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# Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilot Scheme: Final Report 2016

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**Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilot Scheme:  
Final Report 2016**

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

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## Table of contents

Glossary of Acronyms .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	i
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	ii
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilots .....	16
3 Evaluation of Newport Flexibility Pilot.....	26
4 Evaluation of Neath Port Talbot Flexibility Pilot .....	48
5 Evaluation of Carmarthenshire Flexibility Pilot .....	59
6 Evaluation of Denbighshire Flexibility Pilot .....	69
7 Evaluation Conclusions .....	77
8 Further Issues .....	93
References.....	102
Appendix A. Baseline Information Collected From Pilot Local Authorities by the Welsh Government .....	103
Appendix B. Summary of Findings from e-Survey of Parents .....	109
Appendix C. Average Child Wellbeing and Engagement by Setting .....	117
Appendix D: ‘Menu’ of Different Forms of Flexible Provision .....	119

## **Index of Figures**

Figure 1. Estimated percentage of N1 and N2 children in maintained schools only (Flexibility Pilot local authorities highlighted) (2010/11, 2011/12, and 2012/13 combined) .....	8
Figure 2. Comparison of Participation in N2 Maintained Classes Between all Children and Children Eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) by Local Authority .....	10
Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for the Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilots .....	17

## **Index of Tables**

Table 1. Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilot Summary of Proposals .....	14
Table 2. Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilots .....	19
Table 3. Summary of Evaluation Design and Data Collection .....	25

## **Index of Boxes**

Box 1. Key Points of Newport Flexibility Pilot .....	28
Box 2. Key Points of Newport's Shared Provision .....	37
Box 3. Key Points of Newport's Unsociable Hours Provision .....	42
Box 4. Key Points of Newport's 50 Week Provision .....	47
Box 5. Key Points of Neath Port Talbot's Two-and-a-half-days Week Provision .....	58
Box 6. Key Points of Carmarthenshire's Ad Hoc Flexible Provision .....	68
Box 7. Key Points of Denbighshire's Family Link Worker Provision .....	75

## **Glossary of Acronyms**

FSM	Free School Meals
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
MM	Mudiad Meithrin
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association
PACEY	Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual Schools Census
WISERD	Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods
WPPA	Wales Pre-school Providers Association

## **Acknowledgements**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Introduction and Aims of Evaluation*

1. Early years education has been a key component of the Welsh Government's education strategy since 1999. It recognises that early childhood experiences are vitally important in determining children's long-term development and their later life trajectory. Of particular significance within early years education in Wales has been the introduction of the *Foundation Phase* curriculum for 3-7 year old children. This was rolled-out in a progressive manner in order to replace Key Stage 1 and full roll-out was achieved by 2011/12.
2. In Wales, children generally enter primary school aged between 3 and 4 years, although they are not legally required to begin school until the term after their fifth birthday (during Reception Year). However, children are entitled to access the Foundation Phase curriculum ahead of mandatory schooling, in the term after their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday in either a maintained primary school (Nursery) or in a funded non-maintained setting<sup>1</sup>. So an important but sometimes overlooked factor within early years education is the access that children have to the Foundation Phase curriculum *before they begin compulsory education*.
3. In order to ensure that three-year-olds access the Foundation Phase, local authorities are required to provide a minimum of ten free hours of Foundation Phase education per week for all 3 to 4-year-olds.
4. Despite guidelines that encourage providers to offer flexible provision of the Foundation Phase, it has been suggested that the current way the Foundation Phase is organised and offered to parents in Wales is 'inflexible' and may be preventing some children accessing the Foundation Phase. The prospect of some children not accessing

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<sup>1</sup> The funded non-maintained sector includes a myriad of officially registered options including playgroups; private day nurseries; child minders; Welsh speaking nurseries, breakfast and after school clubs. Private companies or community or voluntary organisations can also provide funded places. They may be located in purpose built premises or can be 'pack away' groups. The degree of choice open to parents may of course differ by locality.

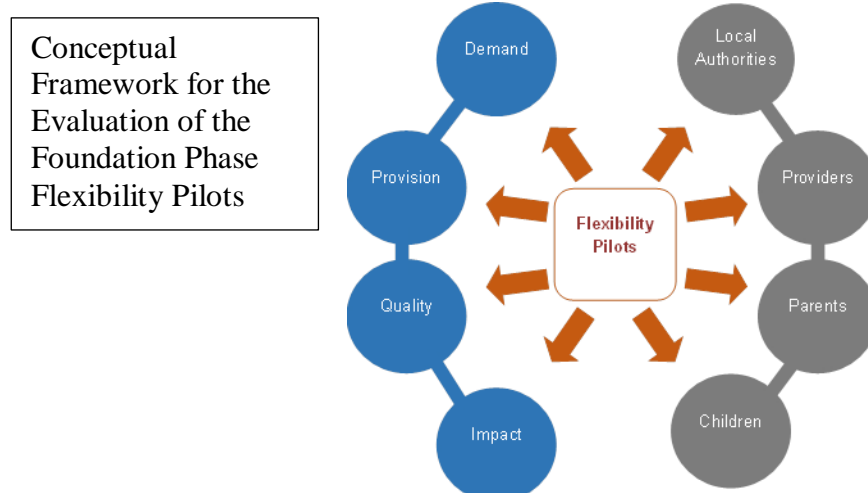
their early years educational entitlement obviously represents a significant issue for the Welsh Government's early years strategy, and indeed for Welsh education more generally.

5. In *Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan (2013)* the Welsh Government set out how it would make early years Foundation Phase provision more accessible. The ultimate aim of increasing flexibility of provision is to increase participation in the early years of the Foundation Phase.
6. To further these aims in 2013 the Welsh Government established a flexibility pilot scheme, inviting four local authorities to explore ways of increasing flexibility in the provision of the early years of the Foundation Phase. 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.
  - 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.
7. The four local authorities which participated in the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilot scheme represented a cross-section of rural and urban, deprived and non-deprived areas across Wales:
  - Carmarthenshire
  - Denbighshire
  - Neath Port Talbot
  - Newport
8. Each participating local authority made their Foundation Phase offer flexible in a variety of ways, from providing wrap-around care and unsociable hours provision to employing family link workers.

9. The two main aims of the evaluation were:
- i. To evaluate how the pilots are being implemented; and
  - ii. To evaluate the effect increased flexibility has on families.
10. The evaluation also had the following research objectives:
- Support the pilot local authorities in establishing a baseline of take-up (parents who signal they want to take up a flexible offer) and session attendance (the levels of attendance of children who subsequently attend the sessions).
  - Assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the pilots.
  - Identify the barriers and enablers for local authorities in providing greater flexibility.
  - Examine the additional costs of providing increased flexibility.
  - Determine the effect of increased flexibility on both parents/carers and their children.
  - Identify the policy and practice implications of providing increased flexibility within the Foundation Phase.

### **Methodology**

11. The evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilot scheme investigated the *demand* and the *design* of the pilot scheme within each local authority (i.e., what the problem or issue was in each local authority that the flexibility pilots hoped to solve); the *provision* of the flexibility pilot (i.e., how the pilot was actually put into practice within local authorities and settings); the *quality* of the flexible provision within settings (i.e., the impact, if any, that the flexibility pilot had on pedagogy and the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum); and finally, the evaluation assessed the overall *impact* of the pilot on settings, parents and children.





12. The evaluation drew upon the following methods:

- Interviews with local authorities; teaching and managerial staff; parents.
- Surveys (both paper and e-surveys) of staff and parents.
- School visits and classroom observations (to investigate the impact flexibility may have on the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum)

13. In total, researchers visited 26 settings across the four local authorities. They conducted 40 face-to-face interviews with 'nursery' staff; 43 telephone interviews with parents; distributed over 500 paper surveys and sent out supplementary e-surveys, (receiving 52 paper and 31 e-surveys back); observed 19 classes across the four local authorities. On top of this, researchers conducted numerous informal 'school gate chats' with parents at the various settings.

14. The findings of the report consider the effect of the pilots on parents, staff and children.

### ***Key Findings and Recommendations***

15. This summary outlines the effects of the pilots on parents, children and settings and the salient issues which pertain to each of these groups. The report also highlights other significant general issues which arose over the course of the research. Generally, the flexibility pilots were found to have worked well and to have helped solve or alleviate the problems they were designed to address across the different local authorities.

### ***Effect on Parents***

16. The research found that the forms of flexibility offered generally helped parents' work/life balance and made their daily routines easier to manage.

17. The research found that many working parents often struggle with the 'traditional' morning or afternoon provision and require some form of full-day provision or wrap-around care to make their daily routines

easier. Working parents often find it hard to manage the logistics of travelling to work and dropping off and/or picking up children, since working hours very rarely correspond to school/setting opening times/sessions.

18. Equally, non-working parents also often find the traditional format difficult, especially those parents with children of different ages, who spend much of their day travelling back and forth to settings. Many non-working parents stated that the traditional format of only morning or afternoon made it harder to carry out important daily tasks such as shopping, cleaning and care giving.
19. Some form of accessible wrap-around provision would also assist parents with issues such as respite. This need may be particularly acute for certain households, for example for parents of children with disabilities or parents who are also carers. We recommend that the issue of respite, rest and parental mental health should factor into the debate about childcare provision in Wales.
20. The lack of wrap-around provision within maintained nurseries means that many working parents in Wales are often reliant on 'private' (i.e. fee-paying) childcare, yet the cost of 'private' childcare is almost universally seen as prohibitively expensive by parents. Working parents claimed that they are 'not being rewarded for working' because of the amount that childcare costs. The greater flexibility of non-maintained settings that offer both state-funded and privately-funded provision is an obvious choice for parents seeking to access flexible, longer hours and/or wrap-around provision. This too raises the issue of cost, but is also dependent upon the provision of funded non-maintained provision in the local area. We recommend that the Welsh Government continue to research affordable childcare options and to consider the relationship between childcare and early years provision.
21. The cost of wrap-around care can be seen to negate any benefit of receiving ten free hours of Foundation Phase education.
22. Because of the prohibitive cost of 'private' childcare, many parents rely on informal family networks (almost overwhelmingly

grandparents) for childcare support. For parents who have this support network in place, childcare costs and working full/part time are obviously less of a problem than they are for families who lack these networks. Many of the families who lack these family networks (and were therefore reliant on private childcare) are mobile, middle-class families who have moved to Wales from the rest of the UK or from other parts of Wales to new areas. Significantly, many parents in the research expressed concern about the 'burden' they were placing on older relatives and stated they wished they didn't have to rely on family members for this support.

23. Whilst these informal patterns of care are traditional and therefore normalised in many areas of Wales, they perhaps obscure the extent of the problems in the childcare 'market'. During the evaluation we spoke to a number of grandparents who stated that their role in childcare was often very difficult and demanding. Crucially, the lack of affordable childcare may be placing a significant strain on older people. We recommend the nature of informal childcare in Wales be explored further by the Welsh Government, for this area may have knock on effects on the well-being of older people.

24. Many parents (particularly working parents) also struggle to find childcare during the school holidays. There is a clear demand for some form of holiday provision. Indeed, during the evaluation it was clear that flexible provision did not just mean how the statutory ten free hours of Foundation Phase education could be provided within each week but also whether an element of the overall amount of free Foundation Phase education could be provided as general childcare during school holidays. We recommend that holiday provision be considered as part of the Welsh Government's childcare strategy.

### ***Effect on Staff and Settings***

25. The implementation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilots was not found to have obstructed the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum, which was generally well delivered across the settings visited in each of the four local authorities. However, it is vital to note that educators felt that there was the *potential* for some forms

of flexibility to impact on the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum. Of most concern was how some forms of flexible provision led to mixed timetables and fluctuating pupil numbers. In turn, this meant teachers and teaching assistants were occasionally faced with larger class sizes and ultimately more work (i.e., increased planning and preparation, more complex tracking of children) to ensure that children did not experience curriculum replication or gaps in their education.

26. The success of future flexible provision depends on the ability of the local authority to properly inform and mentor schools and settings about the aims and goals of flexible provision and advise them on how to implement it with minimal impact on the delivery of the Foundation Phase. We recommend that local authorities provide close guidance to schools regarding the implementation of flexible forms of provision.
27. Local authorities should provide more formal guidance or advice to schools regarding how to advertise the availability of flexible provision to parents. Schools' sophistication in communicating information to parents varies greatly. The evaluation found that the unevenness in communicating the availability of flexible Foundation Phase provision is likely to have led to uneven levels of uptake.
28. Any future implementation of flexible Foundation Phase education needs to be assessed against the capacity and staffing levels of schools/settings. Some forms of flexibility have the potential to swell pupil numbers in classrooms and in settings.

### ***Effect on Children***

29. The flexible forms of provision generally did not seem to have any adverse impact on children's learning or the implementation of the Foundation Phase. Classroom observations conducted in the pilot settings recorded generally high levels of children well-being and attentiveness. Moreover, the majority of parents interviewed as part of the research felt that the flexible provision had a positive impact on their child.

30. A central issue when evaluating the impact of the various forms of flexibility is to consider the impact they have on children. Like their parents, children have complex and varying needs, and their development is contingent upon numerous factors. As our discussions with educators made clear, different forms of flexibility may impact on different groups of children in different ways. Children may develop at different rates and certain groups of children with specific characteristics or circumstances may benefit more or less from different types of flexible provision. This may depend on locality, socio-economic circumstances, household structure and learning needs: there is unlikely to be any 'one size fits all' form of flexibility which benefits every child equally. We recommend that this consideration be at the centre of any future research into flexible provision.
31. A central issue raised by forms of *full-day provision* (whether it be wrap-around childcare or full-day Foundation Phase provision) was the impact that increased contact time had on children. The research noted no adverse impact on participating children, and indeed many parents and teachers believed that extra contact time aided children's school readiness/development. Nonetheless, there were others (parent and practitioners) who were concerned that full-day provision could have a detrimental impact on children (such as increased fatigue) We recommend that the Welsh Government investigate this issue further and the evidence acquired should help inform future discussions on flexible provision.
32. Many educators stressed the importance of *routine* in children's educational and social development. Again, this should be considered when designing and implementing forms of flexibility; it is possible that some forms of flexible provision could be potentially disruptive to children's educational routines.

### ***Further Issues and recommendations***

33. A relatively low number of children in Wales (between 5-12%) do not access their statutory ten hours of free early years Foundation Phase education. Although it was beyond the scope of this research to answer *why* some families do not access their entitlement (it is very hard to research groups who remain 'outside the system'), given the differing perceptions of the demand for flexible provision observed throughout the study, it is possible that the explanations for this are wide-ranging, including: a lack of local early years Foundation Phase providers; the way free places are offered (such as a lack of flexibility); a lack of flexibility from employers; a lack of awareness about their entitlement to the statutory ten free hours of Foundation Phase education; or a limited understanding of the educational and social benefits of early years education for children. We recommend that more research is conducted in this area to firstly, accurately measure the precise number of children who do not access their entitlement; and secondly, to investigate *why* some families don't take it up.
34. Some educators expressed concerns regarding parental perceptions of early years education. Specifically, they felt that many parents view it as a form of childcare. In future discussions of flexible provision, the relationship between 'care' and 'education' needs to be central. For example, what is the difference between quality childcare and Foundation Phase education? Should schools be central to solving the issue of flexibility or does the solution lie in the childcare sector?
35. The evaluation's parental engagement could not establish any definitive relationship between flexible Foundation Phase provision and access to the labour market. However, some non-working parents claimed that the 'traditional' format with its constant traveling back and forth to school made it harder to find a job. Thus whilst the traditional format may not entirely restrict access to the labour market, elements of flexibility may make for a more favourable climate to engage with the labour market.

36. Parents spoken to during the study were generally made aware of their entitlement by the setting or through word of mouth. Very often, receiving this information about entitlement is contingent on already being part of a social network of parents. That is, those 'outside the system' will continue to be missed out. There is clearly a need for more systematic and ultimately more effective communication of childcare and Foundation Phase education provision to parents in Wales (e.g., educational entitlement, childcare entitlement, information about the benefits of early years education and so on). Whilst The Family Information Service in each local authority currently plays a central role here, there are numerous other strategies that could be used to communicate this vital information to parents, including: a dedicated centralised (i.e. national) website; television, print and radio advertising campaigns; and the use of social media.
37. In any future roll out of flexible provision there is a need to clarify the *strategic aim* of increased flexibility and the logic behind this strategy. For example, is greater flexibility designed to help working parents or is it to help workless parents access the employment market? Flexible provision was largely intended to increase participation of children in the Foundation Phase, but could the form of that flexible provision be designed to improve children's educational and social development too? And lastly, how can flexible provision support the broader organisation of educational provision, such as encouraging participation in local schools or to improve Welsh language provision in the early years? These are varied goals and whilst they may not necessarily conflict with each other, they may not always be complementary either.
38. Once the overall aim of increased flexibility is clarified, it is also important that this is clearly communicated to local authorities, schools/settings and parents.
39. There is clearly a need, when thinking about implementing change, to carefully consider who benefits from increased flexibility. The research highlights the possibility that increased forms of 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 that there was very little evidence of any negative impact on children, it is vital that future implementation of flexible provision of is sensitive to these issues.



# 1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Welsh Government has embarked on a series of educational reforms in recent years, within which, particular attention has been focused on *early years education*<sup>2</sup>. The central importance afforded to early years<sup>1</sup> within Welsh education strategy is highlighted in the cross department '*Building a Brighter Future*' strategy (Welsh Government, 2013). This policy document notes that there is "widespread agreement that early childhood experiences are crucially important for children's long term development and their achievements in later life. As a consequence, the early years are the foundation on which society depends for its future prosperity and progress" (Welsh Government, 2013:6).
- 1.2. Of particular significance within early years education in Wales has been the introduction of the flagship Foundation Phase curriculum for 3-7 year - old - children. The Foundation Phase marks a radical departure from the more formal Key Stage 1 national curriculum that it replaced.

## The Current Organisation of Early Education in Wales

- 1.3. An important but overlooked factor within the success of early years education is the access that children have to the Foundation Phase early education entitlement/places for 3 and 4 year-olds *before they begin compulsory education*. In Wales, children generally enter primary school between the ages of 3 and 4, although they are not legally required to begin school until their fifth birthday (when they would enter Reception).
- 1.4. The '*Building a Brighter Future*' (Welsh Government, 2013) strategy notes the importance of educational interventions *before the age of 5*

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<sup>2</sup> Defined as 'the period of life from pre-birth to the end of the Foundation Phase or 0-7 years of age' (Welsh Government, 2013).

(i.e., before compulsory schooling) (*Building a Brighter Future*, 2013:7) and consequently identifies quality early education as a central pillar of the early years strategy in Wales. The document states that these early interventions are particularly important for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds (*Building a Brighter Future*, 2013:11). Children are therefore encouraged to begin the Foundation Phase at age 3 in their early years settings (before they begin formal education) because it is understood to be beneficial to their cognitive development and socialisation.

1.5. Relatedly, as part of a holistic commitment to early years interventions, the Welsh government has also committed to improving early years *childcare*<sup>3</sup> (i.e. pre-education provision), through initiatives such as *Flying Start*, an initiative which provides 12.5 hours per week of free childcare to children aged 2 -3 years old in some of the most disadvantaged communities in Wales.

1.6. In order to ensure that three year olds access the Foundation Phase, the Welsh Government requires local authorities to provide secure, part-time nursery provision for all three year olds from the term following their third birthday. All children in Wales are entitled to a minimum of **ten free hours of early education per week**<sup>4</sup>. This place can either be taken up in the maintained (i.e. State) sector through nurseries attached to primary schools or in nursery schools, or in approved childcare providers in the non-maintained sector<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For a good overview see: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/end-child-poverty-wales-summary.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Although some local authorities offer more generous provision than others. This unevenness of provision will be a recurring theme throughout this report.

<sup>5</sup> The non-maintained sector includes a myriad of options including playgroups; private day nurseries; child minders; Welsh speaking nurseries. These can be provided by private companies or community or voluntary organizations. They may be located in purpose built premises or can be 'pack away' groups. The degree of choice open to parents may of course differ by locality.

- 1.7. In the maintained sector, the early education entitlement is generally delivered through the ‘traditional’ format of two hours sessions (sometimes 2.5 hours) in either the morning (9am to 11/11.30am) or afternoon (1pm to 3/3.30pm). Most local authorities have *parameters* in place regarding the provision of pre-school education, for example maintained settings generally require children to attend a minimum of four or five sessions per week in order to access their free entitlement; children are generally not allowed to access their ten free hours through *full day* provision, and similarly state settings do not generally provide wrap-around child care (although there is significant variation between local authorities). In the non-maintained sector, these parameters are generally more relaxed and depending on the setting children may stay all day. In day nurseries<sup>6</sup> wrap-around care is widely available.
- 1.8. This is a very general picture of the organisation of the early education entitlement. In reality, there is significant variation in the provision of early years educational provision across Wales between different education authorities.

### **The Problem: Why Do We Need Flexibility?**

- 1.9. Although the Welsh Government has advised local authorities to ensure that pre-school education is organised flexibly, it has been suggested that the current way the Foundation Phase is organised and offered to parents in Wales is ‘inflexible’ and may therefore be a *barrier to the uptake of free places* (Welsh Government, 2013: 35). For example, two online petitions<sup>7</sup> organised by parents in and around Cardiff expressed dissatisfaction with the accessibility of free early years education.

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<sup>6</sup> A private childcare facility which normally looks after children from birth to 5 years old.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/make-early-years-education-more-accessible.html> and <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/make-early-years-education-in-cardiff-more-accessible/signatures.html>

1.10. As the following comments indicate, many of these parents point towards the difficulties of taking up the free entitlement if they are already in employment – either because they are employed more than 2.5 hours a day, or because their hours of work do not coincide with the start and end times of nursery provision. They tend to share the view that greater flexibility in nursery provision is necessary:

*“As a full time working mother, I will be unable to send my son to state funded nursery when he is 3. The cost of paying a private nursery to provide wrap around care and transport to school will make it financially unviable. I also pay for full time care for my 11 month old daughter. The WAG needs to offer more help for working parents.” (Comment by parent from online petition in Cardiff)*

*“The free entitlement needs to be far more flexible.” (Comment by parent from online petition in Cardiff)*

*“Due to the lack of flexibility in the 'free' nursery places available in Cardiff, we (as working parents) will probably have to keep our son in his current nursery rather than him being able to go to the nursery in the school in which he will eventually be a pupil. It is simply unfair that only parents who do not work and are able to pick up/ drop off their children after their 2.5 hr daily sessions can benefit from the 'free' places. I am originally from the Rhondda valley and if I still lived here my son would be entitled to a full time place in a state nursery from the age of 3 (as I was as a child). In Cornwall (where my husbands) family live, the 15 free hours can be split as they like i.e. full day sessions for 2 or 3 days a week. Surely Cardiff council needs to develop a more flexible system?” (Comment by parent from online petition in Cardiff)*

*“I believe that through my taxes I am paying for this service which is intended for my family, but as working parents we can't access it.” (Comment by parent from online petition in Cardiff)*

*“We need more flexibility, in order to give working Mums better choices and children more security. To not offer this the same as England, just makes us seem uncompromising and practically Victorian in our attitude to working families. Everyone wants to tackle the people on benefit and put more pressure, through rising fuel prices, redundancies, etc., on working families but no one wants to do anything to help!” (Comment by parent from online petition in Cardiff)*

*“Currently an unhelpful 2.5 hrs a day 5 times a week – so not easily accessible to working parents and their families. It would be easier not to work and this isn't the right attitude. How are parents supposed to work when they have to drop their children off certain times and then go back 2.5 hrs later. Half a day's work has been lost.” (Comment by parent from online petition in Cardiff)*

1.11. These parental concerns are recognised and enshrined in the *Building a Brighter Future* document, ” (Welsh Government, 2013) which, referring to the aforementioned ‘traditional format’, states that “parents tell us that this approach can be a barrier to uptake” (Welsh Government, 2013:35).

1.12. Ultimately, then, there is a concern that a lack of flexibility in provision of early years education may be preventing children accessing the Foundation Phase, as the perceived inconvenience of the traditional format *may* lead to parents withholding their children from pre-school education altogether.

1.13. Children not accessing their pre-school educational entitlement obviously represent a challenge for the Welsh Government in fully implementing its early years strategy.

### **Why Might Parents Withhold Their Children From Pre-school Education?**

1.14. There is very little systematic research or evidence in Wales about the attitudes and decisions of parents in taking up free Foundation Phase places for their 'nursery-aged' children generally, let alone about the need for greater flexibility in that provision. That is, we do not know for sure *why* parents withhold children from pre-school education. A recent study for the Department for Education (in England) investigated the take-up of free places for three year olds. It found that parents' *preferences* and *attitudes* were often more significant than the availability of flexible places (Ipsos MORI, 2012). However, the study also found that for 'partial users' – parents accessing some but not all 15 free hours – the lack of flexibility in its provision *was* a key obstacle in taking up the full free entitlement. The study also pointed towards the rather "haphazard" way in which parents were *informed* of their entitlement, an issue of particular concern for the most marginalised and deprived families.

1.15. Similarly, a recent report for the Nuffield Foundation found that despite the mental health benefits of lone mothers undertaking paid work in recent years, achieving "a satisfactory balance between work and childcare responsibilities mattered most to improvements in their mental wellbeing" (Harkness and Skipp, 2013:3). And of course achieving this depends not only on having access to flexible working but also access to flexible childcare provision (Hirsch, 2008; Winckler, 2009).

## **Uptake of Pre-school Education in Wales by Local Authority: Who Is Missing Out On Their Entitlement?**

1.16. Although there are no published national figures for the number of three to four year olds participating in the Foundation Phase, it is possible to estimate the number of 'nursery-age'<sup>8</sup> children who are in the maintained sector from the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC). Combining data for 2010/11, 2011/12, and 2012/13 (to remove year-on-year fluctuations in the number of children) we can study the number of children in N1<sup>9</sup> and N2<sup>10</sup>. From this it is possible to estimate that 88.5% of 'nursery-age' children attended a Nursery school/class in the *maintained sector* (it is not possible from this data to know how many hours a day or week a child is in attendance, but we know that approximately three-quarters of those attending Nursery are part-time). In addition to this estimate, a 2009 report *Childcare and Early Years Survey Wales* (Welsh Government, 2009) stated that 95% of eligible 3-4 year olds were in early years education, although this does not specify whether this is in the maintained or non-maintained sector (and accordingly, whether they are therefore *guaranteed* to be accessing the Foundation Phase curriculum). A realistic figure for children accessing their early years entitlement will therefore probably fall between 88-95%.

1.17. These figures appear to vary dramatically by local authority across Wales (Figure 1), reflecting both differences in the take-up of free places in the Foundation Phase prior to compulsory school age (Reception Year) *and* differences in the availability of such places in the maintained sector and the dependence on funded places in the

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<sup>8</sup> We refer to 'nursery age' children throughout this report as all children who are aged three or four years of age but who are not old enough to enter Reception classes in a primary school.

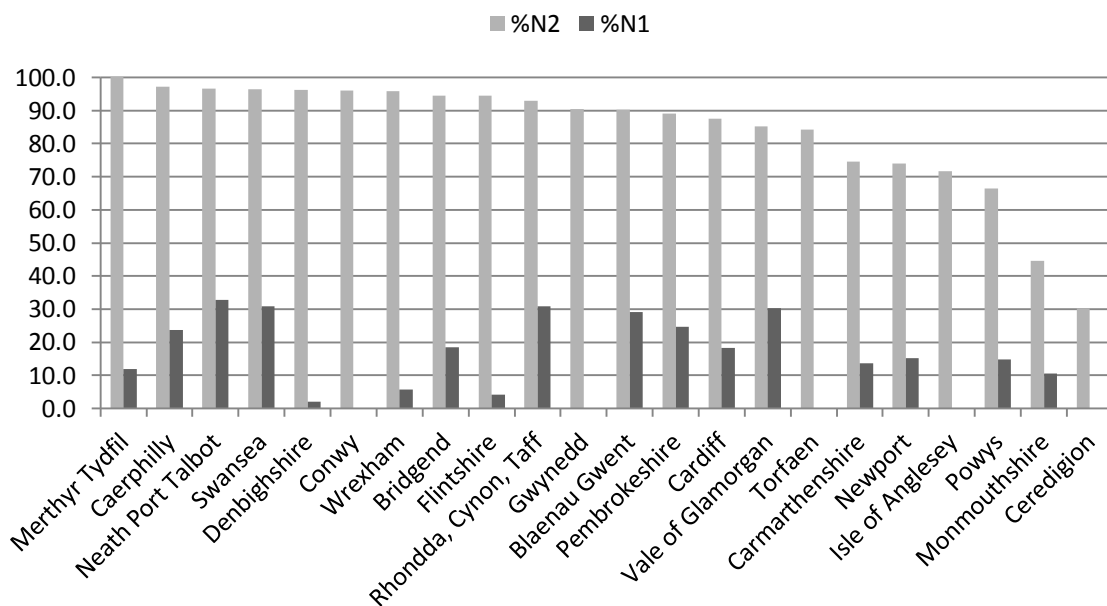
<sup>9</sup> Children entitled to receive education in N1 will be those whose third birthday is after 31<sup>st</sup> August but before 31<sup>st</sup> March of the corresponding school year – often referred to as 'rising threes'.

<sup>10</sup> Three year olds born after August 31<sup>st</sup> of corresponding school year but not old enough to enter Reception.

non-maintained sector. There are also significant variations in the number and proportion of children who enter a maintained nursery class/setting immediately following their third birthday (as indicated by the figures for N1 in Figure 1)<sup>11</sup>.

1.18. For comparison, it is estimated that only 5% of children in England, where they are entitled to 15 hours free education a week and where there already exists some degree of flexibility in provision, do not take up their free place. And according to estimates from the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2010 (available in England only) 68% of parents using the free entitlement used the full 15 hours or more and 32% used less than 15 hours.

**Figure 1. Estimated percentage of N1 and N2 children in maintained schools only (Flexibility Pilot local authorities highlighted) (2010/11, 2011/12, and 2012/13 combined)**



N1 – ‘Rising Threes’: children aged 3 years old after 31<sup>st</sup> August but before 31<sup>st</sup> March of corresponding school year.

N2 – Children aged 3 years old at 31<sup>st</sup> August of corresponding school year but not old enough to enter Reception classes.

<sup>11</sup> We would expect the proportion of N1 children to be approximately 33% if all eligible children took a place in the maintained sector.



## Flexible Provision and Disadvantaged Families

1.19. Also of critical importance to the Welsh Government and the aims of *Building a Brighter Future* is the extent to which greater flexibility in the provision of free Foundation Phase places for ‘nursery-aged’ children could **increase the participation of socio-economically disadvantaged families.**

1.20. Perhaps reassuringly, analysis of PLASC data suggest that children who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) (as measured from when they were in Reception, since the recording of information about eligibility for free school meals in nursery is very limited) appear to be just as likely to attend Nursery schools/classes in the maintained sector as children who are not eligible for free school meals – we estimate 88.8% of FSM children attended a maintained Nursery compared to 88.5% overall. That is, there is no ostensible correlation between a lack of uptake and deprivation.

1.21. Since children from more socio-economically advantaged families are more likely to be able to access private pre-school childcare we perhaps ought to expect this proportion to be higher. Furthermore, more detailed analysis of the participation of FSM children in maintained Nursery settings might suggest that there are important variations in the take-up of such places by local authority (see Figure 2)<sup>12</sup>. For example, in Newport and Monmouthshire, children eligible for free school meals are more likely to attend a maintained nursery setting than non-eligible children.

1.22. Some of the differences in the take-up of free Foundation Phase places by socio-economically disadvantaged families may be explained by the relative levels of take-up *overall* – for example, in

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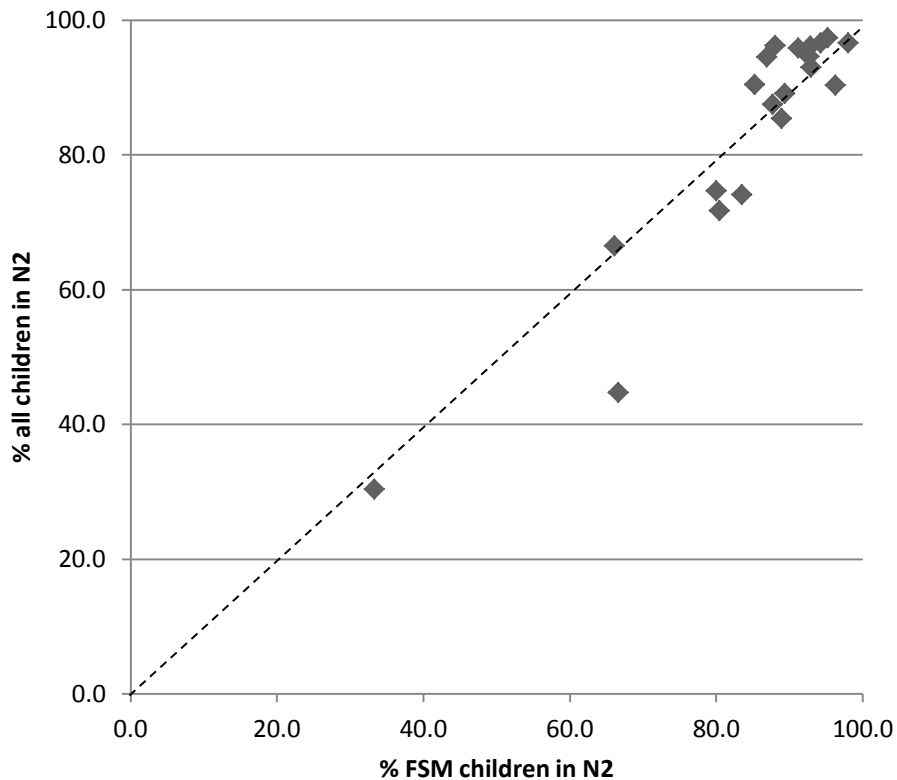
<sup>12</sup> Although crucially, these figures do not include access to funded non-maintained settings.

Newport fewer families overall take up their free place entitlement in a maintained setting. It may also be the case that there are differences in the take-up of free places in the funded non-maintained sector, for which there is currently no published national data available.

1.23. It is also not possible from the PLASC data to see how much of the 10-hour free entitlement different groups of families use.

Nevertheless, this is an important consideration given the emphasis placed on using free early years education to help mitigate the impact of poverty and other socio-economic factors on school readiness and educational achievement.

**Figure 2. Comparison of Participation in N2 Maintained Classes Between all Children and Children Eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) by Local Authority**



N2 – Children aged 3 years old at 31<sup>st</sup> August of corresponding school year but not old enough to enter Reception classes.

## **The Development of Flexibility Within Welsh Education Strategy and the Development of the Pilots**

1.24. In response to the concerns about children and parents not accessing their pre-school educational entitlement, the *Building a Brighter Future* document identifies increased *flexibility* of pre-school education provision as a central aim of future early years strategy in Wales.

1.25. The document states “our ambition is for our universal Foundation Phase offer to be leading the way internationally in terms of the number of free hours of early education provided, *flexibility of the offer*, the quality of the curriculum and outcomes for our children”. It continues: “Looking to the future... we will improve the flexibility, accessibility and affordability of early education and childcare and work with the sector to address the key concerns of parents and providers” (Welsh Government, 2013:33) and “we will consider options to improve the flexibility of provision; produce updated guidance for local authorities to support them in improving the flexibility of the Foundation Phase offer to parents” (Welsh Government, 2013:35-36).

1.26. The overarching strategic aim of increased flexibility is to increase participation in the early years of the Foundation Phase.

Putting these aims into practice, in 2013 the Welsh Government decided to **introduce four local authority pilot schemes** to explore ways of increasing flexibility in the provision of the early years of the Foundation Phase.

## **The Local Authority Pilot Schemes**

1.27. The Welsh Assembly Government invited local authorities to apply to participate in the Pilot scheme, allowing each Local Authority the freedom to design and deliver their own versions of flexible provision based on local demand and local issues. The four participating Local Authorities are:

- Carmarthenshire
- Denbighshire
- Neath Port Talbot
- Newport

1.28. Each local authority was awarded up to £100,000 for the period 1 January 2014 to 31 August 2015 to facilitate the implementation of their respective initiatives to increase the flexibility of the provision of the Foundation Phase. The aims of the awards were to:

- test the flexibility options across the Foundation Phase in the maintained and non-maintained funded settings;
- identify issues that may surface for local authorities and settings as a result of providing or trying to provide greater flexibility;
- consider how those issues can be addressed through low-cost/no cost solutions;
- gain a better understanding of whether increased flexibility makes a difference to parent's ability to access the Foundation Phase for their child; and
- work with the appointed formal evaluation team.

1.29. In addition to these aims, local authorities were also asked to meet the following two criteria:

- The Pilot will aim to include a cross section of different types of schools and settings e.g. MM, WPPA, PACEY, NDNA, nursery schools, infant schools, primary schools etc.

- The Pilot will aim to cover provision for 3 and 4 year olds in rural, urban and Communities First areas while meeting the minimum requirements of the Foundation Phase.

1.30. On commencement of the award, each local authority was asked by the Welsh Government to complete a questionnaire. Their responses to the questionnaire are presented in Appendix A, which provides a snapshot of the typical forms of provision and uptake of nursery places in each participating region prior to the implementation of the flexibility Pilot. As stated above, the provision of pre-school education across Wales is uneven. As a consequence, each participating local authority had a different interpretation of the aim of the flexibility Pilots reflecting differences in their current provision and differences in the kinds of 'issues' that they hoped the Pilots would address. The form of flexibility proposed by each local authority are summarised in Table 1.

1.31. The structure of the remainder of this report is organised in the following way. Chapter 2 provides detail about the evaluation, including its aims and objectives, and design and methodology. Since each local authority Flexible Pilot was very different from one another the results of the evaluation are presented separately for each local authority – Chapter 3 for Newport, Chapter 4 for Neath Port Talbot, Chapter 5 for Carmarthenshire and Chapter 6 for Denbighshire. However, the findings for each Flexibility Pilot are largely structured in the same way in order to help make comparisons between local authorities. In particular the report focuses on Demand; Provision; Quality; and Impact. The final Chapter 7 attempts to bring these findings together to make some concluding observations and questions for further consideration.

**Table 1. Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilot Summary of Proposals**

Pilot Authority	Proposals
Carmarthenshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Carmarthenshire has a mixed economy approach to delivery of the Foundation Phase offer but currently there is no flexibility in the maintained sector offer (school settings) and no choice for parents; with inconsistency across schools in number of hours offered and inconsistency between schools and other providers.</li><li>• Proposing delivery of wrap-around provision for three year olds in range of settings, quality provision and extending that provision in areas of high socio-economic deprivation.</li><li>• Proposing working with 2 nurseries, serving rural community and rural locality.</li><li>• A clear gap in provision in two villages with no current Foundation Phase offer would be addressed by working in partnership with Flying Start to develop wrap around childcare.</li><li>• Proposing secondment of individual to take forward the Pilot.</li></ul>
Denbighshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The authority has advised that they will deploy Family Link Workers to work in clusters of schools. The purpose of their revised way of working is to improve the identification of vulnerable families and to determine appropriate levels of support to ensure a child's school readiness. They will work with individual families and pre-school children who may require support with processes such as admissions arrangements.</li><li>• They will also provide support to ensure smooth transition for children from home to playgroup/setting/school to the Foundation Phase and will work to resolve, with the parent, any barriers to accessing the early education provision on offer across the authority.</li></ul>

Neath Port Talbot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neath Port Talbot proposal is to continue to offer the Foundation Phase in the local authority maintained provision (schools) only, but to offer a more flexible provision of the five sessions of nursery provision a week within a code of conduct.</li> <li>• Neath Port Talbot intend to provide the Foundation Phase flexibility offer across a good breakdown / range of schools, making good use of data around Free School Meals (FSM), Welsh medium provision and possible demand, Flying Start, social deprivation, ethnic minority populations.</li> <li>• This model will test the impact on the non-maintained sector. Evaluation of maintained sector approach only will test which school/s the flexibility of offer will make the greatest/least difference to across this diverse breakdown of school provision, e.g. higher or lower FSM.</li> </ul>
Newport	<p>Newport proposed a non-maintained sector approach only with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a stretching and interesting 39 weeks or up to 50 weeks Foundation Phase offer;</li> <li>• at up to 2 settings (to address bilingual and Welsh medium sessional demand); and</li> <li>• catering for atypical hours.</li> </ul>

Source: Welsh Government

## 2 Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilots

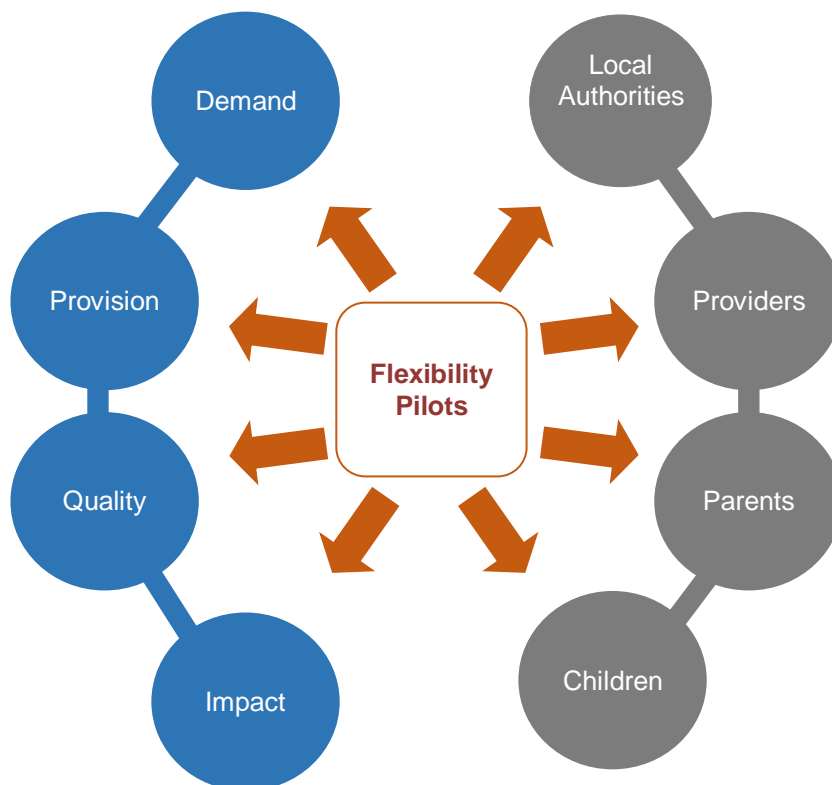
### Aims and Objectives of the Evaluation

- 2.1 The two main aims of the evaluation, as set out in the original tender document, are:
- a) To evaluate how the Pilots are being implemented; and
  - b) To evaluate the effect increased flexibility has on families.
- 2.2 Within these aims the evaluation will address six specific objectives as set out in the tender specification:
1. Support the Pilot local authorities in establishing a baseline of take-up (parents who signal they want to take up a flexible offer) and session attendance (the levels of attendance of children who subsequently attend the sessions)
  2. Assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the Pilots
  3. Identify the barriers and enablers for local authorities in providing greater flexibility
  4. Examine the additional costs of providing increased flexibility
  5. Determine the effect of increased flexibility on both parents/carers and their children
  6. Identify the policy and practice implications of providing increased flexibility within the Foundation Phase
- 2.3 This is largely a process evaluation – looking at how flexibility of provision is being offered and how parents are taking it up. In doing so, the evaluation will also examine an array of issues and questions, most of which are posed above, about the interrelationships between four key elements of flexible access and four main groups of stakeholders (Figure 3): **demand for flexible access** from parents (looking at actual attendance with what they want and what they need), **provision of flexible access** (from both the local authority and provider perspective), **quality of flexible access** (especially in



the delivery of the Foundation Phase), and **impact of flexible access** (for local authorities, providers (including the whole pre-school childcare market), parents and children).

**Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for the Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilots**



2.4 Using this conceptual framework (Figure 3) we begin to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the Pilots in terms of provision, demand, quality and impact, and from the four perspectives of local authorities, providers, parents and children. This can be usefully summarised in Table 2.

2.5 Although the focus of this evaluation is now on processes rather than outcomes, throughout the report we are keen to identify examples of best practice, both at the local authority level and provider level. We

also consider the policy and practice implications of increased flexibility and the possible expansion of the flexibility Pilots to other areas of local authorities.

**Table 2. Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Foundation Phase**

**Flexibility Pilots**

	Local Authorities	Providers	Parents & Children
Demand	How demand for flexible access is assessed	How parents are consulted on flexible access	What forms of flexible access do parents (a) need and (b) desire
	How demand for flexible access is understood (i.e. what do local authorities perceive the benefits to parents to be)	How demand for flexible access is interpreted and understood by providers  How enthusiastic and prepared are providers to offer flexible access	Kinds or types of flexible access required  How demand for flexible access relates to other factors for choosing provision
Provision	How assessment of needs are used to develop provision	How flexible access is communicated to parents	What parents think about the choice of provision overall and flexible access specifically
	How flexible access is communicated to parents	How flexible access is designed and organised	Is more flexible access required
	What local authority support and guidance is available to providers	What are the challenges and limitations of providing flexible access	What prevents take-up of new flexible access  Awareness of parents about any arrangements for flexible access
Quality	What support is given to providers to implement flexible access alongside the delivery of Foundation Phase	How flexible access is delivered  Delivery of the Foundation Phase for nursery-aged children	Quality of Foundation Phase experience for nursery-aged children
Impact	Increase in take-up of free places in the Foundation Phase	Earlier entry to maintained schools	Satisfaction of provision amongst parents
	Earlier take-up of free places in the Foundation Phase	Economic benefits for non-maintained sector	Access to employment for parents
	Cost of assessing needs of flexible access	Financial and organisational costs of providing flexible access	Educational and social benefits for children of increased or earlier access to the Foundation Phase
	Changes in admissions procedures and		

## Design and Methodology

- 2.6 The evaluation of the flexibility Pilot schemes investigated the *demand* and the *design* of the Pilot scheme within each local authority (i.e., what the problem or issue was in each local authority that the flexibility Pilots were hoped to solve); the *provision* of the flexibility Pilot (i.e., how the Pilot was actually put into practice within local authorities and settings); the *quality* of the flexible provision within settings (i.e., the impact, if any, that the flexibility Pilot had on pedagogy and the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum); and finally, the evaluation assessed the possible *impact* of the Pilot on settings, parents and children.
- 2.7 The evaluation process began with consultations and a series of scoping interviews (seven in total) with the local authority representatives responsible for organising and rolling out the flexible Pilots.
- 2.8 This first stage of the research served to clarify the wider local context and the differing demands within each area and what ‘flexibility’ was hoped to address in each region. The research team conducted one *scoping* interview each with local authority educational representatives in Newport and Neath Port Talbot; three in Denbighshire and two in Carmarthenshire.
- 2.9 After this initial scoping exercise the final design of the evaluation was decided. This involved two main strands:
- i. Case study visits; and
  - ii. Parental engagement.

## *Case study visits*

- 2.10 In each Pilot local authority a number of case study settings were selected that were participating in the Flexibility Pilot scheme, 26 in total. Since the design of each Flexibility Pilot scheme differed in each local authority no single sampling strategy was appropriate. In principle, however, case study settings were selected on the basis of the greatest level of demand amongst parents for flexible places. This was to ensure that the evaluation could observe the greatest potential impact of flexible provision within the resource constraints of the evaluation.
- 2.11 In addition, case study settings were also selected, where appropriate, on the basis of low or no demand for flexible provision. The main reason for the involvement of these settings was so the evaluation could consider why there was limited demand for flexible places despite the potential for this.
- 2.12 Lastly, some case study settings were selected because they were not involved in the Pilots but who were very similar schools or settings to those involved (i.e. they were located nearby and served very similar communities). A breakdown of case study schools/settings is provided in Table 3.
- 2.13 Case study visits were designed to assess the impact of the Flexible Pilots on staff, teaching and the setting more generally, and the impact of the flexible initiatives on children and their education. Researchers interviewed and spoke to head teachers, teachers and teaching assistants (i.e. nursery practitioners) involved in the Flexible Pilots; 40 practitioner interviews in total.
- 2.14 The evaluation also observed 19 Foundation Phase nursery groups/classes using the same tools used in the evaluation of the Foundation Phase (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). This involved the systematic

observation of groups/classes over at least one session (usually one hour). This was used to gauge how well the Foundation Phase was being delivered in the case study settings.

2.15 In addition, this involved the systematic observation of involvement and wellbeing amongst pupils using the **Leuven scale**<sup>13</sup>, particularly paying close attention to those children participating in the Flexibility Pilots. Appendix C contains the results of these observations for each case study school/setting,

2.16 For non-participating case study settings the evaluation team interviewed staff about their views about flexible provision (including why they had not participated, where applicable) but did not observe pupils.

2.17 In **Newport**, researchers visited seven settings in total: six participating settings and one non-participating setting. They also conducted telephone interviews with managers at an additional two non-participating settings. Researchers conducted eleven formal interviews in total, during which they spoke to nine setting managers and five nursery lead practitioners (some interviews throughout the evaluation were conducted with the manager/HT and NLP simultaneously, hence the odd number). Over the course of the case study visits in Newport, researchers observed nine different nursery classes.

2.18 In **Neath Port Talbot**, researchers visited four settings in total: including three participating settings and one non-participating

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<sup>13</sup> The Leuven scale is an educational research tool developed in Belgium to aid classroom observation and assessment. "The tool focuses on two central indicators of quality early years provision: children's 'well-being' and 'involvement'. Well-being refers to feeling at ease, being spontaneous and free of emotional tensions and is crucial to good 'mental health'. Well-being is linked to self-confidence, a good degree of self-esteem and resilience. Involvement refers to being intensely engaged in activities and is considered to be a necessary condition for deep level learning and development" (Plymouth City Council, 2011:1).

setting. Researchers completed a total of seven formal interviews, speaking to four head teachers and five nursery lead practitioners. Researchers observed pupils in six different nursery classes.

2.19 In **Carmarthenshire**, researchers visited nine settings in total: five participating settings and four non-participating settings. Of the non-participating settings, two were in the maintained sector and two were in the non-maintained sector. The team conducted eleven formal interviews in total, speaking to seven head teachers and managers and four lead nursery practitioners. Researchers observed pupils in five different nursery classes.

2.20 In **Denbighshire** case study settings were not used. Instead the research team 'shadowed' family link workers during their day-to-day role, both in schools and communities. The research team also spoke to school staff, parents and families associated and engaged with the family link workers. The team also observed the linked teachers during their work in non-maintained settings, interviewed the linked teachers and spoke to the staff at the settings.

2.21 This engagement with local authorities and settings was inevitably a recursive process, and over the course of the evaluation researchers were in regular contact with the respective local authorities and participating schools/settings whenever clarification or additional information was needed.

### *Parental engagement*

2.22 The second main strand of the evaluation was to engage and seek the views of parents/carers on the possible impact of the Pilots on their lives and on their children. A number of strategies were employed to do this. First, the evaluation team handed out a two-page paper-based survey to parents of all nursery age children in each of the case study settings at either the beginning or the end of

the school day. Parents were asked to complete the survey and return to the research team or the school (using pre-paid envelopes where necessary). Over 500 surveys in total were distributed this way, and 52 completed survey responses were received back (approx. 10% response rate)<sup>14</sup>.

2.23 Second, these paper-based surveys were then supplemented by an electronic web-based survey (or e-survey). The link to the survey was distributed by the schools/settings to parents via e-mail, text message and other social media. The evaluation received 31 valid responses to this e-survey. The results of this e-survey are presented in Appendix B.

2.24 Third, the research team conducted 43 telephone interviews with parents who were using or who had previously used the Flexibility Pilots in Newport, Neath Port Talbot and Carmarthenshire<sup>15</sup>. The local authorities obtained the contact details and consent for these parents to be contacted. In total 43 telephone interviews with parents were conducted.

2.25 In addition to these more formal forms of parental engagement, the research team also carried out numerous 'school gate chats' with parents about the Flexibility Pilots during the case study visits.

2.26 A full breakdown of the research process is included in Table 3.

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<sup>14</sup> This response rate of ten percent is the typical rate expected from survey research with parents. It is directly comparable to a larger scale study undertaken in England (Smith et al., 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Denbighshire parents were not contacted by telephone because of the sensitive nature of the interventions carried out by the Family Link Workers, but also because of the difficulties in finding parents to target, given the breadth of the family link worker interventions. It was concluded that informal chats with parents during Family Link Worker sessions provided an adequate opportunity for them to provide their views on the Family Link Workers.



**Table 3. Summary of Evaluation Design and Data Collection**

	Newport	Neath Port Talbot	Carmarthenshire	Denbighshire	Total
<b>Local Authority Interviews</b>	1	1	2	3	7
<b>School/setting visits</b>	7 (6 participating; 1 non-participating)	4 (3 participating and 1 non-participating)	9 (5 participating and 4 non-participating)	6 (4 with family link worker, 2 with 10% linked teacher)	26
<b>Classroom Observations</b>	9	5	5	0	19
<b>Staff Interviews</b>	11 (9 in settings, 2 phone interviews with staff at non-participating settings)	9	14	6 (4 x family link worker, 2 x 10% linked teacher)	40
<b>Staff e-survey</b>					7
<b>Parental Surveys received (Paper)</b>	12	22	18	0	52
<b>E-surveys (parents)</b>					37(31 valid)
<b>Parental Phone Interviews</b>	5	24	14	0	43

### 3 Evaluation of Newport Flexibility Pilot

#### Local Demand and Design

- 3.1 Newport has a well -developed system of nursery provision across the maintained and non-maintained sector. Currently, all maintained primary schools in Newport have on site nursery provision (and if not, they will have this provision in place by 2017).
- 3.2 Historically, demand for pre-school education outstrips supply in Newport and the non-maintained sector has traditionally helped out. If parents cannot get a place in the maintained setting of their choice then the local authority's Family Information Service signposts them to local non-maintained settings where they can access their ten free hours entitlement. The non-maintained sector therefore plays a central role in assisting parents who cannot get a place in a maintained nursery.
- 3.3 Maintained nursery settings in Newport generally offer the 'traditional' provision of mornings (9-12) or afternoon (1-3) sessions, although the precise form of the provision differs from school-to-school based on their capacity and whether they have one or two Nursery classes. Children in Newport cannot access their provision by doing mornings *and* afternoons in the same day (as implemented in the Neath Port Talbot Pilot). Moreover, children in maintained sector nurseries currently have to do a *minimum of five sessions* in order to access their entitlement (i.e., children are not allowed to be 'part time'<sup>16</sup>). This represents an 'all-or-nothing' approach.

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<sup>16</sup> Clearly, with only ten hours of free provision available in maintained schools all children are part-time. The point here is that they have to attend every day of the school week rather than just some days of the week.

- 3.4 In contrast, the non-maintained sector provides wrap-around care, and may take children all day<sup>17</sup>. The non-maintained sector also allows parents to take a minimum of three sessions a week, allowing children to attend for just part of the working week.
- 3.5 In Newport, the explicit aim of the Flexibility Pilot was to *help working parents*. Given the significant range of existing pre-school educational options for parents in Newport, particularly in the funded non-maintained sector, the introduction of the Flexibility Pilot must therefore be seen as an *extension* of flexibility within the existing system, rather than a radical overhaul.
- 3.6 The Newport 'Early Years Board' (including representatives from maintained and non-maintained sector) met to discuss the concept of flexible provision (e.g. demand and feasibility). After consultations with schools, the Local authority's 'flexibility Pilot sub group' designed three different types of flexible provision: (i) *shared provision*; (ii) *unsociable hours*, and (iii) *50 week provision*. Each different form of flexibility was tailored to respond to different issues faced by certain sectors of local parents.
- 3.7 During these initial consultations, the maintained sector representatives decided that they would prefer to maintain the status quo and not participate in the Flexibility Pilot. This led to the Flexibility Pilot being offered only in funded non-maintained settings<sup>18</sup>.
- 3.8 Following this, the local authority then ran drop-in discussions and information days for interested non-maintained settings, who then

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<sup>17</sup> The family information service stated that they publicise non-maintained and maintained settings equally to parents because of their awareness that working parents may require the wrap around provision offered by the non-maintained sector.

<sup>18</sup> The payment system works as follows. Parents pay for their children's nursery (normally 3-5 full day sessions). The nursery then receives funding from the local authority to cover the ten free hours that children are legally entitled to. The nursery then refunds parents the price of their ten free hours from their bill at the end of the month. Within the non-maintained sector, some children will only access their free sessions (i.e. exactly as they would in the maintained sector).

submitted bids to implement the Pilot. Newport's 'prescribed' system offering settings the choice of implementing three pre-arranged types of flexibility differs markedly from the other local authorities involved with the Pilot.

3.9 All settings that agreed to participate in the Newport Pilot *had* to offer *shared provision* as a minimum, and may then offer parents one or both of *unsociable hours* and/or *50 hour provision*. The funding for settings increased with each additional type of provision offered.

### **Box 1. Key Points of Newport Flexibility Pilot**

- Flexible provision only rolled out in non-maintained sector.
- 'Prescribed' types of flexibility offered to settings (i.e. generally led/decided upon by LEA rather than settings).
- Three types of flexibility offered: 'shared provision'; 'unsociable hours' and '50 week provision'.
- Settings can offer all three types of provision but *have to offer shared provision* in order to be in the Pilot (i.e. to access the funding), and can then offer one or both of the additional schemes.

### **Shared Provision**

#### *Demand*

3.10 The main flexible 'offer' proposed by Newport local authority was *shared provision*, a scheme where children could access their ten hours entitlement *between two different settings* (with the proviso that they have to choose a minimum of two days in each setting).

3.11 Based on discussions with parents, the need for shared provision across multiple settings arose primarily because of a lack of wrap-

around care within the maintained sector, coupled with fractional employment amongst parents (mainly mothers). In other words, parents needed wrap-around care in more than one locality. For example, a parent may want wrap-around care on the days they were in work (locality X) and then some form of provision on the other days of the week, near where they lived (locality Y).

3.12 Local nurseries (maintained and non-maintained) only offer mornings or afternoon provision, (i.e., with no-wrap-around care, or wrap-around care which does not last long enough for working parents) so parents would have to arrange for someone to look after the children after they finish Nursery or take their children to a non-maintained day Nursery that *does* offer extended wrap around provision. On days when parents are not working, and are therefore able to pick up the child after the morning session (or take for an afternoon session), it is unlikely that the parent will want the child to spend the whole day in a non-maintained nursery (or pay for a full-day). On these days when they *can* manage pick up/drop off, parents would instead prefer to utilise a *local nursery* (without wrap around provision). This has an additional benefit of helping to socialise their child with children who are likely to attend the same school at age 4/5 years.

3.13 This issue is more prominent amongst working parents (particularly those travelling to work outside the local area), those working part time, and those who cannot rely on local or family connections for childcare.

3.14 Prior to the (formal) introduction of *shared provision*, parents could not access their ten hours free entitlement across multiple settings, so parents in this situation would not be able to get a refund/financial help towards using non-maintained day care nurseries. Moreover, the existence of necessary limits on provision (such as specifying that a child has to attend a Nursery for a minimum amount of days or hours to gain a place or to access their ten hours entitlement) potentially

means that parents are unable to put their children in their local maintained Nursery on the days when they were off work. These parameters could also mean that parents are likely to keep their children out of the non-maintained Nursery on the days they are not working, thereby reducing the amount of time their children could access the Foundation Phase curriculum.

- 3.15 Shared provision thus became the central pillar of the Flexibility Pilot because of a perceived demand in the local authority. Apparently parents had regularly requested that Nurseries offer this option and indeed it had been implemented on an *ad hoc* basis previously. The Flexibility Pilot helped to formalise this.

#### *Provision*

- 3.16 Under *shared provision*, parents and children in Newport could access their ten hours entitlement across multiple settings. As well as being able to access their entitlement across different settings and locations within Newport, children could access *shared provision* in settings in the neighbouring local authorities of Caerphilly, Monmouthshire and Torfaen – all part of the South East Regional Consortium. However, this reciprocal arrangement was not available in Cardiff, which belongs to a different consortium (Central South Joint Education Service)
- 3.17 This form of flexibility had multiple positive impacts. First, by allowing entitlement to be taken across multiple settings, parents could now access a financial benefit previously unavailable to them. Second, formalising the entitlement across multiple settings meant that parents could now always be able to get their children in the 'local Nursery' as well as a setting near where they worked.
- 3.18 This flexibility also allowed children to benefit from the continuity of getting to know their future primary school friends.

- 3.19 Finally, the *shared provision* encourages parents to take their child to Nursery on the days that they were not working (previously they may have kept the child at home) and therefore encouraged greater uptake of the Foundation Phase since children would have attended *more sessions across the week*.
- 3.20 The children who participated in the *shared provision* overwhelmingly shared provision between sessional nurseries (i.e., those which mornings or afternoon provision only) and day nurseries (i.e. with full day wrap around provision). Children were generally not found sharing provision across two full-day settings.
- 3.21 Parents were informed of the *shared provision* scheme by the settings themselves through the traditional lines of communication (newsletters and informal 'school gate chat'). Nonetheless, some parents surveyed stated they were not aware of the Flexible Pilot, suggesting a need for more systematic (or different forms of) publicity for the provision.
- 3.22 Settings also reported that the initial implementation of *shared provision* was disorganised, with little communication between settings and little supervision offered by the local authority. Some parents spoken to similarly suggested that the settings involved did not seem to be in communication with one another. Staff, however, claimed that these teething problems had since been resolved, and that the scheme began to run smoothly.
- 3.23 The settings now have termly meetings with local authority representatives regarding the scheme and managers from the shared provision settings meet each term to discuss the development of their shared children.

## Quality

- 3.24 The local authority did not offer any specific advice or guidance to settings regarding *shared provision* and the implementation of the Foundation Phase, because this form of flexibility was not expected to have any impact on the curriculum. However, it is important to note that staff reflexively understood that there was the *potential* that *shared provision* – since it entails two different sets of staff and two groups of children – *could* confuse or upset the children and ultimately impact on their experience of the Foundation Phase.
- 3.25 Similarly, when discussing the concept of *shared provision* with non-uptake schools outside Newport, some teachers (and significantly those in more deprived areas) stated that *shared provision* and its implications would ‘not have worked’ in their setting. One teacher stated: “The child wouldn’t have the same experiences in two settings, they wouldn’t be getting used to routines and staff members, and it would make it more difficult for the settling-in-period for children, because they need continuity”.
- 3.26 Staff in the participating settings, whilst acknowledging that the scheme did have these potential disadvantages, nonetheless claimed that the *shared provision* had had little impact on either the children’s learning or the implementation of the Foundation Phase. Foundation Phase practitioners argued that the aforementioned issues would generally ‘depend on the child’ and were confident that if these problems did arise they could be negated through effective communication between settings.
- 3.27 In a later meeting, one setting manager stated that one child had *shared provision* between three settings, and was not coping very well.



3.28 As in other regions, the participating settings in Newport were felt to be 'strong' and naturally well equipped to deal with these potential issues. It remains to be seen how 'weaker' settings would cope with these issues.

### *Impact*

3.29 The overall impact of the *shared provision* on *uptake* (and on children's attainment) is not yet clear. There was generally low uptake of the *shared provision* initiative, but this may well be because the working arrangements which prompted the initiative are relatively rare and are in practice, quite bespoke to the needs of individual families.

3.30 An alternative explanation for the low uptake could be that parents who commuted to work could not access the shared provision in Cardiff where many of them worked.

3.31 *Shared provision* was felt to aid the uptake of more *sessions* (rather than uptake *per se*). The local authority claimed that the *shared provision* initiative had not had a negative financial or organisational impact on the local authority. Indeed, local authority representatives stated that the *shared provision* initiative had alerted them to potential blind spots in their admissions procedures: the process of implementing the *shared provision* and organising communication between settings led to a realisation by the local authority that there was not enough communication or standardisation between maintained and non-maintained setting's admission procedures generally.

3.32 Overall, the local authority representatives were very pleased with the impact of the *shared provision* initiative.

3.33 Similarly, nursery staff and managers were generally positive about the *shared provision* initiative. Most stated it had had little or no

adverse impact on the setting or their staff (certainly there was no *financial* cost to settings). However, one setting manager stated that *shared provision* had created more work for staff in terms of *planning and time*, since they now had to ensure that the *shared provision* children did not miss out on aspects of the Foundation Phase curriculum (e.g. focused tasks<sup>19</sup>) or have their experiences replicated between settings. Another manager noted that *shared provision* meant that primary schools would get two sets of (potentially conflicting) reports about the shared provision child, suggesting that this could create extra work for primary school practitioners.

3.34 Similarly, another manager (albeit in a non-uptake comparison setting) raised the issue of fluctuating children numbers and the issue this raised regarding staffing ratios. This practitioner argued *shared provision* in particular (perhaps if taken up by larger numbers of children) had the *potential* to disrupt the recommended 1:8 adult: pupil ratio for Nurseries. This raises the important point that any consideration of flexibility should have staffing thresholds at its core:

“If, because of flexible provision, you go one child over the threshold, are you going to put another member of staff on if you have 9 children? I can’t say to a member of staff ‘I need you two days, but I don’t need you for the other three days’ ....for continuity of staff that would be very difficult”. (Non-uptake Non-maintained Setting Manager)

3.35 These issues should certainly be *considered* when reflecting on the impact of *shared provision*, although it is important to note that within participating Newport settings there were generally no issues with capacity or staffing ratios, presumably because of the low numbers involved in the initiative.

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<sup>19</sup> Whilst much of the Foundation Phase curriculum occurs through play and practical activities, there are still some practitioner initiated, focused activity to consolidate their learning in a more formal context. These are called ‘focused tasks’ by practitioners.

## *Parental feedback*

3.36 In general, most parents we spoke to in Newport were pleased with the way the *shared provision* had been implemented, and stated the increased flexibility had aided their daily routine:

“I couldn’t work around having two hours...mornings or afternoons....it’s made it easier, it means on my days off she can attend the local playgroup and get to know the children she’ll be at school with, and on the days I’m in work she can attend the eight [am] to six [pm] setting and receive her entitlement that way” (Parent in Newport)

3.37 Nonetheless, whilst parents were grateful for this injection of flexibility into the system, many still felt that they needed ‘more help’. Parents spoken to and surveyed in Newport generally demonstrated more complex daily childcare routines than parents in other regions. This may be because of (a) the prevalence of working couples in the region, (b) a larger amount of geographically mobile professionals (who ostensibly lacked the informal family care networks so prevalent in other regions); and/or (c) the prevalence of parents commuting to work outside Newport.

3.38 It is worth quoting the following excerpt from a telephone interview at some length to illustrate the sort of work and childcare routines that led to the demand for *shared provision* within Newport for this parent:

*Researcher:* “So how do you manage your daily routine, balancing work with dropping the children off and things like that?”

*Parent:* “Well it’s a nightmare to be honest! We use breakfast club for our two eldest (who are in primary school). I drop them off at 7:40 at school on my way to work, and on the days that

our youngest is in nursery my husband takes him. On a Monday the youngest goes to [Nursery X] [a non-registered local playgroup which is open early until 3.30] and uses their breakfast club, and then there's a walk over provision to [Nursery Y] [local registered non-maintained nursery without wrap around provision] over the road, and he's then picked up by my parents in the afternoon at 3.30. Tuesday and Wednesday he goes to [Nursery Z] [a private day care nursery about 2 miles away from home village] from 8-6. The Thursday and Friday I have off work, so I take him to [Nursery Y] for the mornings"

*Researcher.* "So why do you use all these nurseries?"

*Parent.* "I wanted him to go to [Nursery Y] because it's local, it feeds directly into the school [the setting is in the grounds of the local primary school] and I really wanted him to go there because he would make friends with the kids he'd be going to school with in September. I have two days off a week so I knew I could take him on those two days. My parents could help us out one afternoon but no more than that, and that was when I had to find childcare at the local nursery...."

*Researcher.* "So he couldn't stay in [Nursery Y] the whole week?"

*Parent.* "No, not unless I employed a child-minder, and I don't want to do that. So I use the private day care nursery because it's quite close to my home and it's very close to my parents' home, so if there was ever an emergency my parents would be able to help out... "

*Researcher.* "So he goes to the private day nursery on the days when you can't take him and when your parents can't

pick him up either, and he doesn't go to [Nursery X] [local, non-registered nursery] because they finish too early?"

*Parent:* "Yes. [Nursery Z] which runs until 6pm is the only one I can use. Also, you need to find a provider which offers holiday provision too, you have to factor that in"

3.39 Lacking local or supportive family networks or local wrap-around care provision obviously necessitates these complex routines (and ultimately the need for shared provision). Some parents noted that they would have organised their routine in this way (i.e., split their provision between multiple providers) *anyway* out of necessity, since of course this shared system is the *only* way they can manage, but that the *shared provision* scheme now simply helped them with some of the costs.

### **Box 2. Key Points of Newport's Shared Provision**

- Designed for working parents unable to access wrap around care at local nurseries.
- Sensitive to the geographic mobility of many working parents.
- Allows parents to access free entitlement across multiple settings (i.e. a financial boost to parents previously unable to access this).
- The ability to access entitlement across multiple settings allows children to access 'local' or 'home' nursery and therefore benefit from meeting 'future school mates'.
- Allows parents to access *minimum attendance* required to receive ten free hours (i.e. ostensibly aids increase in uptake of more *sessions*, rather than uptake of nursery per se).
- No financial cost to settings.
- Need to be sensitive to *potential* negative impact on child of multiple settings.
- Shared provision means double feedback to primary schools, meaning a test of conformity of assessment arrangements.

- More planning for staff to ensure no replication or gaps in curriculum.
- Need for more formal lines of communication between the relevant settings to avoid replication of curriculum and confusion over attendance- this should be mediated by LA.
- A perception that shared provision should be implemented in Cardiff to see greater impact and uptake of scheme.
- Need for awareness of potential staffing ratio issues with influx of new children.
- Positive feedback from parents although a perception from some working parents that more flexibility still needed within the system.

## **Unsociable Hours Provision**

### *Demand*

3.40 The next type of flexibility offered to parents in Newport was '*unsociable hours*' provision, where parents could access Nurseries at earlier and later times of the day (i.e. at 'untypical' or 'unsociable' hours). This initiative was designed to accommodate the shift patterns of certain key workers (e.g. nurses, police officers), whose unsociable shift patterns presented a particular problem when it came to accessing wrap-around childcare (since settings are generally not open early enough for parents to drop children off on their way to work).

3.41 The sensitivity and importance to this form of demand in Newport was perhaps aided by the prominence of the Royal Gwent Hospital as a local employer.

3.42 Because of the lack of access to early wrap-around care, it was assumed that the children of shift workers were perhaps less likely to

access pre-school education, and instead more likely to rely upon private child minders or other informal forms of care, i.e., to keep their child 'out of the system'. The *unsociable hours provision* therefore had the potential to increase uptake of the 10 hours entitlement by getting these children 'into the system'.

### *Provision*

3.43 Nurseries participating in this initiative opened earlier (as early as 6am) to accommodate the demands of shift workers. However, children did not actually begin to access the Foundation Phase until the regular time of 9am.

3.44 As with *shared provision*, parents were informed about this flexible provision through newsletters and informal chats with the parents the settings felt could benefit from the scheme.

3.45 In the case study settings, the *unsociable hours provision* was arranged on a weekly basis (responding to the needs of the individual parents, i.e., their fluctuating shift patterns) rather than termly.

3.46 Again, there was relatively low uptake of this provision across the local authority, and when the option was taken up, it was often by parents of much younger children, who were too young for the Foundation Phase<sup>20</sup>. The relatively low numbers of shift workers in the labour market (although they are of course a permanent feature) can partly explain the low take-up.

### *Quality*

3.47 The local authority did not expect any tension between this mode of flexibility and the Foundation Phase curriculum. Once again,

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<sup>20</sup> Of course this raises a question about whether this form of flexible provision actually met the criteria of the overall Flexibility Pilot scheme.

however, it is worth noting that when the concept of *unsociable hours provision* was described to non-uptake settings in other regions, some practitioners vociferously expressed concerns that going in to settings *too early* in the morning would be too tiring for the child. One head teacher stated that early opening (and indeed wrap-around provision more generally) would be detrimental to the child since they would be too tired to learn anything:

“that’s the tension in the model. There’s the benefit of flexible provision to the parent...great, but it’s not always to the benefit of the child”. (Head teacher in non-uptake maintained school outside Newport)

3.48 In Newport, however, practitioners stated that the early hours benefited the child since they generally got to leave earlier – generally children did not stay from 6am to 6pm.

3.49 Since the uptake of the *unsociable hours provision* was generally by children who were too young for the Foundation Phase researchers could not observe any impact on the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum. The practitioners interviewed, however, were confident that *unsociable hours provision* did not have an adverse impact on children’s learning. It should also be noted here that in non-maintained settings, many children are used to earlier starts than children in maintained settings anyway because of the offer of wrap-around care.

### *Impact*

3.50 Out of all the forms of flexibility offered in Newport, the local authority felt that the *unsociable hours provision* was probably the most likely to aid uptake, since it was assumed that prior to its introduction parents would have left children with child minders or relatives (i.e. been out of the system).



- 3.51 However, it is unclear at this stage whether it has aided uptake of places per se, since children tend to enter non-maintained settings at a younger age anyway.
- 3.52 In terms of the impact on settings, most staff interviewed at participating settings stated that the new arrangement was manageable – many settings were offering early opening hours prior to the Pilot and typically said that ‘an extra hour doesn’t make a difference’. However, staff were sensitive to the fact that if uptake was to increase, this form of flexibility could potentially have an impact on the setting as staffing levels would have to increase accordingly, particularly at these more ‘unsociable’ times.
- 3.53 One setting stated that ‘unsociable’ hours were known to be difficult for staff (and therefore poses financial challenges), claiming that staff who come in early also have to leave early and so “it can be hard to manage rotas...and that’s why most Nurseries don’t offer it”.
- 3.54 Similarly, in one non-participating comparison setting, managers stated that without a financial incentive they would not open early for a limited number of children since it would cost them too much to staff. This is relevant when considering the implementation of this form of flexibility on a wider scale.

#### *Parental feedback*

- 3.55 Parents taking part in the *unsociable hours provision* spoke of their satisfaction with the scheme. Unsurprisingly, these parents again lacked the informal family networks of care that other parents often relied on. Parents expressed satisfaction with the *unsociable hours provision*, stating that it had allowed them to stay in work, and in one case, had allowed the father to obtain a new, better-paid job.

3.56 Nonetheless, parents again expressed their frustration at being so reliant on private nurseries for their childcare, and noted how much of their household income went on childcare. One parent stated that the maintained sector should be more flexible and provide on-site wrap-around care for children.

3.57 Parents also reported that the early opening or the long hours had not adversely affected their children. In fact they claimed that their children had benefited from the extra contact and attention.

“He absolutely loves being the only one in the nursery... it’s actually easier to drop him off than it is on the days where he’s not in early” (Newport parent using unsociable hours provision)

### **Box 3. Key Points of Newport’s Unsociable Hours Provision**

- Designed to aid shift workers and other parents working unsociable hours.
- Nurseries open as early as 6am.
- Assumption that this form of flexibility most likely to aid uptake by getting children ‘into the system’ who may otherwise have been withheld.
- Unsociable hours provision often taken up by pre-foundation phase aged children.
- Felt to be manageable by settings, although aware that greater uptake could potentially lead to issues with staffing and associated costs.
- Felt that initiative had no impact on children’s learning (i.e. did not make them more tired), although important to be sensitive to this potential side effect.

## 50 Week Provision

### *Demand*

- 3.58 The final form of flexibility offered by Newport is an initiative called *50 week provision*. This is about easing the restrictions on when parents can receive their entitlement for their free sessions/hours.
- 3.59 The non-maintained sector in Newport ordinarily offers the Foundation Phase curriculum over a 39 week term (i.e., parents and children access 5 half-day sessions over a 39 week period). They would not *formally* implement the Foundation Phase curriculum during school holidays. Thus under the 39 week provision, part-time children only attending Nursery 3 days per week, for example, are unable able to access the Foundation Phase during the school holidays, and would therefore ultimately access *less of the Foundation Phase curriculum overall than their peers* (parents who work part time for, say, two to three days per week would usually keep their children at home on the days they were not working).
- 3.60 Moreover, parents cannot claim a refund for their ten ‘free’ hours during the holiday-term provision. This means in practice that parents *lose out on their entitlement* for the days that their part-time child does not access Nursery.
- 3.61 The *50 week provision* was only offered to working parents. It was therefore designed to extend or spread the entitlement of ten hours (5 half-day sessions) a week over a 50 week period (i.e., to include most of the school holidays). It was also designed to offer the Foundation Phase curriculum throughout the school holidays, rather than condensing the child’s full entitlement into the two or three days they spent in Nursery.

3.62 In other words, the *50 week provision* is, firstly, designed to help part-time children make up their 'shortfall', by allowing them to access the Foundation Phase curriculum during the school holidays, where they could not previously.

3.63 Secondly, it is designed to assist parents with the costs of childcare during the school holidays, allowing them to access their free sessions during the holidays, where they could not previously. In particular, this not only gave them access to more 'free' entitlement but also spread the costs evenly over the whole year.

#### *Provision*

3.64 The local authority offered close support and advice to participating settings regarding the management of *50 week provision*. This was achieved through a senior teacher (known as a 'linked teacher') who would regularly come into participating settings to advise managers and practitioners on best practice.

3.65 As with the other forms of flexibility, parents were informed about the Pilot by the setting through the standard communication channels.

3.66 Working parents were consulted during the design of the *50 week provision* and asked whether they would like to increase their entitled sessions during the week (i.e. be able to claim for extra sessions during the week, e.g. afternoon sessions) or whether they would like their child to keep their part-time status during the week but then access their entitlement during the school holidays.

3.67 All parents chose the school holidays option since this would mean no spike in costs during holidays. In practice, then, the children continued to access the same amount of sessions during the holidays as they did during term time (some are part-time, some are full-time);

the only difference now is that parents can get these sessions refunded and therefore get more of a financial benefit than previously.

### *Quality*

- 3.68 The *50 week provision* was the only form out of the three schemes trialled in Newport to raise issues specifically related to the implementation of the Foundation Phase. The local authority recognised that this type of provision could potentially lead to planning/management issues (rather than curriculum content).
- 3.69 In terms of the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum, the challenge for educators was to ensure that children doing the *50 week provision* (and part-time during the week) accessed the same curriculum as the 39-week children, i.e. who attended Nursery every day of the week. In particular, they wanted to ensure that they did not miss out on tasks and activities during the week, and if they did, how to ensure that their holiday provision focused on the tasks they may have missed out on.
- 3.70 To ameliorate these potential problems, the local authority funded an increase in the time spent at the participating setting by the 'linked teacher', who advised the settings on how to manage these potential issues.
- 3.71 In practice, the 50-week and 39-week children were tracked separately to accurately monitor their progress and the tasks they completed. All children did different focused tasks every day, with all children (both 39- and 50-week) doing three focused tasks (i.e. learning a new skill) per week. Completion of the focused tasks was monitored, and if children missed a task they were recorded as 'to complete' (e.g., during the next week).

3.72 Children kept to this routine by accessing the Foundation Phase and these tasks during the holiday-term. Any 'gaps' in 50-week children's attainment were focused on during the holiday-term.

### *Impact*

3.73 The local authority stated that the *50 week provision* had slightly increased their costs because they now had to fund more time for the 'linked teacher', but felt that this cost was minimal and acceptable.

3.74 Staff in the participating settings were very positive about the *50 week provision*. They pointed out that non-maintained settings are open for the school holidays anyway, thus this form of flexibility was not disruptive to the day-to-day running of the setting. This suggests that this form is easier to implement in the non-maintained than in the maintained sector.

3.75 They stated that the *50 week provision* had meant no extra costs or impact on staffing levels, but conceded that this was because the provision was only offered to working parents:

“If we had offered it to our non-working parents we would've had more children doing it, then I'm sure we would've had to adjust staffing because we have some staff who work term only...” (Funded non-maintained Nursery manager in Newport)

3.76 The Nursery manager went on to suggest that with an influx of more children, the *term-only* contracts for some of their staff would have become unviable.

3.77 The uptake of the *50 week provision* increased dramatically, from an initial five pupils during the first wave to 16 pupils (20% of the eligible total). The setting manager stated that this increase in uptake had not negatively impacted on staff as initially feared.

3.78 The Nursery staff reported that this form of flexibility benefited those children who previously only accessed the minimum provision (i.e. three days a week). They claimed that provision of the Foundation Phase during school holidays had ensured continuity of provision and prevented 'skill-fade'.

#### **Box 4. Key Points of Newport's 50 Week Provision**

- 50 week provision is all about relaxing how and when children and parents can access their free entitlement.
- Designed to benefit children attending Nursery part-time, who previously accessed the minimum provision (e.g. three days per week). Because children were previously unable to access Foundation Phase curriculum during holiday time, they therefore received less education than their peer group.
- Designed to aid parents financially, since they can now claim their entitlement for holiday sessions and ultimately receive more of a financial benefit.
- Need to be attuned to planning and issues surrounding curriculum replication during holiday-term provision.

## 4 Evaluation of Neath Port Talbot Flexibility Pilot

### Local Demand and Design

- 4.1 Currently all eligible children in Neath Port Talbot are in maintained nurseries (and all of which are teacher-led). Prior to the Flexibility Pilot, children could access their ten free hours (or 5 half-day sessions) in the 'traditional' format of mornings *or* afternoon sessions. Full day sessions are not allowed and settings do not provide wrap-around care facilities.
- 4.2 In essence the Neath Port Talbot Flexibility Pilot allowed parents to access the Foundation Phase across two sessions a day, thereby receiving their entitlement across *two-and-a-half-days* (instead of the typical five days). This was offered in four case study maintained schools.
- 4.3 The Flexibility Pilot was designed by the local authority to help a wide spectrum of parents. The goals of the Pilot were to make life easier for working parents; to help workless parents obtain work; and to facilitate greater engagement with the educational system by deprived or marginalised parents and children.
- 4.4 Local authority representatives stated that they felt the extra contact time within *two-and-a-half-days provision* could potentially help children from deprived families since they generally were in most need of school readiness.
- 4.5 The local authority saw the Pilot as exploratory; they wanted to see 'what works' and to analyse which type of parent benefited most from it. The local authority hoped that one of the impacts of the Pilot would be to improve attendance, which has been a long standing focus within the local authority. The rationale behind the Neath Port Talbot



Pilot was therefore slightly different from the Newport Pilot, which was perhaps narrower in its scope and aims.

- 4.6 The Flexibility Pilots in Neath Port Talbot were designed in collaboration with schools and their feedback/discussions with parents. After expressing an interest in implementing a form of flexibility, participating schools then sent letters and surveys out to the parents for feedback as to what type of flexible provision they wanted (i.e. checking the demand within the locality). After internal discussions, schools then liaised with the local authority to consider whether the proposed forms of flexibility were feasible and went from there. Thus there was no 'prescription' of different types of 'ready-made' flexibility suggested by the local authority, (as in Newport) but flexibility was rather decided on an *ad hoc* basis in each school (as in Carmarthenshire).

## **Provision**

- 4.7 The final form of flexibility which was implemented within Neath Port Talbot was to simply relax how the 10 hours of nursery education could be taken up across the week. Whereas traditionally children would only be able to do morning or afternoon sessions (9am-11.30am or 1pm-3.30pm), children in participating Pilot settings were allowed to do a combination of mornings or afternoons or both (i.e. to stay for the full day) up to a maximum of five half-day sessions.
- 4.8 In practice, this meant that many parents chose to access their ten hours provision in 'blocks' of two days plus one other half day (i.e. across two and a half days). Within one class then, some children would stick to the 'traditional' mornings-only routine, whilst others would access one or two full days.

- 4.9 This led to a 'patchwork' register, as different children within the class accessed their entitlement in different ways.
- 4.10 As in Newport, parents were informed about the flexible provision initiative by schools themselves rather than by the local authority, through newsletters, informal chats and social media.
- 4.11 Significantly, at one 'flagship' school, where enthusiasm for the Pilot was at its highest, the demand for *two-and-a-half-days provision* at one stage led to oversubscription because too many parents wanted their children to have full-day provision on the same day. This was overcome in this instance by asking non-working parents to allow working parents to take the places. This raises the need to be alert to issues about capacity and staffing levels.

## Quality

- 4.12 When designing the Pilot scheme, the local authority was very concerned that this new (i.e. full-day) provision should not lead to a dip in quality of the Foundation Phase. Since every Nursery in Neath Port Talbot is teacher-led, it was decided that *two-and-a-half-days provision* should not mean that children staying for the full day would be taught by an additional practitioner. Indeed, when interviewed, the local authority representatives were highly sensitive to the possibilities of tensions between increased flexibility and quality of provision. There was no mention, however, of what extra support or guidance was provided to the schools to aid the implementation of flexible access alongside delivering the Foundation Phase curriculum.
- 4.13 There were numerous potential issues relating to the implementation of the Foundation Phase. For example, in one setting the flexibility had been managed by integrating older Nursery children into the Reception class. Crucially, in practice, this form of flexibility meant

that children within the same class would attend different sessions over the course of a week. The responsibility was therefore on teaching staff to ensure that each child accessed the Foundation Phase curriculum in the same way despite their different individual patterns of uptake.

- 4.14 In the school that reported no negative side effects of the Pilot on the Foundation Phase curriculum, an additional practitioner was dedicated to tracking the attainment of the Flexible Pilot scheme children in order to ameliorate these potential pitfalls.
- 4.15 One teacher claimed the *two-and-a-half-days* provision meant ‘cramming’ the focused elements of the Foundation Phase for the flexible Pilot children, thereby potentially losing the more play-oriented focus of the Foundation Phase curriculum.
- 4.16 In the observed schools, the implementation of the Foundation Phase was generally high, as was the standard of teaching. Ironically, it was the schools with the highest uptake of the Flexibility Pilot (and therefore with the most potential problems) where we found that the Foundation Phase was being implemented well. It must be noted, however, that these schools and teachers were generally regarded as ‘exceptional’ by the research team.
- 4.17 The local authority themselves acknowledged the excellent relationships these schools had with their parents and community and stated that their success in managing the increased demands of flexibility was down to the creativity and skill of the schools involved.

## **Impact**

- 4.18 The local authority representative claimed that it was too early to judge the impact of the Flexibility Pilot on children’s attainment,

although claimed that the Pilot had helped to increase attendance within the local authority. They also expressed satisfaction that the Pilot had unintentionally helped the internal organisation of the local authority, since it had entailed greater and improved communications with their admissions department.

- 4.19 The perceptions of the Pilot and its impact were, however, more mixed amongst staff and senior leadership across the four case study schools. The two schools with high uptake of the Pilot scheme were generally enthusiastic about the Pilot (one incredibly so), whilst of the low uptake settings, one was positive but with significant caveats, and the other was unhappy with the Pilot. Opinions were split around most key issues: staffing, planning and management, pedagogy and overall impact on children.
- 4.20 Staff in one school claimed that the new pattern of provision had not created any additional work or pressure on staff. As aforementioned, this school had devised a coping strategy for managing the implications of this form of flexibility (i.e. the uneven attendance of children). In other settings, however, staff claimed that the patchwork register and differing patterns of attendance meant significant amounts of extra planning and pressure to ensure that children did not miss out on tasks or have their experiences replicated.
- 4.21 Relatedly, some staff claimed that the lack of school readiness (e.g. not being toilet-trained) of some younger (3 year old) children and their integration into an older group was adding pressure on staff.
- 4.22 In two of the settings, managers and teaching staff claimed that the new *two-and-a-half-days provision* had 'brought children out of their shells' and the extra contact had enhanced their school readiness and all round educational attainment.

- 4.23 Conversely, staff in other settings claimed that young children were not capable of completing a full-day in school, that the day was too tiring for the children, and that this had the potential to disrupt their learning (i.e. that the children were too tired to learn/absorb anything in the afternoon).
- 4.24 Teachers also raised the issue that *two-and-a-half-days provision* effectively meant that children were then out of school for two-and-a-half-days. They claimed that this hindered educational progress and socialisation as the time spent out of school was too long.
- 4.25 There was also a perceived risk that the impact of pupil absence (e.g. through illness) on pupils attending school over fewer days would have a greater detrimental impact than if a child missed just half a day<sup>21</sup>.
- 4.26 One teacher argued that the traditional 'mornings only' was a better routine for children and that it was better for the teaching staff to see the children every day (e.g. to track their progress).
- 4.27 Other staff stated that (later) full-time compulsory education was not flexible, and that it would be better for children and parents to get used to the five day provision/routines that they would soon experience in school when they enter Reception classes.
- 4.28 Staff raised the possibility of uneven attainment within the same cohort of children because of these varying routines.

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<sup>21</sup> Although this must be considered against the lower probability of missing school due to illness if a child only has to attend for two-and-a-half-days.

## Parental Feedback

4.29 Parents interviewed in Neath Port Talbot were generally very positive about the Flexibility Pilots, and indeed their children's education more generally. They reported that it had aided their own daily routine and helped their child's education.

"I feel it has been very beneficial to my working conditions and to my child's education. I think it is an excellent idea for working parents and I am grateful to the school for introducing it." (Parent in Neath Port Talbot)

"Very beneficial- the ideal arrangement for working parents."  
(Parent in Neath Port Talbot)

4.30 The prevalence of this type of positive response was in keeping with the close relationships between the schools and parents that researchers observed during field visits. Parents at one participating setting where the Pilot was coming to a close were dismayed at the demise of the scheme.

4.31 The most significant finding to emerge from parental interviews in Neath Port Talbot was their perception that two-and-a-half-day provision had greatly benefited their children's 'school readiness'. Parents stated that their children had become more independent and confident and had generally progressed in their social and educational development. Although 'school readiness' is perhaps a vague term, it was very common to hear parents say their child had 'come on' since taking part in the flexible Pilot.

"We think our daughter is a lot more confident going to school compared with how we expected her to be with full days."  
(Parent in Neath Port Talbot)

“She is taking more in, they cover more, she’s more attentive. The half days...she doesn’t get the time to get stuck into the lesson before it finishes.” (Parent in Neath Port Talbot)

- 4.32 It was also interesting to note that some of the Pilot schools advised parents their children would struggle with full-day provision, and that parents greatly respected this judgement.
- 4.33 The Pilot in Neath Port Talbot provided an interesting contrast to the Pilot in Newport. In Newport all the parents interviewed who were using their scheme were working full time or part-time. However, in Neath Port Talbot many of the parents interviewed were either not working or were working part-time. Whilst the parents in Newport had to balance complex patterns of formal, expensive childcare, in Neath Port Talbot many parents relied on informal local family networks (specifically grandparents), and very few used formal childcare because they simply did not need it because they were not working.
- 4.34 Despite the fact that childcare and ‘pick up and drop off’ routines were perhaps more manageable for the non-working parents (and indeed for working parents with local family networks) the majority of parents in Neath Port Talbot had nonetheless selected to use the flexible *two-and-a-half-days provision* rather than stay with the traditional morning *or* afternoon provision.
- 4.35 Like working parents, non-working parents also stated that the traditional morning *or* afternoon provision was often inconvenient, particularly for parents with children of different ages who required different pick up/drop off times. They stated that the traditional format meant much of their day was spend coming and going to school, whereas the full-day provision allowed them more time to complete

chores such as shopping and cleaning, and also to spend more 'quality time' with their other children.

"I find [traditional format] it quite hard with the baby....I used to live quite far away from the school and it was very hard with the back and forth back and forth. I'd get up in the morning and take them to school, then I'd have to go to a friend's who lives by there (by the school) because I couldn't go all the way back home because it was too far, then I'd pick her up, go home, do some cleaning, get the baby up because she would be having a nap, then make my way back to the school with both the baby and [eldest son] to pick up at 3.30. It was hard! ...it's just too hard to have half days, especially if it's so far away." (Non-working parent in Neath Port Talbot)

"It was easier for me when he was in full days so I could do all my shopping without having to take him and the baby with me." (Non-working parent in Neath Port Talbot)

"[With mornings only] By the time I took him to school and got home, done the breakfast and cleaning for the morning, it was time to fetch him again... I can do a lot more when he's in for the full two days." (Non-working parent in Neath Port Talbot)

4.36 As mentioned above, a concern raised by some practitioners was that the *two-and-a-half-days provision* ultimately meant more time away from school. In contrast, however, some parents in Neath Port Talbot viewed this time off positively, as a way of spending more 'quality time' with their three-to-four year-old child.

"I can have one on one time with the youngest now too"  
(Parent in Neath Port Talbot)



“Now at the end of every week you’ve got some spare time with the two little ones, so you can do stuff with them” (Parent in Neath Port Talbot)

4.37 In Neath Port Talbot, the research team also spoke to parents who were also carers and parents of children with special or complex needs. These parents also claimed to have struggled with the traditional mornings/afternoon only format and said that they too had benefited from the full day blocks.

*Parent:* “He’s found the full day a lot easier to tolerate than the mornings, he’s on the autism spectrum...the school said they felt he might benefit from it. I wasn’t sure, I was quite sceptical but he’s loved it...”

*Researcher:* “So the full days have benefited you?”

*Parent:* “It’s been really good, it gives us two full days where we can go and spend time out and about ...sometimes when he was coming home from nursery he’d be quite tired in the afternoons so we wouldn’t do anything.... it’s helped me because I don’t have any family back up, and now when he goes full time I get a bit of a break from him, because I don’t get any respite, there’s no family to help me out, so it’s been really beneficial to my mental health”

4.38 Another parent spoke of the difficulties of taking his disabled child to school every morning, and that the ‘two days off’ made his life easier.

4.39 It is clear from this that ‘working parents’ are not always the sole beneficiaries of the Flexibility Pilots. The notion that the *two-and-a-half-days provision* facilitated ‘respite’ and a better quality of life for non-working parents should be considered.

4.40 The only problems with the *two-and-a-half-day provision* raised by parents were about timetabling: a small number of parents stated that on some occasions their child had maybe missed out on a special event which would be held on the days that they were not in school, although these complaints were always qualified by an understanding that the school could only do so much to accommodate shift patterns.

**Box 5. Key Points of Neath Port Talbot’s Two-and-a-half-days Week Provision**

- Demand-led approach led to a form of flexible provision which meant that children could take their ten hours entitlement in full day ‘blocks’ and over just two-and-a-half-days a week.
- In practice, this meant a patchwork timetable with different children in class coming in different days/times, as some children stuck to the traditional mornings or afternoon format and some opted for the two-and-a-half-days block or provision
- Mixed views from staff regarding the implications of the new flexibility. Some stated it had created more work, others stated that they were managing very well.
- Parents were generally extremely positive about flexibility and the impact it had on families. As in other areas, flexible hours seen to aid parental work/life balance and save money on childcare.
- Parents in Neath Port Talbot particularly focused on the perceived positive impact that two-and-a-half-days provision had had on their children’s school readiness, contrasting with views of other practitioners outside the case study settings) who questioned the suitability of full-day provision for pre-school children.

## 5 Evaluation of Carmarthenshire Flexibility Pilot

### Local Demand and Design

- 5.1 Pre-school provision in Carmarthenshire is currently a 'mixed economy' whereby some (around 30) maintained schools accept children at 3 years (i.e. they have an integrated pre-school Nursery unit/class) but most do not. Alternative pre-school provision is therefore offered by the non-maintained sector. Ultimately there is significant and uneven variation across the local authority in terms of access to the early years of the Foundation Phase.
- 5.2 The local authority recognised that "there are a good proportion of three year olds who don't get anything" in some areas. The rurality of certain areas within Carmarthenshire also exacerbates this situation, with certain parents being more geographically isolated from Foundation Phase provision than parents in other local authorities. Parents in this situation expressed frustration at the lack of local early years provision.
- 5.3 In terms of the organisation of pre-school education within settings that do offer it, the local authority stated that the provision of the free sessions was previously relatively disorganised, with different providers 'doing what they wanted', and generally not defining or enforcing parameters within the entitlement. For example, some settings did not set a minimum amount of sessions that a child had to attend in order to access their ten hours entitlement.
- 5.4 A further contextual consideration in Carmarthenshire is the issue of rural schools faced with closures because of falling pupil numbers. Rural schools without a pre-school facility were said to be 'losing pupils' to nearby schools which do offer Nursery provision since

parents tend to stay with these schools once their children are 'in the system' and have made friends.

- 5.5 The unique problems and demands of Carmarthenshire prior to the introduction of the Flexibility Pilot meant that the perceived needs aims of the Pilot in Carmarthenshire differed greatly from the aims of the Pilot in Newport and Neath Port Talbot. Whilst these other local authorities used the Flexibility Pilot to 'tweak' or fine tune their existing forms of provision, Carmarthenshire used it to overhaul the provision of early years education within certain localities.
- 5.6 In many ways, then, the 'flexibility' in Carmarthenshire often refers to the provision of early years facilities within localities where previously there were none, rather than a relaxing of how and when the entitlement may be taken, as in other local authorities.
- 5.7 The Flexibility Pilot has allowed certain schools to develop an early years facility. In some cases the grant was used for capital investment to adapt existing facilities for new use. The ultimate aim for these schools was to try and retain pupils.
- 5.8 The Flexibility Pilot was also used in Carmarthenshire to address the lack of pre-school provision in Flying Start areas. Prior to this there would have been a 'gap' between when the child finishes Flying Start and starting Reception class in the maintained sector.
- 5.9 Unlike other local authorities, Carmarthenshire did not advertise the Flexibility Pilot to all schools and settings. Instead it opted for a targeted approach, focussing on the most deprived areas and those localities that most obviously lacked Nursery provision.

## Provision

- 5.10 As aforementioned, the implementation and uptake of the pilot varied significantly throughout Carmarthen, reflecting uneven levels of need/demand, and in some cases the unique problems of rurality. But it also appeared to reflect different levels of understanding and communication between the local authority and settings, between different settings, and between settings and parents.
- 5.11 In terms of the actual forms of flexibility offered by each setting, that is, beyond the provision of early years facilities in itself, Carmarthenshire's Pilot was akin to Neath Port Talbot in that the participating settings asked parents when and how they would like to take their ten hours entitlement (i.e. a demand-led approach).
- 5.12 However, instead of adopting a single approach to these demands (as in Neath Port Talbot) the types of flexibility implemented differed significantly across the participating settings.
- 5.13 It is worth outlining the different types of flexible provision offered within Carmarthen:
- a) One setting (which previously offered no Nursery provision) had used the Flexible Pilot funding to implement Nursery provision. Significantly, the parents were also offered the flexibility of a wrap-around care service within the setting (in the form of a Portakabin onsite) following the child's education in the morning (or in the morning if they attended the afternoon at school). The parents then had to pay a minimal cost to the school for this wrap-around care. This wrap-around care lasted for 1 hour 59 minutes<sup>22</sup> since the setting was not yet registered with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales. The school generally encouraged a staggered approach to the wrap-around care, asking parents to

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<sup>22</sup> Care of two hours or more must be provided by a registered CSSIW provider.

build their children up to full-day all-week provision by their final term in pre-school. The setting adhered to the Foundation Phase recommended ratios, with 8 places offered for each member of staff. This setting obtained a high level of uptake and was considered the most successful example of flexibility – something of a ‘flagship’ – by the local authority.

- b) One maintained setting initially offered parents the option of full-day provision (i.e. afternoon sessions of Foundation Phase on top of their standard morning sessions, as in Neath Port Talbot), whereby the children would be integrated into the afternoon Reception class of the linked school. However, despite some parents favouring this option, the school ultimately rejected this form of provision due to the perception that the children were not sufficiently toilet-trained and therefore represented a health and safety risk. As a result, no children participated in this offer.
- c) One non-maintained setting allowed parents to access their free ten hours entitlement in their setting (as is standard practice in Newport, for example).
- d) One maintained setting in a rural area that previously offered Flying Start provision but no nursery provision used the Flexibility Pilot to offer a Nursery facility where previously there was none. This was achieved by integrating the Nursery-aged children into the small Reception class.

5.14 As in Neath Port Talbot, parents were informed about the introduction of the new Pilot by schools. As in Neath Port Talbot, some settings were more sophisticated in communicating their offer of flexibility, with the ‘flagship’ school communicating to parents about the new pilot through the local health visitor and through the local authority admissions office.

5.15 In terms of uptake, when offered a choice between mornings, afternoons or full-day provision, most parents in one setting opted for the ‘traditional’ *mornings only* provision. This is interesting given the

perceived lack of flexibility of this model, which of course prompted the Flexibility Pilot in the first place. However, it should be noted that staff at this setting drew attention to the informal pressures exerted on parents to conform to the will of the majority of other parents when deciding what pattern of entitlement they would prefer.

## **Quality**

5.16 In two of the settings in Carmarthenshire, the flexible offer of pre-school Nursery provision entailed the integration of Nursery-aged children into the Reception class (as in one setting in Neath Port Talbot). As In Neath Port Talbot, teaching staff raised concerns about this, stating that the integration of younger children, many of whom were not 'school ready' (e.g. toilet trained) made teaching harder and the implementation of the Foundation Phase more problematic.

## **Impact**

5.17 It is difficult to assess the general impact of the flexibility pilots in Carmarthenshire given the wider context of uneven pre-school provision within the local authority and the ad hoc nature of the Pilots from school to school.

5.18 In many cases the Flexibility Pilot funding was provided to schools who then used this to invest in resources and re-use of an existing infrastructure, (to provide a Nursery facility) rather than tweaking the flexibility of existing Nursery provision.

5.19 Somewhat predictably then, the investment from Flexibility Pilots was generally felt to have had a positive impact on settings. Teachers and senior management were happy they could provide a Nursery service to their local community and therefore retain children.

- 5.20 An additional impact of the Flexibility Pilot was the newly introduced enforcement of a minimum amount of sessions by children, leading to better overall organisation of the early years provision.
- 5.21 In the setting where the Flexibility Pilot ultimately fell through (case study (b) above), the school management complained about a lack of guidance or contact from the local authority regarding the implementation of the Pilot.
- 5.22 In the 'flagship school' (case study (a) above), the introduction of wrap-around care provision was felt to be working very well by everyone involved. The local authority said this was the only form of flexibility where 'boundaries were pushed', conceding that the other forms of flexibility which had been implemented across the local authority were still 'quite restrictive'.
- 5.23 Where the Flexibility Pilot had been implemented most practitioners said that there had been no adverse impact on their planning and workload. However, there were some noteworthy concerns regarding the integration of Nursery children into Reception classes.
- 5.24 Most practitioners also reported that the Flexibility Pilots had had a positive impact on the participating children. But this should be qualified by restating that there had previously been no Nursery provision in the participating case study settings prior to the introduction of the Flexibility Pilot. Therefore, it could be argued that any form of Nursery provision in these areas was always going to receive positive views.

### **Parental Feedback**

- 5.25 The unevenness of early years provision across Carmarthenshire was reflected in the views of parents we interviewed. As an example,



most parents with children attending the 'flagship' setting in Carmarthenshire were extremely satisfied and pleased with the initiative. Notably one parent, however, had moved to the area from another part of Carmarthenshire where full-day flexible provision was the 'norm', and was therefore much less 'grateful' than the other local parents, none of whom previously had the option of any kind of full-day provision.

5.26 In another locality, parents noted how previously they had to drive some distance to access Nursery provision. Some parents also raised concerns that Flying Start provision did not cover the whole town. In another locality, with a participating setting, parents reported that they had not accessed or even heard about any Flexibility Pilots.

5.27 Nonetheless, as in Neath Port Talbot and Newport, common themes persisted in the telephone interviews with parents. For example, parents in Carmarthenshire said they often relied on informal, family networks of childcare, especially grandparents. As in Neath Port Talbot and Newport, private childcare costs were seen as prohibitive and threatened families' wellbeing and household budget.

5.28 Parents whose children attended the 'flagship' setting (with on-site wrap-around care) were generally very happy with this new form of provision. They said it helped them greatly with their work/life balance, that the new flexibility had saved them lots of money on childcare costs, and in some cases had allowed them to return to work.

"It has been very beneficial as it is very flexible so I have the opportunity to keep my child in to the time that suits me, which means I don't have to rely on childcare or babysitters." (Parent in Carmarthenshire)

“It gives huge flexibility and it should continue: we don’t live in the 1950’s, most mums work part time, and to be able to access a flexible nursery has allowed me to work!” (Parent in Carmarthenshire)

“The flexibility offer has allowed me to return to work part-time without the need for paying for private childcare. Without this flexibility all my wages would have disappeared on childcare costs.” (Parent in Carmarthenshire)

5.29 One parent claimed that the flexibility had allowed her child to access Nursery education (i.e. ‘enter the system’, a stated goal of the Flexibility Pilots), stating that without this flexibility the child would have been withheld from the Foundation Phase until the beginning of compulsory education (probably utilising a child minder) because of the perceived inconvenience of the ‘traditional format’:

“I no longer spend the majority of my wage on childcare costs! If it was not flexible my child would be unable to access the Nursery due to my work commitments.” (Parent in Carmarthenshire)

5.30 A recurring issue throughout the evaluation is whether full-day provision is suitable for very small children. As in the other regions, parents in Carmarthenshire generally felt their children could cope with full-day provision. As in Neath Port Talbot, parents at the ‘flagship’ school generally felt that full-day provision (even though it was wrap-around care and not education) had aided their child’s school readiness.

“I feel 100% satisfied with the way that the pilot has worked, and am only glad that my daughter has had an opportunity to take part in it. I feel it has given her an excellent start for

school and the idea of full time school is no longer a daunting thought for parent or pupil- she actually can't wait to stay all day." (Parent in Carmarthenshire)

"The flexibility pilot has not only helped with my childcare arrangements but my daughter has blossomed in her behaviour, attitude, confidence and her willingness to learn." (Parent in Carmarthenshire)

"The flexibility pilot has been extremely beneficial to our childcare arrangements, as well as our daughter...who has enjoyed every minute and developed beyond expectations." (Parent in Carmarthenshire)

5.31 What is significant here is that 'care' was felt to have had an impact on general 'school readiness', to have aided confidence and sociability, and so on.

5.32 Nonetheless, as in other local authorities, there were some parents who did not feel that their child could cope with full-day provision.

"My youngest daughter is not as confident as my eldest...I do worry that she might be a bit young for school. I like the fact she can just attend mornings as they seem so little at three." (Parent in Carmarthenshire)

5.33 These parents noted, however, that their school had been very flexible and allowed children to move on or off the full-day provision depending on whether or not they were coping with the extra contact time.

### **Box 6. Key Points of Carmarthenshire's Ad Hoc Flexible Provision**

- Flexibility pilot designed to help overhaul early years provision within certain places within the local authority, rather than to 'tweak' existing early years provision.
- The Flexibility Pilot implemented on an ad hoc basis based on the different demands of each locality and participating setting.
- In some cases the Flexibility pilot funding went towards capital investment (e.g. buildings, resources, etc.).
- Mixed impact overall and significant variation between settings.
- Parents of children attending 'flagship' setting which had implemented on-site wrap-around care were extremely happy with this initiative.
- The emphasis of the local authority again focused on benefits to parents, and less so to settings and children. However as in Neath Port Talbot, parents claimed the flexibility and extra contact time had aided children's development as well as aiding their own work/life balance.
- Limited implementation and low uptake of the flexibility pilot in rural settings.
- Issues of communication between local authority and settings- some settings unhappy with advice/guidance provided by local authorities.
- As in Neath Port Talbot, pedagogical issues of combining nursery and reception classes in smaller settings.
- When assessing the uptake of 'demand led' types of flexibility, parents may acquiesce in the face of informal pressure from other parents when choosing their take up (that is, the wants of the majority will normally prevail).

## 6 Evaluation of Denbighshire Flexibility Pilot

### Local Demand and Design

- 6.1 In Denbighshire, pre-school education for 'rising threes' is generally provided by the funded non-maintained sector, in the form of playgroups and private day nurseries. Four year olds in the region generally have places in maintained Nurseries attached to Primary schools. In some rural areas with limited provision, 'rising three' children are admitted into maintained Nurseries.
- 6.2 Denbighshire's approach to 'flexibility' differs significantly from those of the other participating local authorities. Whilst the other local authorities focused on increasing uptake by relaxing the existing parameters surrounding pre-school provision – usually by altering a setting's opening hours – Denbighshire instead used flexibility funding to supplement an existing initiative developed by the local authority. This involved the employment and work of nine *family link workers* in different local communities across Denbighshire.
- 6.3 The goal of the *family link workers* initiative was to help raise educational standards across the local authority. In particular, the *family link workers* are tasked with improving 'school readiness' (e.g., ensuring children are toilet-trained, that they have appropriate behaviour and language readiness).
- 6.4 The *family link workers* work in local (mainly deprived) communities, working across clusters of schools, and with parents and pre-school aged children (from birth to Reception age).
- 6.5 At its most basic, the role can be described as pastoral, whereby the *family link workers* generally seek to build links between the schools/settings and the local community.

- 6.6 But using numerous strategies, the *family link workers* also aimed to increase the uptake of the Foundation Phase through increasing parental awareness of their entitlement and emphasising the educational benefits of early years education.
- 6.7 In Denbighshire there is a focus on bringing children ‘outside the system’ whose parents, for a number of reasons, may not bring them into the Foundation Phase until they reach compulsory school age, into the education system to access the Foundation Phase curriculum.
- 6.8 Unlike other local authorities which interpreted flexibility by altering setting opening hours or timetables, in Denbighshire the local authority felt that there was no demand for different opening times or for ‘full-day’ blocks and so on (as in Neath Port Talbot or Newport).
- 6.9 The local authority representative also implied that because pre-school education is meant to promote ‘school readiness’, routines (e.g. the ‘traditional’ morning *or* afternoon only model) should be encouraged. This echoed the claims of some practitioners in other local authorities who believed the ‘traditional’ system of mornings *or* afternoons was more effective.
- 6.10 However, the family link workers was not the only initiative the local authority operated under the auspices of the Flexibility Pilot. Within the Foundation Phase, qualified early years teachers are employed to work with approved funded non-maintained settings for 10% of the week in order to ensure high quality educational provision. In Denbighshire these teachers were ordinarily peripatetic. But as part of Denbighshire’s ‘brokerage’ model the role of the 10% ‘linked teachers’ (funded by the Foundation Phase, not the Flexibility Pilot) was *broadened* to include training *new* 10% teachers in local primary

who were then permanently assigned to their feeder primary schools, supported by the senior Foundation Phase advisory teacher. The time of the additional 10% linked teachers (i.e., *on top of* the 10% Foundation Phase teacher) was funded by the Flexi pilot.

- 6.11 This move was designed to build relationships between the schools and their feeder playgroups, between the two sets of staff, and between parents, children and school/teachers. Ultimately this reorganisation towards a permanent, embedded 'linked teacher' within the feeder playgroups (rather than a floating advisory teacher, as was the case under the Foundation Phase) was designed to aid 'school readiness' through building multiple relationships, not least familiarising children's and parents' familiarity with their soon-to-be teachers, with school routines and expectations.

## **Provision**

- 6.12 The *family link workers* are best described as mediators between schools/settings and families and communities. The *family link worker* role can perhaps be described as comprising two interlocking elements: (a) targeted work in the community, and (b) targeted educational work in 'hub' schools where they are formally based. *Family link workers* describe their community work as the groundwork for their role in schools.

### *Community work*

- 6.13 *Family link workers* pioneer and implement community outreach work to mothers and young children (from babies to reception age) in the community. The aim of these initiatives is to engage with local mothers and families and to support them where needed, with the underlying aim of improving school readiness.

- 6.14 These interventions include: mother and baby groups; ‘top tips’ drop-in sessions where parents are informed of issues relating to school readiness; and language and play-based toddler groups, specifically designed to aid ‘summer birth’ children who are not yet eligible for funded places and who would otherwise miss out on provision.
- 6.15 During the course of this work, the *family link workers* educate parents about the benefits of pre-school education and also make parents aware of their educational entitlement. For example, every term the *family link workers* manually go through admission lists (from the local authority) and playgroup lists, working out which children are entitled to 10 hours of free provision and which are not (e.g. summer births). They then contact the families to inform them of their entitlement.
- 6.16 Through these forms of community outreach, these interventions have the added benefit of ‘getting to families early’. *Family link workers* help target parents who are ‘outside the system’, and focus on getting their children into education. This is an issue other local authorities were struggling to address.

#### *School work*

- 6.17 The *family link workers* spent a significant amount of their time within local schools. As qualified Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs), they ran multiple remedial coaching classes designed to aid ‘school readiness’. For example, focusing on phonics, attention and listening, and reading.
- 6.18 They were also tasked with improving attendance within schools and dealing with behavioural/pastoral issues raised by a school. So, for example, the head teacher would alert the *family link worker* to a child whose attendance has been poor. The *family link worker* would then



contact the parent and establish what the problem was and attempt to resolve it. Although this strategy is not about offering flexible Foundation Phase provision one of the stated aims of the Flexibility Pilot in Neath Port Talbot was also to improve attendance, and hence interesting comparisons can be made.

6.19 The combination of school interventions and community outreach is therefore a holistic approach to ameliorating poverty and dealing with the link between deprivation and educational problems. Although increasing the uptake of ten free hours of Foundation Phase was not the explicit focus of the *family link workers*, increased uptake and attendance is perhaps an inevitable consequence of their work.

## **Quality**

6.20 The remedial work *family link workers* conducted in schools was felt to help with the implementation of the Foundation Phase. It was argued that aiding 'school readiness' (addressing behavioural and speech/attention issues) allowed these children to better engage with the Foundation Phase curriculum. This work was also felt to ease the burden on teachers.

6.21 The other pillar of Denbighshire's Flexibility Pilot, the role of the 10% linked teacher, was also specifically designed to improve implementation of Foundation Phase. However, the independent evaluation of the Foundation Phase (Taylor *et al.* 2015) found that some other local authorities already utilised and organised their 10% linked teachers in this way.

## Impact

- 6.22 The local authority was extremely pleased with the *family link worker* initiative, and felt they had been successful in improving standards of school readiness. The extra cost of the *family link workers* was said to be a highly worthwhile investment, but the extent to which this would be sustainable after the Flexibility Pilot funding has ceased was unclear, although the local authority has advised that they will continue this model of working.
- 6.23 The local authority also stated that the *family link workers* had helped their applications and admissions department greatly.
- 6.24 School staff and senior leadership teams also spoke incredibly highly of the work of the *family link workers*, stating that they had helped improve attendance, behaviour and made the running of the school easier by taking on such a significant pastoral role. The *family link workers* were felt to be a highly effective bridge between schools and communities/parents. Practitioners claimed that children had also benefited from the community and school-work of the *family link workers*.
- 6.25 The main issue the research team noted was the significant workload of the *family link workers* and how sustainable their role was.
- 6.26 The other aspect of the Denbighshire pilot – a locally embedded 10% linked teacher on top of the pre-existing 10% foundation phase teacher – was also felt to have been very successful, both by the linked teachers themselves and staff in the non-maintained settings. The latter claimed the extra contact time had greatly aided their understanding and implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum.

6.27 They also suggested that children had also benefited from the 'coaching' they had received.

6.28 It could be argued, however, that the role of the 10% linked teacher in Denbighshire is not that dissimilar to those in other local authorities, and the original aim of the 10% linked teacher following the introduction of the Foundation Phase.

6.29 As well as aiding delivery of the Foundation Phase, this reorganisation had clearly helped establish positive working relationships and lines of communication between the *family link workers*, playgroup staff and Nursery teachers. Under the new organisation, teachers were more likely to know who the at-risk children and families were, for example, and would have begun to establish a relationship with them prior to them attending Nursery.

#### **Box 7. Key Points of Denbighshire's Family Link Worker Provision**

- Flexibility Pilot funding used to supplement existing family link worker initiative.
- The family link workers aim to help improve educational standards through improving school readiness. I.e., with no explicit focus on 'flexible' provision, although increased uptake was felt to be an inevitable consequence of their community work.
- Pastoral role straddles school and community, focusing on building links between communities and schools, in particular making school and education less 'threatening' or intimidating for at risk families.
- The family link worker initiative represents the only pilot to actively work with children and parents 'outside the system' (i.e., the small amount of children in Wales who are estimated to not access their entitlement).
- 'Early intervention' through health workers and other initiatives allow family link workers to bring those 'outside the system' into

education.

- Family link workers run remedial educational interventions within schools (e.g. phonics classes, reading classes, attention classes).
- Family link workers overwhelmingly seen as invaluable to both schools and community.
- High workload for family link workers who spend a lot of time traveling across Denbighshire to different communities, settings and schools.
- Flexibility Pilot also used to broaden Foundation Phase 10% linked teacher scheme. Additional 10% teachers, drawn from local primary schools, trained by senior Foundation Phase advisory teachers and permanently assigned to their feeder playgroups. This helped establish support networks between playgroups, family link workers and schools.

## 7 Evaluation Conclusions

- 7.1 As the above report makes clear, the Flexibility Pilots were not interpreted or applied uniformly across all local authorities because each local authority had a different context or set of 'issues' that they wanted to address. So, for example, whilst the aim of the Pilot in Newport was to help working parents, the goal of the Pilot in Denbighshire was more explicitly about improving educational standards by improving 'school readiness'. Therefore the 'success' of each Flexibility Pilot scheme should also be considered against the different aims of each local authority as well as the overall aim.
- 7.2 Based on this evaluation there are some general conclusions and that can be drawn about (a) parental needs, (b) the implementation of the flexibility pilots, and (c) the overall impact of the flexibility pilots on educators, children and families. These are outlined below.
- 7.3 The conclusion also includes some brief discussion points around some of the most salient issues to emerge from the research, most specifically:
- The relationship between education and care;
  - The relationship between flexible provision and the labour market;
  - The relationship between flexible provision and uptake of the Foundation Phase; and
  - The need for better communication of issues to parents.
- 7.4 All these issues should be of considerable interest to policy makers.
- 7.5 First, however, it is worth scrutinising the concept of flexibility in the context of the Foundation Phase. In any future roll out of flexible provision there is a need to clarify the strategic aim of increased flexibility and the logic behind this strategy. Is the scheme designed to help working parents, or is it to help workless parents access the

employment market? Is it designed to help children's educational and social development? What is the role of Welsh language provision within flexible provision? There are numerous aims that flexible provision could be used to help address. Whilst they may not necessarily be conflicting, they may not always be complementary either. Once the overall aim of increased flexibility is decided upon (even if it is to allow considerable autonomy to different local authorities and providers), this should be clearly communicated to local authorities, schools/settings and parents.

- 7.6 What the evaluation also makes clear is the need, when thinking about implementing change, to consider who the main intended beneficiaries from increased flexibility are. The evaluation alerts us to the possibility that increased forms of 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 that 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. The short time frame of this evaluation means it is not possible to comment on longer term impacts on children.

### **Parental Needs**

- 7.7 Interviews and surveys with parents revealed the complex nature of parents' needs, which are contingent on working patterns, household structure, geographical location, social class and family networks. Households with multiple children where both parents work full time and commute to work outside the area will naturally have a different set of needs to a household where neither parent works.
- 7.8 The diversity of family structure/household composition both within and between areas should caution against treating 'parents' as a

homogenous group with uniform needs. Equally, it is problematic to ascribe the needs of one particular 'ideal type' of family unit to all others. This is particularly relevant given the changing structure of family life i.e., the decline of two parent families where one parent works and one raises children; the rise of working parents; the prevalence of blended families and so on.

7.9 Nonetheless, there were certain issues that regularly surfaced in conversations with all types of parents, suggesting that these problems and needs are fairly universal.

7.10 Many working parents often struggle with the traditional mornings or afternoons provision and stated that they required some form of full-day provision or wrap-around care to make their daily routines easier. Working parents often said they find it hard to manage the logistics of travelling to work and dropping off/picking up children, since working hours very rarely correspond to school/setting opening times/sessions:

“Early years education is so inflexible that it is almost unaffordable to take. Both parents work and so maintaining 18 months of our son being dropped off for 2.5 hours is unrealistic. It feels like a good idea is almost taken away from working families! Families should be able to use the hours to fit in with family life, not make it more difficult”. (Working parent)

7.11 Equally, non-working parents also stated that they found the traditional format difficult, especially for those parents with children of different ages, who stated they spent much of their day travelling back and forth to settings/schools. Many non-working parents stated that the traditional format of mornings or afternoons often made it harder to carry out important daily tasks such as shopping and cleaning.

- 7.12 Significantly, some parents stated that some form of wrap-around provision would give them some respite from the stress of raising children, and that they also needed 'some time to themselves'. This need may be particularly acute for single parent households and for parents of children with disabilities or parents who are also carers. This issue of respite, rest and positive parental mental health should feature into future debates about childcare provision in Wales.
- 7.13 Parental demand for alternative forms of provision is reflected in the e-survey results (see Appendix B, Q.9). 64% of parents surveyed felt that some form of *unsociable hours provision* would be quite useful or very useful; 79% felt that some form of *on-site wrap-around provision* would be quite useful or very useful; and 89% felt that *full-day provision* would be quite useful or very useful.
- 7.14 The lack of wrap-around provision within maintained Nurseries means that many working parents are often reliant on private childcare. Yet unlike the Wales 'Childcare and Early Years Survey' (Welsh Government, 2009) where 25% of parents claimed that paying for childcare was difficult (Welsh Government, 2009: 57-58) the cost of private childcare was almost universally seen as prohibitively expensive by parents. Working parents claimed that they were 'not being rewarded for working' because of the amount that childcare costs took out of the household budget.
- 7.15 The non-maintained sector is an obvious choice for parents seeking to access wrap-around care, but again the issue with the non-maintained sector remains one of cost: affordable/subsidised local wrap-around child care remains a key issue for parents.
- 7.16 Parents whose children access their ten free hours entitlement but then have to pay for wrap-around care on top of this can justifiably



claim that the cost of wrap-around care negates the benefit of their ten free hours entitlement.

- 7.17 Because of the prohibitive cost of private childcare, many parents relied on informal family networks (almost overwhelmingly grandparents) for childcare support. For parents who have this support network in place, childcare costs and working full/part time are obviously less of a problem than they are for families who lack these networks. The issue of informal childcare and the role played by grandparents, friends and so on is one which demands further exploration by the Welsh Government (see Dallimore, 2014)
- 7.18 Many of the families who lacked these family networks (and were therefore reliant on private childcare) were mobile, middle class families who had moved to the area, or new in-migrants.
- 7.19 Significantly, many parents expressed concern about the 'burden' they were placing on older relatives and stated they wished they did not have to be as reliant on their family as they were. They were grateful for any forms of provision that relieved their reliance on family.
- 7.20 Grandparents we spoke to at the school gates stated that their role in childcare was often very difficult and demanding. Whilst these informal patterns of care are traditional and therefore normalised in many areas of Wales, they perhaps obscure the extent of the problems in the childcare market. Crucially, the lack of affordable childcare may be placing a significant strain on older people.
- 7.21 Many parents (particularly working parents) stated that they struggled to find childcare during the school holidays. The demand for some form of holiday or *50-week provision* is reflected in the e-survey (see

Appendix B, Q.9) where 55% of parents surveyed stated that some form of holiday provision would be either quite useful or very useful.

### **Assessment of the Implementation of the Flexibility Pilots**

7.22 The following is a brief, general assessment of the various forms of flexibility in responding to the (often localised) problems they were designed to solve. It considers the overall strengths and weaknesses of each form of flexible provision and the lessons learned over the course of the implementation of the Flexibility Pilots.

7.23 Many of the forms of flexibility offered across local authorities were responding directly to the perceived inconvenience for parents of the inflexible 'traditional' format of 'mornings only' (or 'afternoons only') provision. Staff in the majority of settings acknowledged that many parents struggled with this format.

7.24 Intuitively, it would seem that some form of affordable, on-site wrap-around care would be the most practical solution to this demand, and the e-survey results show that 79% of parents felt this provision would be useful (see Appendix B, Q.9).

7.25 Indeed, of the various attempts to ameliorate this problem within the maintained sector, one of the most effective was the provision in the Carmarthenshire 'flagship' school, which offered on-site wrap around-care for a modest fee. As the evaluation makes clear, parents and staff were very happy with this form of provision. Parents stated it had helped their work/life balance, saved money on childcare and had aided their child's school readiness. Staff felt the scheme had been

easy to implement and had not negatively impacted on their workload.

7.26 However, the feasibility of implementing such provision on a large scale would be dependent on the setting and the area. Firstly, there are issues of capacity (i.e., is there enough room to accommodate a wrap-around facility). Second, the addition of wrap-around facilities would naturally increase the costs of running the setting. Finally, there would have to be safeguards in place to ensure that the care provided was of a high quality.

7.27 Another possible solution to the 'wrap-around' problem was the Neath Port Talbot scheme of full-day educational provision. This form of provision was felt to be the *most* beneficial by parents in our e-survey, with 89% stating it would be useful (see Appendix B, Q.9).

7.28 The full-day Pilot in Neath Port Talbot was implemented very well in the participating settings and was viewed very positively by the staff, local authority and parents.

7.29 As the report makes clear, one of the most prominent themes to emerge from this form of flexibility was the perception that full-day provision had aided children's school readiness. In addition to this, parents felt the full day blocks made their lives easier.

7.30 However, there are some important caveats which should be noted. As the report makes clear, this mode of flexibility had the potential to increase the workload of practitioners, although this was often successfully managed through the creativity and skill of the staff and management in the participating settings. It is unclear whether it would be possible to extrapolate this model to other settings.

- 7.31 An obvious solution to the problem of the 'patchwork register', which arose during this form of flexibility, would of course be to extend the ten hours free provision and offer full-day provision to all three year olds. This was a common request from parents.
- 7.32 As with the notion of wrap-around care, however, the extension of entitlement would entail significant costs in terms of staffing and would raise issues about capacity and space. In one setting in Neath Port Talbot the implementation of the Flexibility Pilot initially led to capacity issues, as the setting struggled with the increase of children.
- 7.33 *Unsociable hours provision* in Newport was also designed to aid a specific section of parents (i.e., shift workers) with the logistics of dropping children off on the way to work. Significantly, parents spoken to in other local authorities expressed their desire for a similar form of provision and spoke of the acute logistical difficulties faced by shift workers trying to access the Foundation Phase and wrap-around care.
- 7.34 From the research carried out, staff at participating non-maintained settings felt this form of provision was manageable, although again noted that earlier opening hours had the potential to increase staffing costs and that this format can feasibly cause problems with rotas.
- 7.35 Like other forms of flexibility, *unsociable hours provision* also raised the issue of having longer days for very young children. It is important to remember that this scheme was rolled out in the non-maintained sector, where settings routinely open earlier and took children at a very young age as a matter of course, and had, therefore, little impact on staffing costs. It is less clear how this form would work in the maintained sector.

- 7.36 The *shared provision* rolled out in Newport was designed to allow parents to access their free ten hours entitlement across multiple settings. This form of flexibility allowed children to access their local Nursery, to help children socialise with children who would then attend the same school, and also provided parents with financial help towards the cost of childcare.
- 7.37 It was felt that this form of provision was implemented well, and parents and settings were pleased with it. As the evaluation made clear, this format responded to a small section of mobile, working parents unable to access local family care networks but keen for their child to access a local setting.
- 7.38 It may certainly be the case that some working parents in other regions require a similar form of flexibility.
- 7.39 The strengths of this format are that it does not cost settings anything to implement, but nonetheless requires vigilance and clear, structured, lines of communication between the participating settings and the local authority / local authorities.
- 7.40 When considering extrapolating this form to different regions, policy makers should also be sensitive to the potential impact this format could have on practitioners' workloads, staffing ratios (e.g. additional children on particular days), and on the children themselves (whether or not they cope with going to multiple settings).
- 7.41 The *50-week provision* rolled out in Newport allowed parents and children to access their entitlement across the whole year. In practice this meant that children received the Foundation Phase curriculum during the school holidays and that parents were not exposed to a rise in costs during the school holidays.

- 7.42 Staff at these settings claimed this form of provision was working well, and stated this format incurred no extra costs. Again, this form of provision was rolled out in the non-maintained sector where holiday provision is the norm. It is much less clear how this scheme would work in the maintained sector, where there is still a clear demand for some form of holiday provision.
- 7.43 The *family link worker* initiative implemented by Denbighshire was very unlike all the other forms of flexibility, and indeed was designed to improve educational standards through supporting 'school readiness' (rather than with helping working parents).
- 7.44 The scheme proved incredibly successful in its stated goal of improving school readiness and was highly praised by practitioners, parents and the local authority.
- 7.45 Given that many other schools were keen to build stronger relationships with their local community, the use of *family link workers* is a realistic option. The only potential problem identified by the evaluation was the high workload taken on by the link workers themselves and the cost of employing *family link workers*.
- 7.46 The 10% 'linked teacher' initiative in Denbighshire was also felt to be a success, and has potential to be extrapolated to regions with a preponderance of non-maintained settings, particularly where they still operate peripatetically.

### **Impact on Staff and Settings**

- 7.47 Considerations of practitioners' workloads must be central to any future developments in offering flexible provision. Parental demands and needs, although vital, must be balanced against supply-side

issues. Staffing levels and Foundation Phase recommended adult:child ratios should be central to planning flexible provision.

7.48 Generally, the implementation of the Flexibility Pilot was not found to have obstructed the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum, which was generally found to be delivered well across the case study settings and schools in the four local authorities. However, it is vital to note that practitioners understood there to be the *potential* for some forms of flexibility to impact on the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum, particularly if demand for flexible provision was to grow.

7.49 It is also important to note that some settings/schools claimed they did not receive adequate support or guidance from local authorities about either the goals of the Flexibility Pilot or how to implement it. The success of future flexible provision depends on the ability of the local authority to properly inform and mentor settings about the aims and goals of the new provision, and to offer advice on its implementation and to monitor the quality of that provision.

7.50 Local authorities would also need to consider how they advertise the availability of flexible provision to parents. There would appear to be considerable variation in the systems and ability of local authorities in informing parents of early years Foundation Phase provision. Offering flexible provision would only exacerbate these differences.

7.51 Schools' approaches and abilities to communicate information to parents also varies greatly. The evaluation found that this unevenness in communicating the availability of the Flexibility Pilots may partly account for uneven levels of uptake.

7.52 Certain forms of flexibility have the potential to increase the workload of some staff. In situations where Nursery children were integrated

into Reception classes, some staff stated this had increased their workload. Other forms of flexibility that could potentially increase workloads were *two-and-a-half-days provision* (and the patchwork register effect), *unsociable hours provision* and *shared provision*.

## Impact on Parents

7.53 Most parents participating in flexible provision were very satisfied with what they were being offered. They generally stated that the Pilots had had a positive impact on their work/life balance and had often helped their childcare arrangements. 76% of parents in our e-survey stated that the flexibility had helped their childcare and working arrangements (see Appendix B, Q. 5).

7.54 Parents generally stated that the Flexibility Pilots had also benefited their child's 'school readiness', with 89% of parents in the e-survey stating that the flexible provision had helped their child (see Appendix B. Q.7).

7.55 Overall in our e-survey, 93% of parents felt that the flexible provision had been helpful (see Appendix B, Q. 6).

7.56 As discussed throughout the report, we found that both working and non-working parents appeared to benefit from the flexible provision.

7.57 A constraint on the Flexibility Pilots was the uncertainty amongst parents about the sustainability and long-term availability of flexible provision. Many parents may well have not engaged with something they thought was only temporary, preferring instead to stick to their routine.

7.58 Low levels of participation in other forms (e.g. *shared provision* and *unsociable hours provision*) simply reflect the small amount of



parents in the flexible pilot areas whose circumstances demanded this form of flexibility in the first place.

## Impact on Children

7.59 A central issue when evaluating the impact of the various forms of flexibility is to consider the impact they have on children. Like their parents, children have complex needs and their development (social and educational) are contingent upon numerous factors. As our discussions with practitioners made clear, different forms of flexibility may impact on different groups of children in different ways.

7.60 Forms of full-day provision (e.g. with *wrap-around care* or *two-and-a-half-days provision* or *unsociable hours provision*) were a common response to the inconvenience of the 'traditional' format. Many parents, the research team spoke to, expressed their desire for some form of full-day provision for their children.

7.61 Yet it is vital to consider whether any form of full-day provision, particularly full-day *educational* provision, is appropriate for young children in the first place. During the research we encountered conflicting arguments regarding *wrap-around-care* and *two-and-a-half days (Foundation Phase) provision* full day education from some practitioners.

7.62 For example, one senior teacher in a school in a deprived area stated that children with chaotic family backgrounds benefited from extra contact time because it was assumed they would not get appropriate levels of education, support and socialisation in the home. The same practitioner also spoke of the importance of *routine* and felt that any forms of flexibility (e.g. *shared provision*) that disrupted this routine would not be appropriate for children from these particular backgrounds.

- 7.63 But other practitioners claimed that young children cannot cope with spending a full day in education and/or care, and that such long periods in settings are detrimental to children. They argued that children should spend *more* time with their families at pre-school age, not less.
- 7.64 The majority of parents claimed that extra contact had benefited their child, aiding their 'school readiness'. However, there is perhaps an issue here about precisely what is meant by 'school readiness'. Parents largely understood this to be about general confidence and sociability rather than cognitive and educational progress in the child.
- 7.65 Another issue with parents perceptions is that general 'school readiness' improves with age – so the extent to which participating in flexible provision *adds value* to how a child's general school readiness would have improved anyway, is less clear.
- 7.66 Despite this, from our limited snap-shot classroom observations the evaluation found no negative impact on participating children in terms of their involvement in learning or their objective wellbeing (see Appendix C).
- 7.67 Of course early child development is a very complex phenomenon and a full consideration of the impact of flexible provision on this is beyond the scope of this evaluation. But policy makers should nonetheless consider other more robust evidence when assessing demands for flexibility that entail forms of full-day provision.
- 7.68 One potential solution to managing this issue would be to offer a staggered or gradual intake, whereby children build up to doing a full-day in their final term, rather than going straight into full-day provision from the start of their pre-school education. A key strength of some of

the settings/schools where full-day education or wrap-around care had been implemented was their sensitivity to this issue – children were allowed to gradually increase their contact or come off if they were struggling. This flexibility and understanding should underpin all future initiatives.

- 7.69 This issue is further exacerbated by other important differences amongst the children – such as family background and season of birth. Again, any future flexible provision should be sensitive to these varying needs and contexts.
- 7.70 Many practitioners stressed the importance of *routine* in children’s educational and social development. However, by definition most forms of flexible provision tend to disrupt the notion of routines. Again, this should be considered when designing and implementing forms of flexibility: is the proposed form of flexibility potentially disruptive to children’s educational routine? Does it improve it? Or does it have no impact?
- 7.71 Unsurprisingly, the *family link worker* initiative was viewed as the most effective intervention in terms of improving ‘school readiness’ and supporting at-risk children. However, this approach was the most resource intensive, and even with the employment of additional staff to undertake this role the extent to which they can spend the necessary time with children and their parents is somewhat limited, particularly in more rural areas.
- 7.72 Nevertheless, family link workers provide a very useful connection between families and schools and settings. There was also some evidence that this approach increased participation in the Foundation Phase at Nursery-age (although it should be noted that this may reflect rates of relatively low participation in these areas previously).



## 8 Further Issues

8.1 Throughout the evaluation, some other issues emerged relating to early years education and parental needs more generally. These matters tend to extend beyond the scope of the evaluation's focus on flexible provision, but nonetheless appear to be important contextual issues that may warrant further consideration by policy makers in Wales.

### Low Uptake of Entitlement and Flexible Provision

8.2 One of the aims of the Flexibility Pilots was to improve uptake of the free Foundation Phase early education entitlement for three to four year olds – to get children who were previously 'out of the system' into early years education so they might benefit from the Foundation Phase curriculum.

8.3 Measuring the success of this in this evaluation has been difficult for a number of reasons, not least the timescale of the Pilots. But more importantly, nearly all the parents who were interviewed as participants in the Flexibility Pilots appeared to have either already been 'in the system' or would have accessed their free entitlement irrespective of whether there was any flexible provision.

8.4 Nonetheless, two of the 126 parents interviewed or surveyed did say that without the increased flexibility of provision they would have kept their child outside Nursery until they reached statutory age; directly crediting the Flexibility Pilots with them entering their child into education:

“If it was not flexible my child would be unable to access the nursery due to my work commitments”. (Parent)

- 8.5 Although a relatively low number and proportion of parents who said this, this does tend to reflect the overall small minority of parents who appear to not use their free entitlement.
- 8.6 But perhaps perversely, it was the *family link worker* initiative that appeared to offer the potentially greatest impact on uptake – an initiative that had very little to do with offering flexible Foundation Phase provision. Whilst engaging in interventions to engage school readiness, the link workers also addressed the issue of low uptake of entitled places through the systematic education of parents about their entitlement.
- 8.7 Whilst this may reflect the particular contexts and locality that this initiative was being employed in it does highlight the importance of more targeted and nuanced support and provision that many parents who may not take their free entitlement probably need. In other words, the family link workers actually represented the best method of reaching those parents who were ‘out of the system’.
- 8.8 Other local authorities were all searching for a way of reaching parents ‘out of the system’ and irrespective of what form of flexible provision they offered if they could not identify and communicate such potential parents then it is unlikely that their form of flexible provision was likely to make any serious inroads into the minority of parents who do not use their free Foundation Phase entitlement. This may be particularly the case in areas that rely on the funded non-maintained sector to offer Nursery-age provision.
- 8.9 Given the differing perceptions of the demand for flexibility observed throughout the evaluation, there is an obvious need to clarify the reasons behind perceived low uptake of pre-school education in the first place. For example, are these supply-side issues, as the Pilot scheme largely assumed. This could include a lack of flexibility from

Foundation Phase providers, or a lack of alternative childcare to complement Foundation Phase provision

- 8.10 Or is non-uptake largely a demand-side issue. This could include a lack of awareness amongst parents about their free entitlement or a lack of knowledge about the benefits of early years education. But it could also include explicit and possibly rational decisions about not participating in the Foundation Phase until compulsory school age.
- 8.11 A further set of explanations could be more structural factors. This could include the lack of flexibility amongst employers allowing parents to access their free entitlement or the structure of the labour market in particular localities that is more dependent, for example, on shift working or multiple jobs.
- 8.12 In all likelihood, the factors that contribute to a parent not accessing pre-school education will depend on the specific circumstances of each parent and their locality. More extensive research with the small amount of parents who choose not to enter their children into pre-school education may still be required in order to help strengthen our understanding of this issue.
- 8.13 Nonetheless, a 'national' solution or policy may not be the most appropriate way of increasing participation in the Foundation Phase for three to four year olds. Even offering a full-time free entitlement may not be a straightforward solution. Some practitioners and parents will be wary about allowing their three-year old to attend full-time Foundation Phase provision.

### **Care or Education**

- 8.14 Some practitioners expressed concerns regarding parental perceptions of pre-school Foundation Phase. Specifically, they felt

that many parents view it as a form of childcare. Furthermore, some practitioners were concerned that ‘flexibility’ should not lead to a decline in the quality of Foundation Phase provision, that teachers should not be used as child minders, and that schools should not become crèches.

8.15 The research with parents revealed a more complex picture regarding their perceptions of the distinction between childcare and pre-school Foundation Phase. Many parents said they would like their child to be able to access full-day provision as soon as they turned three, but it was often unclear whether this demand was based on their own need for childcare or a belief that extra contact would aid their child’s ‘school readiness’ and education.

8.16 As the evaluation has shown, many parents believed that the Flexibility Pilots, particularly those forms that led to extra contact hours, had benefited their child’s education and socialisation. That is, they clearly did not view the pilot as being solely about helping them as parents, and were clearly aware of the benefits of the Foundation Phase (i.e. as educational provision rather than childcare provision).

“We are working parents who believe pre-school provision is of extreme importance to future learning”. (Parent)

8.17 Importantly, some parents drew a clear distinction between care and ‘school’, in particular favouring the aspects of socialisation that came with the ‘school setting’.

“I felt better knowing my daughter was ‘in school’ rather than her being at a nursery/child minders. She was learning and having fun. When children get to a certain age there is only so much stimulation you can give them at home and school is the best opportunity for learning and mixing with friends at an early



age that they will have throughout their school lives-I cannot speak highly enough of this provision". (Parent)

"We wanted him to be around a group of kids instead of having a nanny or a child minder". (Parent)

8.18 Only a few parents specifically mentioned the Foundation Phase, highlighting a further level of knowledge and understanding that parents of young children are expected to have.

"My daughter really enjoyed the Foundation Phase and I found the scheme really flexible for working parents." (Parent)

"My child is accessing more Foundation Phase than before." (Parent)

"My son is accessing more Foundation Phase provision...I think it's running perfectly. Staff and support are really good and very flexible." (Parent)

8.19 Whilst some parents drew a clear distinction between childcare and the Foundation Phase, it is worth considering the similarity of the views of parents in one setting in Carmarthenshire (with on-site *wrap-around provision*) and in another setting in Neath Port Talbot (with full-day or *two-and-a-half day* (Foundation Phase) *provision*). Although these two settings offered very different forms of provision, both sets of parents spoke in very similar terms about improved 'school readiness' (e.g. confidence, greater independence, sociability). This suggests there is a perception that young children may derive similar educational and social benefits from 'extra contact', regardless of whether this is 'care' or 'education'.

- 8.20 This picture is further complicated by the fact that many 'private' non-maintained childcare providers quite likely implement elements of the Foundation Phase in their provision.
- 8.21 The distinction between childcare and Foundation Phase education needs to be given further consideration, particularly in terms of encouraging more parents to utilise their free Foundation Phase entitlement. Furthermore, there should be some consideration given to the balance between childcare and Foundation Phase provision, noting that the Foundation Phase is designed to already include a balance between 'play' and directed learning.
- 8.22 It would also be beneficial to consider this relationship between childcare, education and the Foundation Phase in the context of the Flying Start programme, to ensure that parents are both aware of and familiar with the distinction between them and that there is continuous provision between early quality childcare and the Foundation Phase.

### **Access to the Labour Market**

- 8.23 Almost none of the 126 parents interviewed or surveyed said that the flexible provision has enabled them to access the labour market, perhaps constrained by the timescale of the Pilot and by the uncertainty of its future availability.
- 8.24 However, some non-working parents did say that the 'traditional' format of provision (i.e. mornings *or* afternoons), with the constant traveling back and forth to school, did make it difficult to find a job.
- 8.25 Other parents suggested that some form of full-day provision meant that returning to work was more feasible for them using the flexible provision than with the 'traditional' provision.

“Full day was much more convenient because I’ve got a one year old as well, and I used to be back and forth...if we went back to full days I could do two days work instead of night shifts...” (Non-working parent)

8.26 One parent also said that without flexible provision they would have been unable to continue in work.

“When I was working the flexible nursery was a massive help to us because it enabled me to work...otherwise I would’ve had to have given up there and then because I couldn’t afford the childcare for the pick-up and the drop off,...it would’ve worked out as a lot more expensive...” (Parent)

8.27 Only one parent, who was working part-time, said that the flexible provision has enabled them to return to full-time work.

“As a part time worker having the option of putting all the hours together along with wrap around care (i.e., outside of school hours) allowed me to return to work”. (Parent)

8.28 Other parents stated that the full day blocks of provision were helpful since they meant they could maintain their current hours or status in work instead of reducing them or leaving work:

“I have been able to maintain my working hours as a manager as well as reducing my child’s days in a private nursery.... The full days have improved my child’s concentration. If it was to stop it would mean reducing my working hours and increase the time in a private nursery”. (Working parent)

“More time in school: my child loves it and because partner works shifts it’s better for him since he now has more sleep”. (Parent)

8.29 Furthermore, some self-employed parents said that increased flexibility allowed them to be more productive or carry out more work than previously.

8.30 Thus whilst the 'traditional' format of provision may not entirely restrict access to the labour market, some of the forms of flexible provision do provide a more favourable climate for accessing the labour market. Of course it should be noted, however, there are other, far more significant, factors than pre-school provision that restrict access to the labour market.

### **Communication and Information for Parents**

8.31 The evaluation found that different local authorities, and even different settings/schools within each local authority, adopted different strategies for informing parents about the Flexible Pilot. It was also evident that some strategies seemed to be more effective than others. But it also became clear throughout the evaluation that parents found out about the standard free Foundation Phase entitlement (i.e., the free ten hours) in very different ways too.

8.32 Some parents said they found this out from the settings/schools, others from other parents or health visitors. But what did appear evident was the lack of any systematic way of informing parents about their entitlement. This would appear to be even more critical if the nature of that entitlement were to change and be more flexible (i.e. and with more options).

8.33 Such information would include a wide range of topics, not just their Foundation Phase entitlement, and whether that is provided in maintained schools or in the funded non-maintained settings. It would also need to include information about accessing other forms of wrap-around childcare, information about how the Foundation Phase differs

from standard childcare, and what the benefits are of early years education.

8.34 There are numerous strategies which could be used to communicate this vital information to parents: a dedicated centralised website irrespective of where in Wales parents live; television, print and radio advertising campaigns; the use of social media; employing family link workers, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

8.35 What was clear, however, was that many parents, almost irrespective of their background, would like some form of tailored, professional and expert assistance in making appropriate decisions about their pre-school options for their children.

8.36 A further advantage of this kind of support, such as that provided by the family link workers in Denbighshire, is that it could also help establish positive working relationships and lines of communication between parents, pre-school nursery staff (particularly in the non-maintained sector) and Foundation Phase Reception year practitioners. This would help Reception year practitioners identify at an early stage which children were more 'at-risk' and what levels/forms of educational support their children would need before they enter Reception.

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## Appendix A. Baseline Information Collected From Pilot Local Authorities by the Welsh Government

	NEWPORT	CARMARTHENSHIRE	NEATH PORT TALBOT	DENBIGHSHIRE
How many 3 and 4 year olds reside within your authority?	3891 (estimate)	Further information to follow of exact figures across Carmarthenshire Local Authority	1542 (Registrar Generals Mid Year Estimate 2012 age 2 residents), 4 Year olds – 1510 (Registrar General's Mid Year Estimate 2012 age 3 residents)	The Office for National Statistics mid year population estimate for 2012 is the latest data that we have. This gave 2,167 people aged 3 or 4 out of a total population of 94,044 for the County.
What is your current early years offer?				
Hours per week	12.5 hours per week	Maintained settings provide both part time and full time educational provision for 5 days a week over 39 weeks.	2.5 hours daily	10 hours per week
Days per week	Non-maintained settings (Private Day Care Nurseries / Playgroups) - Minimum 3 sessions up to maximum 5 sessions per week over 5 days; Maintained (LA) settings - Minimum 5 sessions per week over 5 days.	Non-maintained settings provide 10 hours free educational provision over a minimum of 4 days a week, over an agreed number of weeks, approx 36 weeks.	5 days per week	over 4 or 5 days
Weeks per year	39 weeks per year		during term time	39 weeks
<b>For each setting:</b>				
How many 3 and 4 year olds take up the current early years offer?	As at Sept 13 (therefore no rising 3s): Non-Maintained Settings (NMS) 389; Maintained Settings (LA) 1349; TOTAL 1738	In maintained settings approx 1863 3-4 year olds take up the current early years offer. In non-maintained settings on average between 380 and 450 children take up the current early years offer.	All provision is within schools, Nursery 1 pupils (3 yr olds) – 536 (Jan Plasc 2014 prov), Nursery 2 pupils (4 yr olds) – 1499 (Jan plasc 2014 prov)	In total for all the settings - 610 Spring term and Summer term children

	NEWPORT	CARMARTHENSHIRE	NEATH PORT TALBOT	DENBIGHSHIRE
What are the average attendance rates for the current offer?	84% - This figure is based on an average of attendance rates for the period Sept-Dec13 provided by a sample of Non Maintained Settings in Newport who responded to the request for information.	Attendance rates in maintained schools are good, exact figures will follow. In non-maintained settings on average approx 75% of 3 year olds who take up the current early years offer attend the full 10 hours of free early years provision. The 25% of 3 year olds who take up the current offer vary between accessing 6-10 hours of free early years provision.	The systems used in schools do not currently produce data for nursery pupil' attendance rates, so this is unknown at LA level	Attendance Data not currently collected by the Authority - Attendance policy is included - Non-attendance collected is collected by the Teachers who provide 10% support – Setting Leaders notify the Teachers of any children who have poor attendance and the ESW will become involved with the Families to encourage improved attendance.



	NEWPORT	CARMARTHENSHIRE	NEATH PORT TALBOT	DENBIGHSHIRE
How many unused places?	<p>Estimated 36% - Total numbers of EY places available per setting is fluid due to varying numbers of children taking up part time versus full time places, as well as the varying number of younger, non funded children (aged 2 ½ - 3 years) pre-school age who also take up pre-school places each term. Additionally, by the end of the academic year percentage of 'unused' places will fall as more three year olds take up remaining available places during the spring and summer term. Therefore it is difficult to provide static figures. A percentage has been provided based on information from settings for funded places accumulated from Autumn 13 &amp; Spring 14 terms.</p>	Information currently unavailable	Unknown	There are 973 places available in total in the funded pre-school provision. This gives 363 unused places available in the Authority.
How many unused sessions?	11% (252) per week based on information from 24 non maintained settings over the period Sept13-March 14	Information currently unavailable	Unknown	Data not collected currently - 3 playgroups in the Spring term did not have any 3 year old funded children, they do have children in the summer term.

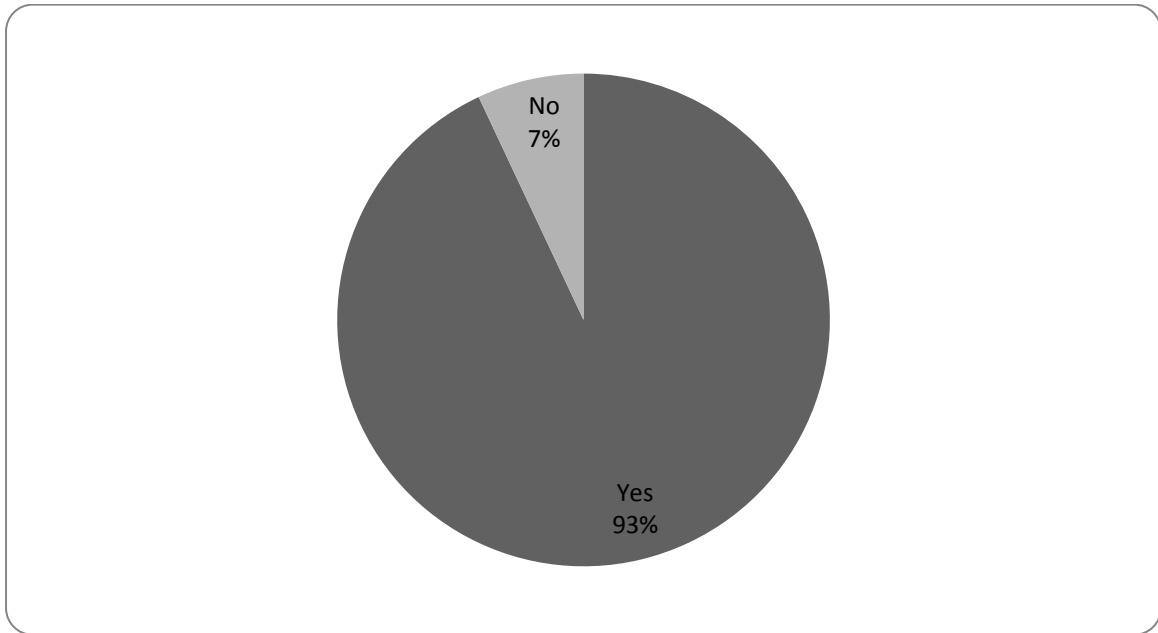
	NEWPORT	CARMARTHENSHIRE	NEATH PORT TALBOT	DENBIGHSHIRE
The cost for each place?	£6.83 (increase from £6.72 Sept)	In non-maintained settings we provide each child £30 a week (a rate of £3 for minimum of 10 hours per week) over an agreed number of weeks per term, similar to school weeks.	£3944 for 2013/14 (2014/15 figures will be available at the end of Feb)	£350
How are you meeting parental demand for places?	<p>Through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSA consultation.</li> <li>• Working closely with the Local Authority Admissions to ensure parents are aware of choice, availability and options should first choice not be accommodated.</li> <li>• Applications for non-maintained setting (NMS) places.</li> <li>• Number of Refusal letters from maintained – those families referred to FIS for NMS info</li> </ul>	If parents are unable to access a place in school, then there is an opportunity to access early years provision in a non-maintained setting.		Parents apply for the setting of choice and the Authority is able to meet that demand.
Do most children attend the full number of sessions offered? If not, why not?		Yes, most children attend the full number of session offered. One child doesn't attend on a regular basis, currently monitoring the situation.		There is no demand for children from parents not to attend the full offer of 10 hours.
How many unused places?		None		

	NEWPORT	CARMARTHENSHIRE	NEATH PORT TALBOT	DENBIGHSHIRE
How many unused sessions		None		
What additional costs have been incurred in delivering the new flexible offer?		Additional costs have incurred to address the requirements of CSSIW to register to deliver care provision. However, this financial implication has been sought from other departments.		The employment of 9 Family Link Workers at Grade 6. Full time term time only. £23,000 x £207,000  Supply for Schools to release an experienced Teacher - half day supply per week per term 39 weeks = £46,000 to support the funded non-maintained settings.
<b>General Issues:</b>				
How do you cater for children from disadvantaged communities? e.g. Flying Start, Communities first, other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitional data between settings on child development and family background</li> <li>• Support provided through Assisted places (funding for low income disadvantaged families)</li> <li>• Children with additional needs are offered 1:1 support</li> <li>• Cross border funding with neighbouring LA's</li> </ul>	Some settings in the pilot have established a Flying Start setting, so the aim is to provide early years provision in partnership with Flying Start.	2 of the 3 schools has Flying Start provision within its catchment area, 2 are Welsh medium schools	With regards to Flying Start the cap for the whole of the FS area for 13/14 was 774 but we had on average 789 children under 4 registered with an FS Health Visitor during 13/14.

	NEWPORT	CARMARTHENSHIRE	NEATH PORT TALBOT	DENBIGHSHIRE
If Flying Start provision is available in the area how many children access this provision?	FP Pilot will be Newport wide as catchment areas for NMS are not in place. Therefore the areas in Newport that Flying Start is operating in will be able to access/transition into FP provision.	This information will follow once all settings have participated in the pilot.		Of those children and with regards to child care provision 203 children were eligible for childcare (turned 2yrs of age or transferred into FS at 2yrs), in 13/14.  230 Children were made a full offer of childcare (12.5hrs per week) in 13/14 (figure slightly higher than those eligible due to difference in school term and WG report term periods). 195 Children took up a full offer (12.5hrs per week) and 2 took up a reduced offer (anything less than 10hrs per week) in 13/14.
How may families speak Welsh and what provision is made available for them.	Estimated 9157 of total population of Newport 4.2% primary aged children accessing Welsh medium School	Currently mapping Welsh provision across the Local Authority		27 of the eligible children requested a Welsh Language setting and all of those requests were met.

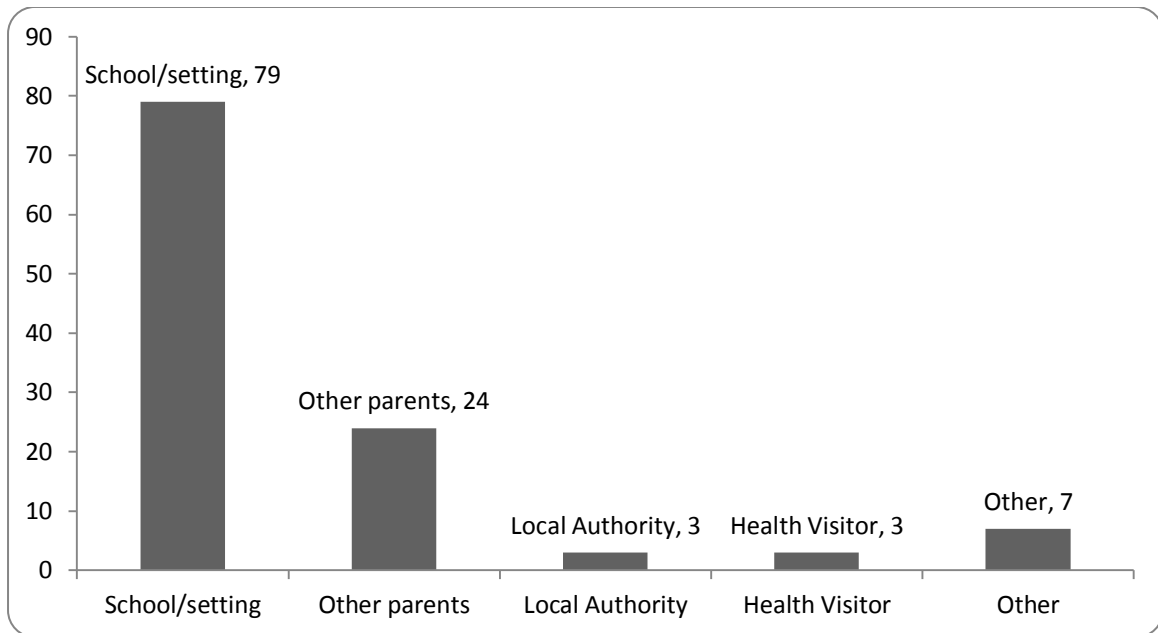
## Appendix B. Summary of Findings from e-Survey of Parents

### 1. Were you aware of the flexibility pilot offer at your child's school/setting?



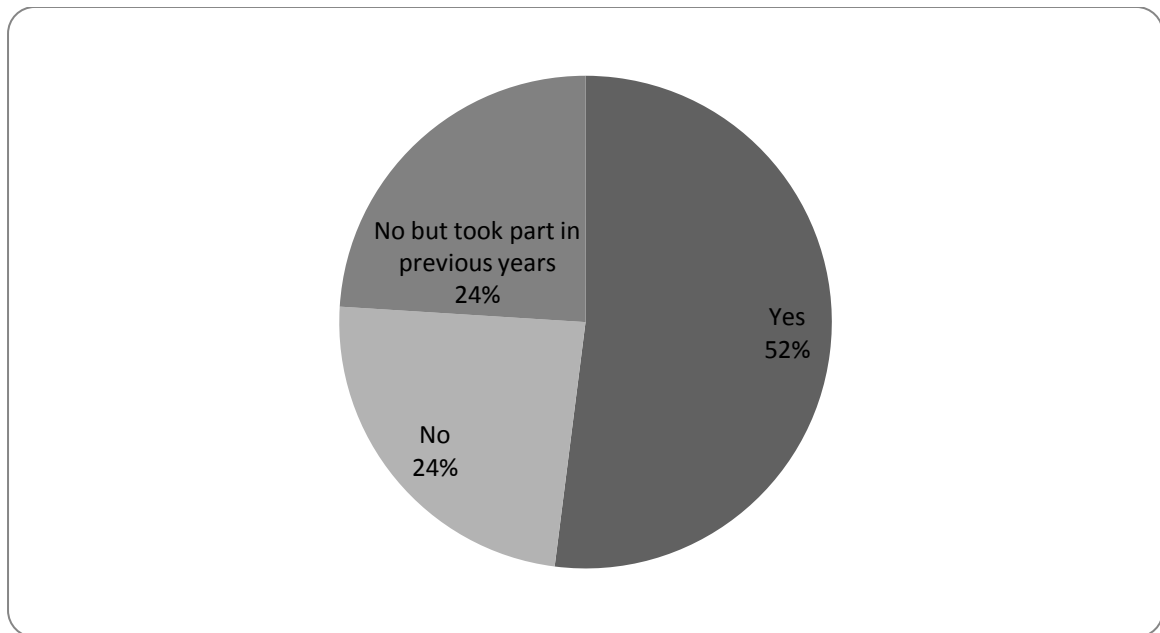
Value	Percent	Count
Yes	93 %	27
No	7%	2
Total		29

## 2. How were you made aware of the flexibility pilot offer?



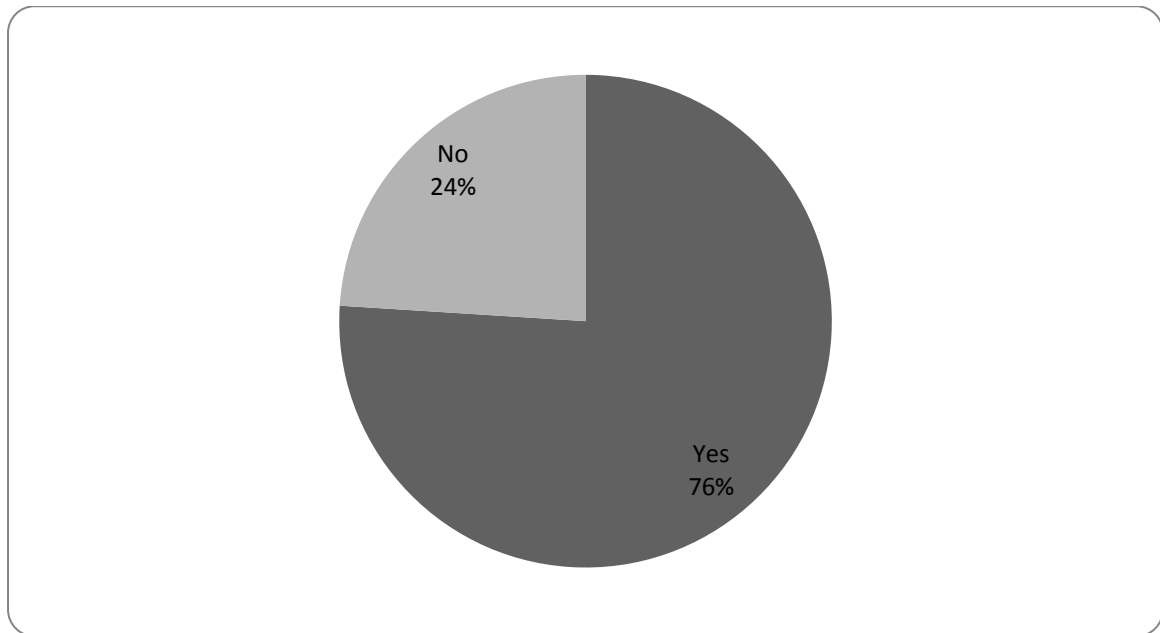
Value	Percent	Count
School/setting	79 %	23
Other parents	24 %	7
Local Authority	3 %	1
Health Visitor	3 %	1
Other	7 %	2
Total		29

### 3. Is your child taking part in the flexibility pilot at present?



Value	Percent	Count
Yes	52 %	15
No	24 %	7
No but took part in previous years	24 %	7
Total		29

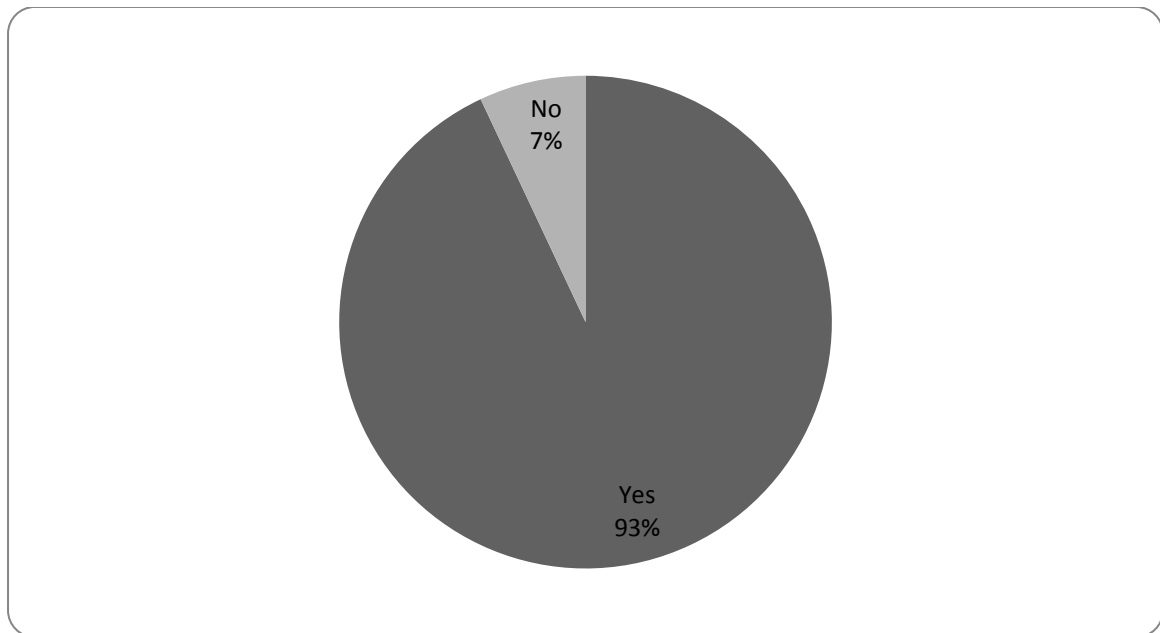
**5. Has the introduction of the Flexibility Pilot had any impact on your childcare or working arrangements?**



Value	Percent	Count
Yes	76 %	22
No	24 %	7
Total		29

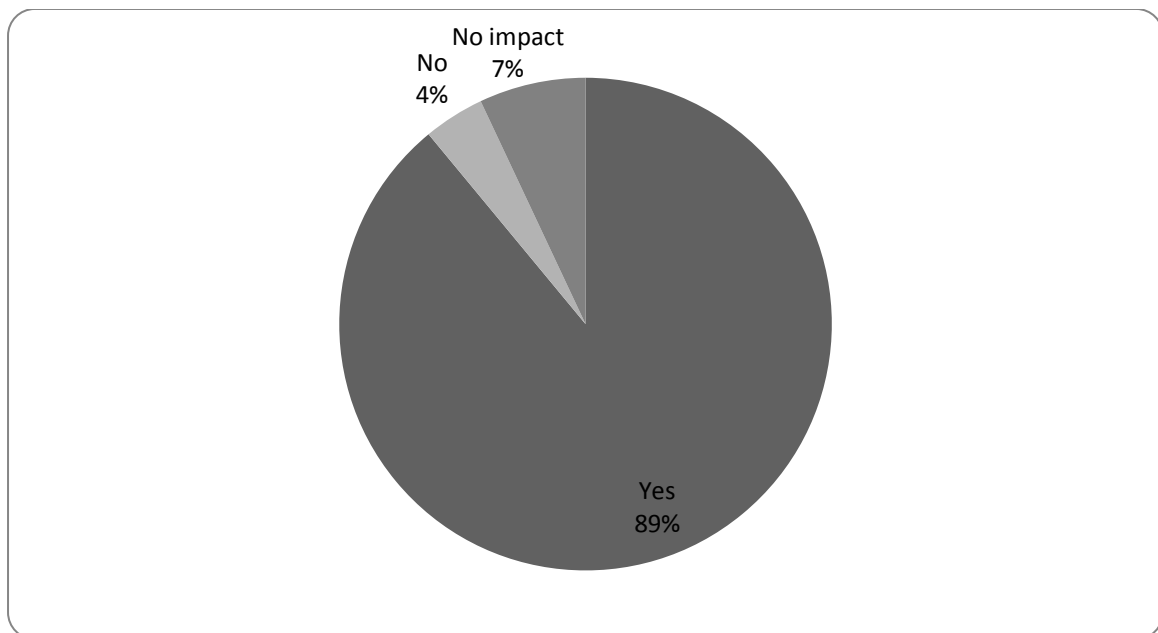


## 6. Has the flexibility pilot been helpful to you?



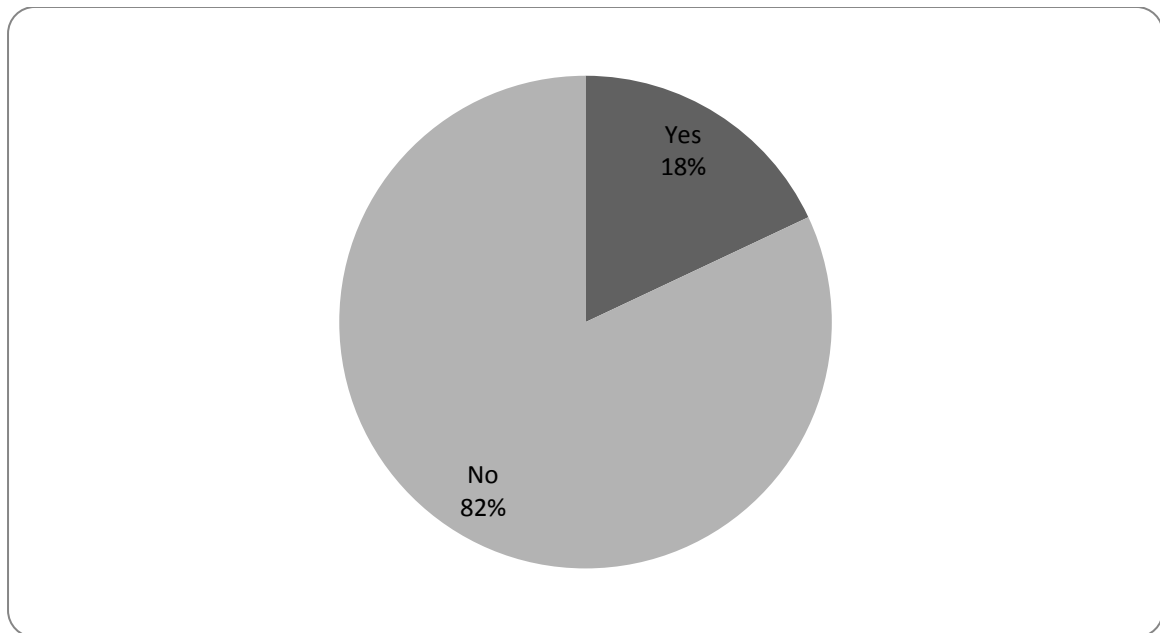
Value	Percent	Count
Yes	93 %	25
No	7 %	2
Total		27

### 7. Has the flexible offer been helpful to your child?



Value	Percent	Count
Yes	89 %	25
No	4 %	1
No impact	7 %	2
Total		28

**8. Would you like to see any changes to the flexibility pilot in future?**



<b>Value</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Yes	18 %	5
No	82 %	23
Total		28

**9. Different local authorities in Wales are currently experimenting with different types of flexible provision. Out of the following existing initiatives, which do you think would be the most useful to you and your child?**

	Not at all useful	Not particularly useful	Don't know	Quite useful	Very useful	Total responses
<b>Shared provision (child can take the ten hours in up to three different schools/settings)</b>	<b>45%</b> 13	<b>28%</b> 8	<b>1 %</b> 5	<b>7%</b> 2	<b>3%</b> 1	29
<b>Unsociable hours (schools/settings open earlier and stay open later to accommodate unusual shift patterns)</b>	<b>7%</b> 2	<b>11%</b> 3	<b>18%</b> 5	<b>29%</b> 8	<b>36%</b> 10	28
<b>50 week provision (schools/settings offer the Foundation Phase during the school holidays excluding Christmas)</b>	<b>11%</b> 3	<b>22%</b> 6	<b>11%</b> 3	<b>18%</b> 5	<b>37%</b> 10	27
<b>Full day provision (children can take the 10 hours in 'blocks' of mornings AND afternoons if needed)</b>	<b>0%</b> 0	<b>4%</b> 1	<b>7%</b> 2	<b>29%</b> 8	<b>61%</b> 17	28
<b>Wrap around care (schools/settings do not offer the Foundation Phase outside the ten hours but do offer childcare, i.e. child can stay all day)</b>	<b>7%</b> 2	<b>4%</b> 1	<b>11%</b> 3	<b>14%</b> 4	<b>64%</b> 18	28

## Appendix C. Average Child Wellbeing and Engagement by Setting

Setting	Local Authority	Maintained (M) or Non-maintained (NM)	Form of flexible provision	Children on roll	Uptake of flexible offer	Average Wellbeing (1 being lowest, 5 being highest)	Average Involvement (1 being lowest, 5 being highest)
NPNM01	Newport	NM	50 week	14	8	3.5 (AM), 4 (PM)	3.5 (AM), 4.4 (PM)
NPNM02	Newport	NM	Unsociable Hours	21	2 x 3-4 year olds, 2 x younger children	3.5	3.9
NPNM03	Newport	NM	Shared Provision	50	2	3.6(AM), 3.5 (PM)	4.2(AM), 4.5 (PM)
NPNM04	Newport	NM	Shared Provision	25	5	4	4
NPNM05	Newport	NM	Shared Provision, 50 week, Unsociable Hours	35	1 x 50 week; 1 x SP; 3 x UH	3.7	3.8
NPNM06	Newport	NM	Shared Provision	41	4	3.7 (AM), 3.6(PM)	3.9 (AM), 3.8 (PM)
NPTM07	Neath Port Talbot	M	Full Day provision	26	26	3.9 (AM), 3.9 (PM)	3.4 (AM), 3.9 (PM)
NPTM08	Neath Port Talbot	M	Full Day Provision	28	16	3.4(AM), 3.5(PM)	3.5 (AM), 3.4 (PM)
NPTM09	Neath Port Talbot	M	Full Day Provision	29	15	3.6 (AM), 3.7 (PM)	3.9 (AM), 4.2 (PM)
CM10	Carms	M	Wrap around care	25	17	4 (AM), 4 (PM)	3.5 (AM), 3.2 (PM)
CM11	Carms	M	Nursery provision on site	16	3	3.6	3.3
CNM12	Carms	NM	Entitlement provided in NM setting	NK	10	3.8	3.6

Setting	Local Authority	Maintained (M) or Non-maintained (NM)	Form of flexible provision	Children on roll	Uptake of flexible offer	Average Wellbeing (1 being lowest, 5 being highest)	Average Involvement (1 being lowest, 5 being highest)
CNM13	Carms	NM	Afternoon provision offered	14	0	3.6	3.1

## Appendix D: 'Menu' of Different Forms of Flexible Provision

### Shared Provision

#### What is it?

- This form of flexibility allows parents and children to access their ten hours entitlement across **multiple settings**.
- Children can access shared provision between different nursery settings throughout *all* counties within the educational consortia.
- Children may take their entitlement in up to three settings, although typically provision is divided between two settings.
- The children who participate in the shared provision overwhelmingly share provision between sessional Nurseries (i.e., those with mornings or afternoon provision only) and day Nurseries (i.e. with full-day wrap-around provision)
- Children would generally not share provision between two full-day settings.
- This form of flexibility may therefore bridge the maintained and non-maintained sector.

#### Demand

- The demand for this flexibility comes from parents who want their child to access a *local* nursery and receive the benefits of socialising with future school peers but who are unable to access this local setting because it lacks wrap around provision which is compatible with their working hours.
- On their working days, or on days where they cannot arrange childcare, parents typically have to take their children to a day Nursery that does have adequate wrap-around care.
- On days where they can arrange childcare or where the parent may be off work, they would prefer for their child to access the local Nursery rather than the day Nursery.

- Prior to the introduction of shared provision, parents could not access their ten hours free entitlement across multiple settings.
- Moreover, the existence of necessary parameters on provision (such as specifying that a child has to attend a Nursery for a minimum amount of days to gain a place) potentially meant that parents would be unable to put their children in their local nursery on the days when they were off work.
- These parameters potentially meant that parents would be likely to *keep their children out* of the private nursery on the days they were not working, thereby reducing the amount of time their child accesses the Foundation Phase curriculum.
- Finally, these parameters could potentially have meant that the child would not be able to experience their local Nursery and socialise with other children who they would eventually go to primary school with.
- This form of flexibility would typically benefit working parents, particularly those who commute to work, and working parents who lack informal local networks of childcare.
- The circumstances that necessitate shared provision means that demand may be more prevalent amongst working parents than workless parents, and demand and uptake may therefore fluctuate between different places.

### **Impact and advice for stakeholders**

Introducing this form of flexibility has multiple impacts.

- i. By allowing entitlement to be taken across multiple settings, parents can now access a financial benefit previously unavailable to them.
- ii. Allowing places to be taken across multiple settings means that parents should now always be able to get their children into the 'local Nursery' as well as the setting they utilise when they are working (and when they require longer wrap-around care).



- iii. This flexibility allows children to benefit from the continuity of socialising with their future primary school friends.
  - iv. The shared provision encourages parents to take their child to the local nursery on the days that they are not working (previously they may have kept the child at home) and therefore encourages greater uptake of the Foundation Phase since children will in theory attend more sessions across the week.
- Shared provision is cost free and requires no capital investment.
  - Shared provision has a number of potential complications that can be overcome through effective organisation and management:
    - i. There is a risk that the child accessing shared provision could either miss out or have their experiences duplicated at their two settings. Implementing shared provision effectively therefore depends on clear, organised lines of communication between settings, who need to be in regular contact over the progress of the shared children and their engagement with the Foundation Phase.
    - ii. Settings should also be alert to potential issues about how children manage two sets of friends and two sets of staff.
    - iii. Settings should also be alert to the impact of shared provision on staffing levels/ratios and capacity (as certain days of the week the setting will have more children than others and will therefore potentially require more staff).

## Unsociable hours

### What is it?

- This form of flexibility simply means that nurseries extend their wrap around care to open earlier and close later.
- This is designed to accommodate the working patterns of certain key workers (e.g., nurses, police officers) who previously would have been unable to access childcare because of the unsociable hours.
- Nurseries participating in the unsociable hours form of flexibility may open as early as 6am.
- The precise hours are not fixed (e.g. on a termly basis) but will be arranged on an ad hoc basis based on the needs of the parents, whose shifts fluctuate regularly.
- Whilst the children come in early, education does not start until the regular time of 9am.
- Some children may be in nursery from 6am until 6pm or later.

### Demand

- Because of the lack of access to wrap around care shift workers are perhaps more likely to rely upon private child minders or other informal forms of care and ultimately less likely to access pre-school education. That is, there is a danger that these children are more likely to be kept 'out of the system'.
- The unsociable hours format therefore has the potential to increase *uptake* of the 10 hours.

### Impact and advice for stakeholders

- The form of flexibility may benefit working parents, particularly shift workers, and their children.
- This form of flexibility may be more manageable in the non-maintained sector where settings routinely open earlier anyway.

- To be implemented effectively, managers should, however, be sensitive to the *potential* impact this form may have on staffing levels and rotas (e.g., staff will have to come in early but then also have to leave early).
- Settings may also require financial incentives to offer this form of flexibility as opening early for a limited number of children may cost more in staffing levels than the setting receives from the parents.
- Settings should be alert to the potential for this format to fatigue the participating children, and should be sensitive to this factor when teaching.

## 50 week provision

### What is it?

- Existing traditional parameters within Foundation Phase provision stipulate that the curriculum only be offered over a 39 week term (i.e., parents and children ordinarily access 5 sessions over 39 weeks). In other words, non- maintained sector nurseries *do not* implement the Foundation Phase curriculum during school holidays.
- Moreover, parents cannot claim a refund for their ten free hours for the holiday term provision.
- The '50 week' form of flexibility is therefore designed to extend or spread the *entitlement* of ten hours (5 sessions) a week to 50 weeks (i.e., over the school holidays), and also to implement the Foundation Phase curriculum during the school holidays, excluding Christmas.
- This form of flexibility is **only possible in the non-maintained sector**, as maintained settings close during school holidays.

### Demand

- Under the prior parameters, **part-time children** only attending nursery 3 days per week are unable to access the Foundation Phase during the school holidays, and would therefore ultimately access *less of the Foundation Phase curriculum overall than their peers* (parents who work part time e.g. 2-3 days per week usually keep their children at home on the days they are not working).
- Parents also lose out on their financial entitlement for the days their part-time child did not access nursery.
- 50 week provision is designed firstly to help **part time children** make up their 'shortfall' by allowing them to access the Foundation Phase curriculum during the school holidays, where they could not previously.
- It is designed with the needs of the (part-time) child in mind as it increases the amount of Foundation Phase curriculum the child accesses overall.

- It is also designed to assist parents with the costs of childcare during holiday provision, allowing them to access their free sessions during the holidays, where they could not previously (ensuring that childcare costs do not 'spike' for these parents during holidays, but remain consistent throughout the year).

### **Impact and advice for stakeholders**

- This form of flexibility will benefit parents financially.
- This form of flexibility may benefit those part-time children who previously only accessed the minimum provision (i.e. 3 days a week).
- The provision of the Foundation Phase during school holidays should ensure continuity of provision and prevent skill-fade in children.
- The challenge for practitioners is to ensure that children doing the 50 week provision (part time during the week) access the same curriculum as the 39 week children, who are full time (i.e., that they don't miss out on tasks and activities during the week, and if they do, to ensure that their holiday provision focuses on the tasks they may have missed out on).
- Best practice should be to track 50 week and 39 week children separately to accurately monitor their progress and the tasks they have completed.
- Completion of the focused tasks should be monitored, and if children miss a task they should be marked to complete it (e.g., during the next week).
- Children keep to this routine by accessing the Foundation Phase and these tasks during their holidays.
- Any gaps in 50 week children's attainment are focused on during the holiday period (i.e. during the additional 11 weeks).

## Full day provision

### What is it?

- This form of flexibility relaxes how the 10 hours of nursery education may be taken up across the week.
- Traditionally, children are only able to do morning or afternoon sessions (9AM-11.30AM or 1PM-3.30PM)
- Children in settings that offer full-day provision are now allowed to do a combination of morning *and* afternoon or *both*, i.e. to stay for the full day.
- So in a school's Nursery class 5 sessions (2 hours each equalling 10 hours total) can now be taken up by the parents in any combination (i.e. a mixture of morning *and* afternoons compared to 5 daily morning *or* afternoon sessions).

### Demand

- This form of flexibility mainly responds to the perceived 'inconvenience' of traditional mornings or afternoons only format.
- The goals of the pilot were to 'make life easier for working parents'; to help workless parents obtain work; to facilitate greater engagement with the educational system by deprived or marginalised parents and children.
- Local authority representatives stated that they felt the extra contact time within full-day provision could potentially help children from deprived families since they generally were in most need of school readiness

### Impact and advice for stakeholders

- This form of flexibility may help parents' work life balance.
- This form of flexibility may positively impact on children's school readiness through providing them with extra contact time.
- Conversely, staff must also be sensitive to the possibility of increased fatigue amongst students staying for a full day.

- It is best practice for settings to adopt a flexible approach to this form of flexibility, allowing children to 'come on' or 'come off' the full day sessions if they are not coping well.
- In practice, this form of flexibility means that many parents will access their ten hours provision in 'blocks' of two days plus one other half day (2.5 days).
- Within one class then, some children may stick to the 'traditional' mornings only routine, whilst others may access 1 or 2 full days.
- This may lead to a 'patchwork' register, as different children within the class accessed their entitlement in different ways.
- Staff must be sensitive to the potential issues raised by this 'patchwork register' and must plan accordingly.
- Under this form of flexibility, children within the same class may attend different sessions over the course of a week.
- It is therefore imperative that teaching staff ensure that each child accesses the Foundation Phase curriculum in the same way despite their different individual patterns of uptake.
- Staff must be sensitive to the potential for having to 'cram' focussed tasks into small periods of time for children, and how this may contradict the principles of the Foundation Phase.
- Examples of good practice here include using HLTAs to track students, ensuring that they are not missing or replicating tasks throughout the week.
- Managers must accordingly be sensitive to the potential for increased staff workload with this form of flexibility.

## **On-site wrap-around care**

### **What is it?**

- This form of flexibility provides an **on-site wrap- around care service** within the setting which children can access before and after their education session.
- Parents pay the school for the additional on-site care.

### **Demand**

- This form of flexibility is designed to help parents' work life balance; save them money on childcare; and to aid children's school readiness by increasing their contact time.

### **Impact and evidence for stakeholders**

- This form of flexibility may aid parents' daily routines and save them the cost of private childcare.
- This form of flexibility is unlikely to create extra work or pressure for staff, nor is it likely to impact on the implementation of the Foundation Phase.
- This form of flexibility may aid children's school readiness by getting them used to a 'full day' routine, even if this is provided as 'care' rather than the Foundation Phase curriculum.
- It is good practice to be flexible with the implementation of this form of flexibility, allowing children to 'come on' or 'come off' the full day provision depending on how they cope.
- It may be helpful to encourage a staggered approach whereby children gradually build up to full day provision.
- This form of flexibility is contingent on capacity and may also be costly. Settings must have appropriate space and finances to implement this form of flexibility.
- Similarly, settings need to decide who will provide on-site care (will it be provided by the school or by private providers) and to ensure that the on-site care provision is of a high standard.



## Family Link Workers

### What is it?

- Unlike other forms of flexibility, which generally focus on relaxing the parameters of current provision (usually by altering the setting opening hours), this form of flexibility is actually a family/community intervention, whereby family link workers are employed within local (mainly deprived) communities.
- The core role of family link workers could be described as *pastoral*, and family link workers generally seek to build links between the schools/settings and the local community.
- The family link worker role comprises two interlocking elements.
  - i. targeted work in the community; and
  - ii. targeted educational work in 'hub' schools where they are formally based.
- The family link workers work across clusters of schools with parents and pre-school aged children (from birth to reception age).
- Community interventions include mother and baby groups; 'top tips' drop in sessions where parents are informed of issues relating to school readiness; 'language and play' based toddler groups (specifically designed to aid 'summer birth' children who are often not yet eligible for funded places and would otherwise miss out on provision).
- During the course of this work, the family link workers educate parents about the benefits of pre-school education.
- Family link workers' school interventions are also important.
- They run multiple remedial coaching classes designed to aid 'school readiness' (for example, focusing on phonics, attention and listening, reading).
- They can also be tasked with improving attendance within schools and dealing with behavioural/pastoral issues raised by the school.

## **Demand**

- The goal of the family link workers initiative is to help raise educational standards and 'school readiness' across the local authority.
- It is not a form of flexible provision and hence the demand for this approach should be considered differently, and primarily based on the educational needs of children.
- Although they are tasked with improving educational attainment, the family link workers also aim to increase *uptake* of the Foundation Phase through increasing parental awareness of their entitlement and emphasising the educational benefits of early years education.

## **Impact and advice for stakeholders**

- The general aim of improving school readiness (through school and community interventions) may allow certain children to better engage with the curriculum.
- This work may in turn ease the burden on teachers.
- Family link workers may aid overall uptake of the ten-hour places through their engagement with hard to reach groups.
- Through community outreach, family link workers help target parents who are 'outside the system', and focus on getting their children into education.
- The workload of the family link worker may be very significant, and it is important to recruit experienced and capable people for these important roles.