

LITTLE PIECES. BIG PICTURE



Save the Children
Achub y Plant

**Harnessing Early Childhood Education and Care
to make sure no child in Wales is left behind.**

Every child has the right to a future. Save the Children works in the UK and around the world to give children a healthy start in life, and the chance to learn and be safe. We do whatever it takes to get children the things they need – every day and in times of crisis.

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Cover photo: Ava, three, plays with educational toys at a nursery in Ormskirk, Lancashire (Photo: Magda Rakita /Save the Children)

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Foreword

We all want children to have the best start in life, to be happy and have every opportunity to begin their learning journey positively. We understand that the early years of a child's life will shape their personality, skills and ability; but this report presents new evidence on just how vital these early years are. It demonstrates that too many children in Wales, particularly those children living in poverty, are falling behind in their early years and that, crucially, many never catch up.

It does not need to be this way.

This report makes the case for what more could be done to harness the role of Early Childhood Education and Care in addressing the impact of poverty on children's early learning. In Wales we have many parts of the jigsaw available to provide a great start in a child's life, but there are pieces missing or misplaced making it difficult for us to see the bigger picture.

We all have a role to play in solving the puzzle to provide a different future for all children in Wales. We at Save the Children are committed to playing our part in building the evidence to create the arguments for change and to start the conversations needed to make this happen.

Please read this report, share it with others and join us. Let us shape their future – together.

Louise Davies
Head of Save the Children, Wales



Executive summary

This report makes the case for what more we could do in Wales to harness the role of Early Childhood Education and Care in addressing the impact of poverty on children's early learning (or the 'early years' attainment gap). The first part of the report examines the link between poverty and children's early learning outcomes. Those are the early skills the brain uses to think, read, learn, remember, reason and pay attention – otherwise known as cognitive skills. The second part of the report examines the role that Early Childhood Education and Care can play in supporting young children to reach their early learning outcomes. We look at the evidence that supports that case; examine the current system in Wales and point to where further progress could be made. This summary outlines the key messages from our report.

Every child deserves a fair start in life. International evidence illustrates how the early years are a vital foundational stage in a child's life. We know how crucial early childhood is for a child's development and the role it plays in shaping the kind of people we grow up to be. It is the time when our personality forms and we learn how to relate to other people. Our experiences in early childhood can set the course of our whole life. What's more, the way our children grow up and become adults determines the kind of society we will live in, and the future prosperity for all of us.

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON CHILDREN'S EARLY LEARNING

Children living in poverty are more likely to struggle with vital areas of their development in the early years. Save the Children is concerned about the persistent and well-evidenced impact of growing up in poverty on children's early learning outcomes. We know this link starts well before children set foot in the classroom and remains throughout school. New research for Save the Children found that:

1. Children living in poverty in Wales are falling behind their peers in meeting key cognitive outcomes by the time they start school:

- By age five around a third of children living in poverty (30-35%) were already falling behind across a range of cognitive outcomes (i.e. vocabulary, problem solving, dexterity and coordination) compared with a fifth of those from better-off families (20-21%).

2. Being behind in the early years also means it's more likely children will be behind throughout their education. Our analysis also shows that

- Almost half of children who were in the lowest performing group at the beginning of primary school remain behind at ages 7, 11 and 14 on different measures of cognitive development.



Photo: Clare Hewitt / Save the Children

Our findings mirror existing evidence in Wales about the impact of poverty on young children's outcomes. Our research also examined the factors that might be driving the gap in outcomes between children living in poverty and their peers. We found that:

- **Socio-economic and structural factors drive the gap at every age.** At age 5 this accounts for around half the gap between children living in poverty and their peers.
- The home learning environment, child behaviour and development explained the other half of the gap at age five.
- **Prior ability is a key driver of the gap as children get older.** Nearly a third of the gap at age 7 and half the gap at age 14.

Once children fall behind, many never manage to catch up. When this is the reality for a significant proportion of our children, our whole society suffers. However, the analysis also points to the power of getting it right in the early years and how this can help children to get and stay ahead; children who were at the top in outcomes at the start of primary school were more likely to stay ahead throughout their education.

THE NEED TO ACT NOW

The need to address the early years 'attainment gap' has never been more urgent. The gap does not appear to be reducing and indeed might even be increasing. The latest figures from Welsh Government show that the gap in attainment between the poorest pupils and their peers at age 16 is widening. In the early years, the Welsh Government set a target to narrow the gap in attainment levels between children in poverty and their peers at age seven by the end of 2017. There is little evidence that sufficient progress was made. These trends, coupled with the numbers of young children experiencing poverty in Wales are cause for concern. Over a quarter (28% or 50,000) of children under five in Wales are living in income poverty.

WHAT MORE CAN WE DO - HARNESSING THE ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN WALES?

Despite the prevalence of the link between poverty and early learning outcomes in Wales, **no child's development during the crucial early years is pre-determined; every activity in early childhood is an opportunity for them to learn and develop.** With the right support every child in Wales can start school with the level of development they need to succeed.

One of the proven ways we can support children to meet key learning outcomes and overcome the impact of poverty is through high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Children need quality early education and care during this period to develop the foundations of their development and for future learning. It can play a key role in supporting children living in poverty by providing high quality early learning experiences and activities and through supporting families with employment and care, which in turn can support family incomes.

The Welsh Government's stated ambition is to provide "every child with the best possible start in life" and their most recent publication on childcare states "*recognising that childcare enables parents to work, supports economic growth, and helps tackle poverty and inequality; the Welsh Government has made flexible, affordable and high-quality childcare a priority for the next five years*" (Welsh Government, 2017c). However, as we outline in our new report, to achieve this all children must have access to high quality Early Childhood Education and Childcare. Currently, in Wales not all children are able to access or benefit from high quality provision.

- New analysis we have commissioned revealed that on average **44% of children living in income deprivation in Wales are not eligible for Flying Start** - the early years education programme for families living in disadvantaged areas of Wales. This means despite their clear need nearly half of all children living in poverty do not have access to this programme (LGDU-W, 2017). It is also important to note the strong variance that exists across Wales. Estimates vary by local authority and range from 25% in Merthyr to 60% in Ceredigion, where almost two thirds of children living in poverty do not have access to the programme specifically designed to support them.

Our concern is that the current state of play is resulting in a childcare system that is not fulfilling its potential to help prevent children in poverty falling behind early and remaining behind throughout their education and further into their lives. The consequences of children being unable to benefit from quality early education and care for children's development and learning can be devastating. We fear that for too many children in Wales, particularly those living in poverty, access to high quality provision is still too often left to chance. Often services are not available to all families in every area of Wales and how far they are reaching all children living in poverty is questionable.

Furthermore, some of the services aimed at targeting high quality provision are still failing to meet the needs of parents (both working and non-working) at a time when they are facing new and increasing pressures from changes to the economy and the welfare system. Finally, there is very little support for those parents, who in the early years are using informal childcare (via family or grandparents) or those not accessing formal early education services, to help them to support their child's early education.

Save the Children wants all young children in Wales to be able to access and benefit from high quality ECEC. Achieving this ambition rests on having an early year's policy that ensures access to provision of high quality education and care to all young children whilst continuing to support parents into work and addressing issues around women's employment. In addition, Welsh language provision in the early years and childcare sector needs development (Welsh Government, 2013a). Other

factors include child development, health, wellbeing, the role of welfare benefits and subsidies, and the role of informal childcare.

Each of these elements form part of what Save the Children see as the jigsaw of Early Childhood Education and Care. We believe each part needs to be positioned correctly for the big picture of a system that delivers for children living in poverty, to fall into place. Previous and current Welsh Governments have made clear their vision and commitment to the overall picture and have worked hard to lay out and try to fit together many of the pieces, including providing several free hours of ECEC for young children and introducing initiatives and support for groups of children e.g. Flying Start.

Welsh Government has shown a continued willingness to add new pieces where gaps are identified. However, as this report shows when we take a step back to look at the bigger picture there are still glaring gaps which are having very real impacts on the outcomes of children living in poverty. There are core pieces of the puzzle missing and others that seem to have been placed without keeping an eye on the whole picture, leaving the overall picture feeling fragmented and difficult for all involved to understand and benefit from. Ultimately, our concern is that the current state of play results in a childcare system that is not fulfilling its potential to order to help prevent children in poverty falling behind early and remaining behind throughout their education and further into their lives. Addressing these gaps and finishing the jigsaw in a way that best supports young children's early learning presents a huge challenge.

We have identified some immediate steps, representing pieces of what we see as the Early Childhood Education and Care jigsaw. At a minimum, these basic pieces need to be in place, before we can start to move to more complex and longer-term issues to solve the puzzle of how to make sure no child is left behind. We all have a role to play in solving the puzzle and making a difference for the future and all children in Wales.

SAVE THE CHILDREN'S RECOMMENDATIONS

We are calling on Welsh Government to:

1. Fill the gaps: Deliver a single, simple and coherent system for high quality early education and care

- Provide key updates on progress that have been committed to and deliver on recommendations for a 'Single Quality Framework' for ECEC in Wales.
- Establish sole Ministerial responsibility for all aspects of early childhood education and care (including Welsh language provision and ensure a focus on the role of ECEC in tackling the attainment gap.

2. No child left behind: Ensure equal access to high quality ECEC for all children in Wales with a specific focus on providing additional support to all children living in poverty:

- Guarantee a minimum of 15 hours a week of high-quality, free at the point of use ECEC for all children aged between two and four and living in poverty:
 - Extend the minimum eligibility for ECEC hours per week from 10 to 15 for three and four year olds in non-working households
 - Introduce a new entitlement of 15 hours per week of ECEC for all two year olds living in poverty

We are calling on all political parties to:

- Join our mission to complete the 'ECEC jigsaw' and support the calls above

We are calling on all stakeholders to:

- **Support parents, carers and grandparents to engage in their children's early learning** at home by working together to explore how ECEC settings and the new Prosperity for All Community Education Centres can support families

Introduction

This report makes the case for what more we could do in Wales to harness the role of early education and childcare in addressing the impact of poverty on children's early learning (or the 'early years' attainment gap). The report examines what we know about the link between poverty and learning outcomes in the early years in Wales. We draw on new research to highlight the extent to which low income children are falling behind at an early age and how this compares to their peers. We also look at the lasting impact of falling behind before children start school. We also draw on new research that highlights the factors that contribute to this gap. The second part of the report is focussed on examining the opportunity that exists in early childhood to support and prevent children falling behind, through improving early education and childcare. We examine the role that early childhood education and childcare can play in addressing the gap; and to what extent the system in Wales is supporting young children's learning. Finally, we point to what more could be done to meet this challenge.

Early learning covers a huge range of developmental milestones and outcomes for children. We have specifically focussed on core cognitive skills. That is the skills the brain uses to think, read, learn, remember, reason and pay attention. These skills involve the progressive building of learning crucial to processing and understanding information, such as attention, memory and thinking. Speech, language and communication, pre-literacy and pre-numeracy

skills are foundational to the development of other skills.

- **Speech, language and communication skills:** these cover a range of vital skills, including the ability to speak fluently, using pitch, tone and volume to convey meaning; the ability to use words to describe objects, actions and feelings, using words to create sentences, conversations and narratives; and the ability to understand what others are saying and respond to nonverbal cues.
- **Literacy and pre-literacy skills:** these include the ability to read and understand increasingly complex words, sentences and stories; fine motor skills that enable children to use a pen, and an understanding of how books work; and the ability to write increasingly complex words and sentences, including the correct use of spelling and grammar.
- **Numeracy and pre-numeracy skills:** these include in-depth understanding of numbers, counting, simple calculations, shapes, space and measurement; and the ability of young children to use these skills to describe and analyse the world around them.

THE ISSUE AND WHY WE'RE CONCERNED

We know how crucial a time early childhood is for a child's development and the role it plays in shaping the kind of people we grow up to be. It is the time when our personality forms and we learn how to relate to other people. Our experiences in early childhood can set the course of our whole life. What's more, the way our children grow up and become adults determines the kind of society we will live in, and the future prosperity for all of us.

International evidence, cited later in this report,

illustrates how the early years are a vital foundational stage in a child's life. But too many children in Wales, particularly the poorest, are already struggling by the time they start school. The gaps in children's development, that are present early on, between the most disadvantaged children and their peers persist right through school.

In Wales, almost one in three or 200,000 children are living in poverty. This is a figure that has remained stubbornly static for the last decade and is the highest rate of child poverty of any country in the UK. Analysis carried out in November 2017 by Save the Children has shown that 49,014 (28%) of children under 5 in Wales are considered to be living in income poverty (LGDU-W, 2017).

Children living in poverty are more likely to struggle with vital areas of their development, in the early years. However, until now there has been very little analysis that looks specifically at how these patterns play out in Wales.

This report aims to address this gap by presenting new ScotCen analysis (Hinchliffe, 2017) for Save the Children. Our analysis asks how much growing up in poverty in Wales impacts on children's attainment and future life chances compared to their better off peers. Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) data has been analysed in order to track the impact of poverty on children's attainment at ages 5, 7, 11 and 14. While this analysis provides a snapshot of how poverty impacts attainment, it also points to a stubborn trend that if left to chance could risk children in poverty falling and staying behind throughout their education.

Studying this cohort of children in Wales has shown too many fall behind by the time they start primary school. Our research shows that by age five around a third of children living in poverty (30-35%) were already falling behind, compared with a fifth of those from better-off families (20-21%). At the other end of the scale, between 11% and 17% of children from low-income households were getting the best scores, compared with 27% of those from households with higher incomes.

Being behind in the early years also means it's more likely children will be behind throughout their education. Our analysis also shows that almost half of children who were in the lowest performing group at the beginning of primary school remain behind at ages 7, 11 and 14 on different measures of cognitive development. While a significant

proportion of children were escaping from their poor starting position, too many are still left behind.

The analysis also points to the power of getting it right in the early years and how this can help children to get and stay ahead; children who were at the top in outcomes at the start of primary school were more likely to stay ahead throughout their education.

We fear that for too many children in Wales, particularly those living in poverty, access to high quality provision is still too often left to chance. Often services are not available to all families in every area of Wales and how far they are reaching all children living in poverty is questionable. Furthermore, some of the services aimed at targeting high quality provision are still failing to meet the needs of parents (both working and non-working) at a time when they are facing new and increasing pressures from changes to the economy and the welfare system. Finally, there is very little support for those parents, who in the early years are using informal childcare (via family or grandparents) or those not accessing formal early education services, to help them to support their child's early education.

Save the Children is on a mission to break the link between poverty and children's early learning outcomes in Wales once and for all. We are committed to helping to build the evidence, to create the arguments for change and to start the conversations needed to make this happen. To do this we **must** keep an eye on the bigger picture and to do all we can to help find the missing pieces of the ECEC puzzle to make sure no child falls behind in their development before they've even reached the classroom. We want every child to be ready for school, to thrive when they get there and have the big future they deserve. With this report, we aim to refocus attention on the fact each child has just one chance to have the best possible start in life, with so many children still falling behind, the need for change has never been more urgent.

1 Examining the long-term impact of the gap in the early years in Wales

A third of children living in poverty (30-35%) were already falling behind at age 5.

Almost half of children in poverty and who are behind at age 5, remain behind at age 7, 11 and 14 across key milestones.

Children from low-income households were more likely to remain in the bottom performing group, and children from higher-income households were more likely to retain their position at the top. (Hinchliffe, 2017)

RESEARCHING THE LINK BETWEEN POVERTY AND EARLY LEARNING MILESTONES

Evidence from across the UK and internationally shows a strong link between low income and cognitive outcomes in early childhood – such as speech, language and communication skills, early numeracy, early literacy and the disposition to learn (The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project – EPPSE: Fernald et al, 2013). In fact studies have shown that, controlling for other factors, the association between poverty and cognitive outcomes is stronger than for other outcomes, such as socio-emotional and health outcomes. (Hinchliffe, 2017)

By the time children start school, children from low-income families in the UK are already up to a year behind middle-income children in cognitive skills, while the gap between the poorest and most advantaged tenth of children is as much as 19 months. (Waldfoegel, J and Washbrook, E, 2011) And, early cognitive development has a lasting effect on later educational attainment. (Galindo-Rueda, F. and Vignoles, A., 2005), Further, evidence suggests that disparities in early cognitive development in the UK tend to be more profound than those seen in other outcomes. (Gregg, P., Propper, C. and Washbrook, E. 2008).

Further, evidence tells us that without support to overcome early disadvantage, the impact of income on outcomes remains and can increase. The relationship between income and cognitive development is present from infancy onwards. The gap in outcomes between the poorest children and their better-off peers is wide and persistent. Moreover, there is strong evidence that the transmission to future poverty mainly acts through educational achievement, which is particularly strong when poverty is experienced at a younger age (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Kiernan & Mensah, 2011). In the UK, studies have found that parental income in childhood is a stronger predictor of an individual's later life outcomes in the UK than in most other developed countries (Blanden, Gregg and Machin 2005).

We wanted to better understand this link in Wales. There is data on the gap at the end of school that shows an increase in the attainment gap between the poorest pupils and their peers. However, there is limited data on gaps in early learning in Wales. We wanted to strengthen the evidence on the gap and what's driving it to better understand how we can make progress in tackling the gap.



Photo: Clare Hewitt / Save the Children

METHODOLOGY

We have carried out a new analysis for children in Wales of the Millennium Cohort Study in order to obtain data for a snapshot of children to help us better understand the gap that exists and the impact of falling behind early. This research builds on our previous research in *Ready to Read: Closing the gap in early language skills* so that every child in Wales can read well. Our new analysis examines how poverty impacts on learning outcomes from age 5 to 14, and the factors which are driving these gaps in ability. Further detail on the analysis can be found in the technical reports (which are available on request).

The research comprised secondary analysis of data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) for families residing in Wales. MCS is a large-scale longitudinal research study, following the lives of children born in the year 2000 throughout their childhood. This set of analysis uses data from all six sweeps of data collection that are currently available, but concentrates on data from sweeps 3 to 6. In total 2,127 children in Wales took part in the assessments at sweep 3 which are used as the main outcome measures of the analysis at age five. Over time a number of the participating families dropped out of the study, leaving 1,493 children who completed the assessments at sweep 6 (age 14).

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings from the research are:

- 1 **Children from lower - income families were falling behind their peers on nearly all measures at every age.** At each age, the gap was largest for assessments relating to language development. The gap was smaller when the assessment was less related to academic ability, such as on the time taken to complete a task.
- 2 **A gap in early cognitive outcomes** (i.e. vocabulary, problem solving, dexterity and coordination) between children living in poverty and their peers **is evident at age five.**
 - Around a third of children from low-income households (30-35% on the three assessments) were in the lowest performing group, compared with a fifth of those from better-off families (20-21%).
 - Between 11% and 17% of children from low-income households were in the top quartile, compared with 27% of those from households with higher incomes.
 - Differences on language development tests were slightly bigger than for the other assessments used.

3 The gap persists at key stages throughout school (ages 7, 11 and 14).

- At age seven, more than double the proportion of children from low-income households were in the bottom quartile, compared with children from higher-income households (39% and 18% respectively).
- Children from low-income households performed considerably worse on language development measures at age eleven than children from higher-income households. Nearly half (46%) of children from low-income households were placed in the bottom quartile, compared with 24% of those from higher-income households
- By age 14 children from low-income houses were more likely to remain in the lowest performing group and children from higher-income households were more likely to retain their position at the top.

4 The size of the gap between children living in poverty and their peers remained consistent across all key measures. This suggests on the one hand no evidence of a widening of the gap as children get older, but on the other hand no signs of the gap reducing.

5 Children who start school behind (in the lowest performing group across a range of indicators) are just as likely to remain behind as they are to move ahead.

- **Nearly half of children who were in the lowest performing group at the beginning of primary school were also in the lowest performing group at ages 7, 11 and 14 on different measures of cognitive development.** Children who were in the top performing group at the start of primary school were also more likely to stay ahead.

1.2. CHILDREN BEING LEFT BEHIND

On the measures examined, as children get older, poor performance at age five remains a consistent predictor of poor performance at each age.

At age seven, nearly half (46%) of the children who were in the bottom quartile on the Naming Vocabulary assessment at age five were also in the bottom quartile on the Word Reading score at age seven.

Exactly the same picture is seen looking at the Number Skills assessment at age seven: 45% of those who were in the bottom quartile at age five on the Naming Vocabulary assessment were also at the bottom on the Number Skills assessment. While Naming Vocabulary and Number Skills are quite different concepts, this shows that there is no difference in opportunity for movement out of the bottom quartile when looking at language development or development relating to mathematical skills.

At age eleven a similar proportion (48%) remain in the bottom quartile when considering the Verbal Similarities assessment, and at age fourteen a similar proportion (42%) also remain in the bottom quartile on the Word Activity assessment.

Children from low-income households were more likely to remain in the lowest performing group, and children from higher-income households were more likely to retain their position at the top.

More than half (56%) of those from low-income households who were in the bottom quartile at age five on the Naming Vocabulary assessment were also in the bottom quartile at age seven on the Word Reading assessment. By comparison, 37% of those from higher-income households who were at the bottom at age five were still there at age seven.

The same was observed for the age eleven assessments, with 58% of children from low-income households in the bottom quartile at age five being in the bottom quartile at age eleven on the Verbal Similarities assessment and 41% in the bottom performing quartile at age eleven on the Spatial Working Memory total errors score. Comparable figures for children from higher-income households who had been behind at age five were 40% and 25% respectively.

At the best performing end of the scale, those from higher-income households who were in the top

quartile at the start of primary school were more likely than those from low-income households who were in the top quartile at the start of school to still be there at both the Word Reading and the Number Skills assessments at age seven, and the Word Activity assessment at age fourteen. Sample sizes at age eleven were too small to examine the difference.

Nearly half of children who were in the lowest performing group at the beginning of primary school were also in the bottom quartile at ages seven, eleven and fourteen on different measures of cognitive development. Children from low-income houses were more likely to remain in the lowest performing group, and children from higher-income households were more likely to retain their position at the top.

1.3 WHY THIS IS HAPPENING?

Save the Children also wanted to understand which drivers explain the educational achievement gap between children living in poverty and their peers at ages 5, 7, 11 and 14, to help identify ways to reduce the gap. The key findings are set out below.

KEY FINDINGS

1 A range of complex and interlinked factors are associated with the development of children's cognitive and language skills.

Key factors include socio-economic or structural factors, family background, the home learning environment, parenting styles or rules, a child's behaviour and development and prior cognitive ability.

2 At ages five and seven, structural or socioeconomic characteristics (e.g. family income, tenure, multiple deprivation and parental education) accounted for around half of the gap in cognitive and language development between children from low income and higher-income households.

3 The home learning environment, child behaviour and development explained the other half of the gap at age five.

4 At each age, socio-economic / structural factors are shown to negatively impact a child's life starting early and the impacts are still evident at age 14.

5 How well a child has done at younger ages (prior ability) has a significant impact on the gap in children's attainment in cognitive and language skills and becomes stronger as children get older.

At age seven, prior ability (scores on assessments from earlier ages) accounts for just under a fifth of the gap. By age 14, more than half of the total gap was explained by prior ability.

This suggests that it is likely to be easier to tackle the education achievement gap in early years rather than wait until the primary stage. The research points to areas of opportunity in the early years where progress could be made by influencing children's development, their learning at home and their prior ability.

As we can see therefore, the key factors affecting falling behind in a key milestone, language development, can be predicted and tracked across a child's development.

This evidence clearly indicates that ensuring that intervening early to ensure that no child is left behind is essential.

In the following sections we look at the evidence showing that ECEC provision can help to mitigate the negative impact of these core factors and help to redress the balance early in life so that children can benefit right throughout their education and into adulthood.

2 Early Years and the science behind children's development



Over the past 12 years, growing international evidence from the fields of neuroscience and developmental psychology has increased understanding that a child's brain circuitry and therefore future development, is driven by a mix of genes, environments, and experiences (Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, 2016). No child's development is pre-determined. The idea that genes are set in stone has been disproved. Scientists have discovered that the experiences children have early in life, and the environments in which they occur, not only shape how the building blocks of their brains develop, but also affect how genes are turned on and off and even whether some are expressed at all (Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, 2016).

Over the last decade a significant growth in knowledge about brain development in the early years of life, linked to advances in the behavioural and social sciences, offers more sophisticated insights into how early experiences are hardwired into our bodies, with lasting impacts on learning, behaviour, and both physical and mental health. An impressive expansion in scientific research has revealed the widespread and rapid changes that occur in early childhood, underlining that it is in these early years that the building blocks of the developing brain are most influenced by relationships and experiences.

This research shows us that in the first few years after birth, more than 1 million new synapses (connections between neurons) form every second (National Research Council (US) et. al, 2000). Increasingly, research draws on the analogy of building a house, indicating that certain elements of the developing brain must be built in a predictable sequence and what is built early must be strong enough to support the long- term structure.

Moreover, just as a lack of essential materials can require changes and adaptations to design blueprints, a lack of key experiences or key stressors can lead to alterations in neural architecture (Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, 2016). Building strong and functioning cognitive, social, and emotional skills on a weak foundation is far more difficult and less effective than getting things right from the beginning (Coch et al., 2007; National Research Council (US) et. al, 2000; Nelson & Bloom, 1997; Nelson, 2000).

We are increasingly understanding that significant disadvantages in the life circumstances of young children can throw their development off course, potentially reducing their future economic and social mobility, and ultimately jeopardise the functioning, productivity, prosperity and sustainability of our societies (Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, 2016).

In recent years there has been growing interest in Wales in building on research into the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on child development and outcomes (Fellitti et. al, 1998). The term Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is used to describe a wide range of traumatic events that children can be exposed to while growing up, these can include neglect and physical, verbal and sexual abuse along with harms that affect the environment in which the child lives such as exposure to domestic violence, family breakdown, and living in a home affected by substance abuse, mental illness or criminal behaviour. A Public Health Wales study (Bellis et al., 2015) of ACEs found almost half (47%) of adults in Wales have suffered at least one ACE. The study has shown that the more ACEs individuals experience in childhood, the greater their risk of a wide range of health harming behaviours and diseases as an adult. In recent years, childhood and early intervention policy in Wales has increasingly adopted an 'ACE-aware' lens and a series of policy innovations such as the Welsh Government's new Children's First initiative and funding for a new ACEs hub (Welsh Government, 2017a).

Looking at the impact of negative responses, research into the biology of stress shows how significant hardship or threat (e.g. from extreme poverty or child maltreatment) can result in physiological disruptions, which can have lifelong impacts on learning, behaviour, and physical and mental well-being. If a stress response is extreme

and long-lasting this is termed 'toxic' stress. It has been repeatedly shown that toxic stress responses can impair development, with lifelong consequences (National Scientific Council, 2014' Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007; Shonkoff et al., 2009). In short, again echoing the findings of the ACEs research (Bellis, 2017), whatever the source of the adversity, experiencing too much of it early in life without adequate support from adult caregivers (both inside and outside the home) is detrimental to child well-being.

Over half a century of programme evaluation research has demonstrated time and time again that effective early childhood services can be a significant mitigating factor. The right interventions at the right time can improve life outcomes for children facing adversity, produce important benefits for society, and generate positive returns on the investments and funding required for these interventions (Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, 2016).

Neuroscience is also showing that the later we wait to support families with children who are at greatest risk, the more difficult (and likely to be more costly) it will be to achieve positive outcomes, particularly for those who experience the biological disruptions of toxic stress during the earliest years (Lupien et al., 2009). At a time when much of the discourse and policy solutions to early childhood investments are dominated by debates over childcare or early education for 4-year olds, evidence from the biological sciences emphasises the urgent need to address a significant gap—new strategies in the prenatal-to-three period for families facing adversity (Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, 2016).

Appreciating what this knowledge is telling us should be used to inform innovative approaches to capture the promise of the early years, to understand the elements that can disrupt it and to design solutions to support children and families to overcome some of the most complex challenges faced by our communities.

WHAT DRIVES CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT?

There is no single factor that enhances children's outcomes and determines attainment. It is the combination of experiences over time that matters

– a good quality home learning environment (which includes enough money to meet children's living standards), a good quality pre-school and an effective primary school. A child who has all three of these experiences is more likely to show improved cognitive and social outcomes compared with children that have two, one or none of these experiences. (*Sylva, K., Melhuish, E.C., Sammons, P., Siraj, I. and Taggart, B. 2004*).

Supportive environments and experiences can make an important and positive impact on a child's development. Of course, this is what all parents and carers want to provide for their children. But struggling on a low income makes it so much harder to achieve.

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES

Struggling on a low income shapes the health, behaviour and attitudes of parents. It creates stress and anxiety, and often leaves parents feeling frustrated and depressed. This can affect their ability to create the conditions in which young children can learn, for example, making it harder to show consistently positive behaviour and to stay engaged with their children's learning. While what parents do has a greater impact on young children's development than family background, parents living in poverty are more likely to struggle to provide at least some aspects of a good quality home learning environment, particularly if they don't have the right support.

Experiencing poverty is also associated with a higher risk of mental ill health, and depression among mothers is linked to poorer cognitive development among young children. Poverty can also have an impact on parents' ability to manage stressful events, and to provide sensitive, responsive care-giving, and can make good family functioning more difficult. Young children respond to stress in the home, which inhibits their ability to learn and develop.

Struggling on a low income also limits parents' ability to invest in the goods, activities and experiences that further child development; even to provide the essentials for family routines such as sociable mealtimes or a bedtime story. Missing out on these experiences, and the guilt and anxiety that parents often face in not feeling able to provide them, compound the impact on children's wellbeing.

What this means is that during their formative early years, children experiencing poverty don't benefit from the enriching, supportive learning environments that they need to thrive. Growing up like this has a huge impact on their lives - surrounded by stress and anxiety, it's harder to play and explore, to spend quality time with their parents and siblings, to have fun and to learn. They miss out on the crucial foundations they'll need for the future.

2.1 THE ROLE OF HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

There is strong evidence that young children having access to high quality Early Childhood Education and Care is a key factor that can enhance children's outcomes in early learning. In fact, evidence suggests it can help overcome the disadvantages of poverty, if the quality is good enough. This section of the report examines the role that early childhood education and care can play in supporting children living in poverty in Wales to meet key early learning milestones. It starts by summarising the evidence on the role that ECEC can play. This is followed by an analysis of the current system of ECEC in Wales.

Increasingly, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is the accepted terminology used by international bodies such as the OECD and the European Union. The terminology has also recently been adopted in Wales policy documents and guidance (Graham, 2014). It is defined by the OECD as: *'as all educational and care arrangements for children from birth to compulsory schooling, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours, or programme content.'* As this wide definition indicates, ECEC can take many forms (European Commission, 2011).

There is a growing body of national and international evidence that shows that providing publicly supported high quality learning and development opportunities and care to young children can have a powerful, positive influence on children's early development and alleviate and prevent child poverty as well as mitigate its impacts (OECD, 2006). ECEC has been shown to have a particularly significant positive effect on early cognitive outcomes. The quality of pre-school provision is important. Evidence from the UK's, Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study has also shown that attending a high-quality

part-time early education setting over a number of years can have a lasting positive impact on children's learning and development (Sylva et al., 2004). Findings from EPPE have shown that:

- A child who attends a high-quality setting for one to two years starts school 1.6 months ahead of their peers who attended a low-quality setting and 4.8 months ahead of a child who attended no provision.
- A child who attends a high quality setting for two to three years starts school 3.2 months ahead of their peers who attended a low-quality session and 7.8 months ahead of a child who attended no provision.

The findings from EPPE also show that attending high quality provision in the early years has a lasting impact right through primary and secondary school and later life:

- Attending childcare between the ages of two and three is linked to better cognitive and socio-emotional development outcomes, with additional benefits for disadvantaged children (Melhuish et al., 2015).
- The benefits of childcare were found to be independent of the benefits of the home learning environment and the impact of disadvantage and other factors (Melhuish et al., 2015).
- Attending any type of childcare increases the probability of obtaining five or more GCSEs A*-C by 88.4%, with the effect higher for disadvantaged children.
- Attending a high-quality setting compared with a low-quality setting increases the likelihood of achieving five or more GCSEs A*-C by just under 20%.

Moreover, the long-term, societal impacts have also been studied by recent research, finding that:

- 1 A child who attends any childcare earns on extra £27,000 over their lifetime, and a child who attends a high-quality setting earns an additional £19,000 over their lifetime;
- 2 This represents a return to the exchequer of around £11,000 for attending any type of childcare and a return of £5,000 for a child who attends a high-quality setting (Cattan et al., 2014).

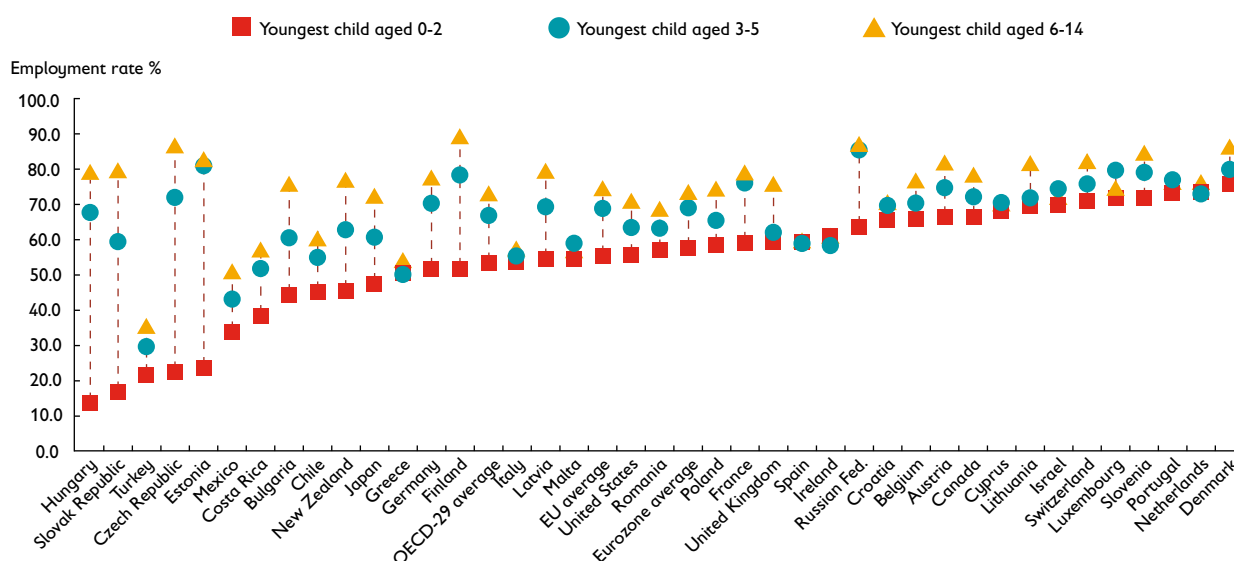


Photo: Kit Oates / Save the Children

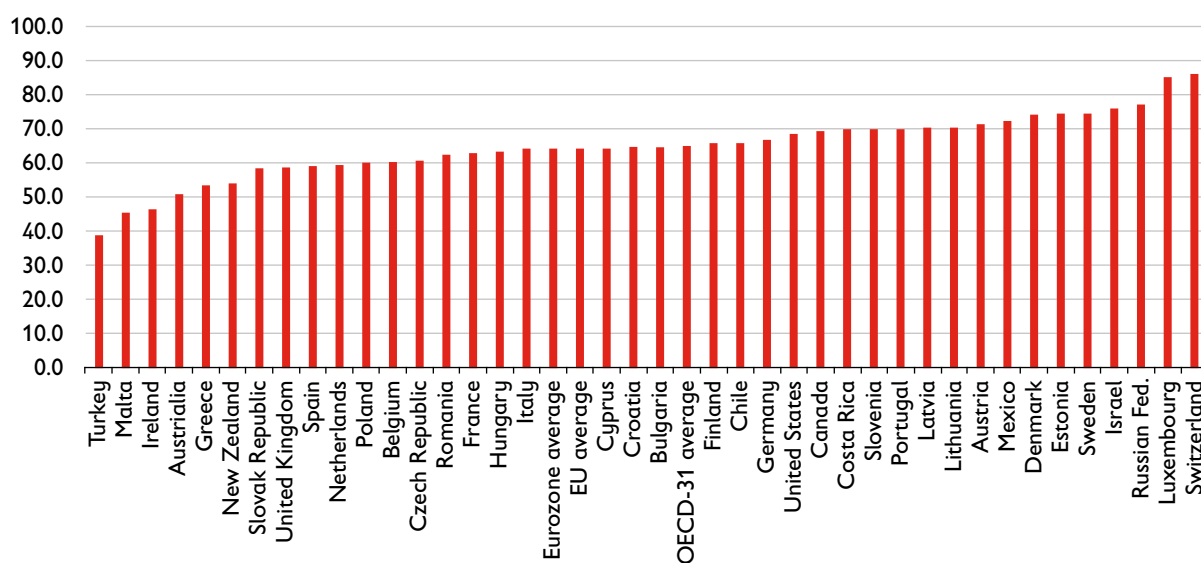
THE IMPORTANCE OF ECEC IN ENCOURAGING MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT

Alongside the direct impact that high quality ECEC can have on children's development, the evidence also shows it can have an indirect impact by supporting parents, particularly mothers to work. While some mothers choose to take time out from working while their children are young, the combined evidence shows that external factors also influence their decisions, such as the labour market, qualifications and childcare. Trends in data show there is often a significant gap in employment among mothers of the youngest children, and this is particularly marked among lone parents, those with low qualifications and with low household incomes, compared to other countries. Addressing this and enabling more mothers to work could have a significant impact on the number of children in poverty.

Despite relatively high female employment rates, the UK has comparatively low maternal employment rates, women with young children are less likely to work than women without children. In addition latest figures for Wales (Jul-Sept 2017), show one of the lowest rates of female employment in Great Britain at 52.1% with the number of women in employment falling 2.2% in the last year (ONS, 2017). OECD employment data from 2014 shows maternal employment rates in the UK including mothers with the youngest dependent children was considerably below top performers Denmark, and the Netherlands, ranking 17th among the OECD countries in 2014 (Figure 1). UK employment rates for mothers of children aged 3-5 rank significantly lower internationally, with the UK 13th from the bottom and below OECD averages.

Figure 1: Maternal employment rates by age of youngest child in OECD countries, 2014

Source: OECD Family Database 2014

Figure 2: Employment rates of single mothers with at least one child aged 0-14 in OECD countries, 2014

Source: OECD Family Database 2014

The UK also has extremely low rates of employment among lone mothers, (Figure. 2) ranking eighth from the bottom among the OECD countries in 2014, below the OECD average. The rates for partnered mothers are higher ranking slightly above average in 2014, but still relatively low compared with many other countries.

As we have seen, although women's economic participation has increased in most countries, many mothers of young children are the least likely section of the labour market population to work. In 2014, 2 in 5 women who were not participating in the labour market gave "looking after the family/home" as their reason (ONS, 2015).

International evidence shows that family policies that subsidise childcare and increase its availability have various effects on female labour supply across different countries (Vuri, 2016). However, this research underlines that effectiveness will depend on a holistic understanding of country specific pre-reform levels of female employment and earnings, and childcare availability, costs, and quality. Save the Children commissioned research from NatCen (2017) which identified a gap in research evidence when it comes to determining the ability of existing childcare markets to provide for the potential future demands for childcare when new offers are introduced. Our report highlighted that a lack of analysis at a nation level limits our ability to compare take-up of childcare and patterns of childcare use across the four nations of the UK. Detailed analysis of latest Labour Force Survey figures looking at patterns of maternal employment rates and factors that affect it has not been recently conducted for Wales.

Save the Children believes that in light of proposed changes including the 30 hours offer being piloted in certain areas of Wales, a clearer picture is vital. Although there was some modelling of the different options for an extended offer of 20 hours free childcare for 3-4 year olds, carried out in Wales before the introduction of the new 30 hours offer pilots (Paull & Xu, 2015), we believe an up-to-date, detailed analysis of the characteristics of female and maternal participation looking at issues of income, qualifications and labour market characteristics would be helpful. This should inform final decisions about eligibility for the 30 hours offer which currently only benefits working parents. A similar analysis of the 30-hour pilot for its impact on child poverty and closing the attainment gap should also be carried out. Save the Children will explore the options for conducting this analysis to inform the debate in Wales. As research emphasises, it is only if childcare policy interventions are rooted in a detailed understanding of country-specific needs that they will lead to a significant impact on maternal employment (Vuri, 2016).

The evidence presented in this section has shown that affordable and accessible ECEC services play a powerful role in supporting children's development and hold significant potential for mitigating or to help overcome adverse experiences in childhood. We've examined some of the factors that continue to shape parent's decisions about work and the sorts of provision they choose.

We've also seen the effects are of ECEC are strongest when the provision is high quality (Sylva, 2008) and starts as early as possible (Eisenhardt, 2014).

In defining good quality within pre-schools EPPE (Sylva et al., 2004) found that settings that were most successful in supporting children's development were integrated settings that employ staff with higher qualifications, deliver a balanced curriculum and have a social mix of children.

The study also identified that the quality of the home learning environment is more important for a child's development than parental background, summarising 'what parents do is more important than who parents are'.

Working with parents, communities and schools to ensure universal access to the right interventions and services could tackle disadvantage early and make sure all children thrive. ECEC can also be a vital support for families, helping to protect and even boost household incomes by supporting women into work. ECEC provision must take specific contexts into consideration, they must be readily available, affordable but most importantly high quality.

3 Early Childhood Education and Care: The state of play in Wales



Taking the international evidence into consideration, Wales has made a positive start. This section examines the extent to which ECEC in Wales is supporting children to meet early learning outcomes. It looks at the system as a whole and at certain elements of the system and highlights where gaps exist.

The Welsh Government's stated ambition set out in their ten year early years and childcare policy, Building a Brighter Future is to provide 'every child with the best possible start in life' (Welsh Government, 2013a). This is echoed in the recently published Prosperity for All: A National Strategy which states "we will provide the best start in life for all, with support from birth, through education, and beyond, making sure everyone has the chance to fulfil their natural potential." (Welsh Government, 2017b). These statements reflect a continued commitment since

the establishment of the National Assembly in 1999 to fore-fronting children's rights and the needs of families.

The Welsh Government has been clear in what it sees as the big picture for early education and childcare: "improving quality including leadership, the workforce, the environment and the experience of the child. Supporting transition from home to school. Improving the flexibility and accessibility of early education and childcare and, where possible, the affordability of childcare by working with and developing the childcare market so more parents, who want to, can access childcare to help them work and train", a vision forming one of five core priorities of the Welsh Government's 10 year Early Years Plan - Building a Brighter Future 2013-2023 (Government, 2013). Aiming to build their 'big picture' Welsh Government has identified key pieces of the puzzle and worked to put them in place over the last five years.

We acknowledge that Welsh Government has consistently promoted and extended interventions underpinned by international evidence on what makes the greatest difference for children and families in the early years. The introduction and extension of Flying Start and the implementation of the Foundation Phase are key examples. Most recently Welsh Government's announcement of new Children First pioneer pilot projects and the vision of developing 'ACE aware' public services which take a more preventative approach to address the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Bellis, et al, 2015). In the last few years Welsh Government has delivered the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2015 and the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2105. These innovations in law and policy in Wales are all aimed at keeping the needs of families and children high on the agenda at all levels of decision making.

The importance of childcare and early years to the tackling poverty agenda has also been consistently stated by Welsh Government. Most recently they have stated: *"recognising that childcare enables parents to work, supports economic growth, and helps tackle poverty and inequality; the Welsh Government has made flexible, affordable and high-quality childcare a priority for the next five years."* (Welsh Government, 2017c). Building a Brighter Future (2013) emphasised the links between early years policy and the Welsh Government's tackling poverty agenda, recognising the majority of the gap between the attainment of a child from an advantaged or disadvantaged family is determined early in childhood and created largely as a result of family background and the home environment. Our analysis in this report has also found this to be the case. In March 2015, Welsh Government published a revised Child Poverty Strategy (Welsh Government, 2015a) which identified the availability of affordable and accessible childcare as fundamental to the tackling poverty agenda and identifies it as one of its top five priorities for the strategy.

It is noticeable however, that this priority seems to have weakened recently. Childcare is only briefly mentioned with regards to the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) new inspection framework in the latest Welsh Government Strategic Equality Plan (Welsh Government, 2016a). The recently published Welsh Government Prosperity for All Strategy (Welsh Government 2017b) seems to narrow the

focus further to the new 30 hours offer and the establishment of Community Learning Centres to provide extended services with childcare, parenting support, family learning and community access to facilities built around the school day.

Welsh Government has shown commitment to stepping back when necessary, revisiting the big picture and furthering its understanding of improvements needed. In 2014, they commissioned an Independent Review of Childcare Structures (Graham, 2014), which set out detailed recommendations for systemic changes needed to deliver on their ambitions for childcare and early education. The Graham Review pointed out a patchwork and staged approach to embedding necessary reforms was risking an increasingly complex, fragmented and unwieldy system confusing for parents and providers alike (Graham, 2014). The new analysis we present in this report, alongside a consideration of the current state of play in Wales, underlines that many of the core recommendations of the review still need to be addressed.

Save the Children believes the current system in Wales needs urgent reform, building on existing provision, before it matches what international evidence is telling us works best for supporting children in poverty to thrive. It is only by not losing sight of the bigger picture and remaining focused on filling the glaring gaps that Welsh Government will harness the potential of high quality ECEC to ensure every child in Wales has the best start in life. We believe that there are two major pieces of what we see as the 'ECEC jigsaw' missing. These need to be urgently addressed to build a solid base so that ECEC in Wales can have the greatest impact for children living in poverty.

Firstly, we will look at what needs to be done to achieve a single, coherent system for the provision of high quality early learning that will have the greatest impact for children living in poverty in Wales.

Secondly we look at the steps needed to make sure no child's access to high quality ECEC is left to chance. We look at improvements needed to achieve a parity of provision, to make sure that all children in Wales have equal access to quality provision. We also explore how to ensure a specific focus on providing support to children living in poverty, however they receive their care; either through formal or informal channels.

3.1 MISSING PIECES: TOWARDS A COHERENT AND SIMPLIFIED APPROACH TO HIGH QUALITY ECEC PROVISION

***"Childcare is available in my area but good quality child care is hard to find, I don't want my child to go somewhere just because I'm in work, I want them to have a positive and learning experience whilst there and be well cared for and looked after, which means it will not be cheap."* (Save the Children and Family and Childcare Trust survey 2011)**

In 2014, one of the core recommendations of the independent review of childcare structures (Graham, 2014) was for systemic change that brings together the sometimes competing, needs of the parent to work and the child's care and education. As recent commentary has pointed out, childcare and education in Wales have traditionally been treated separately in both policy and practice (Dallimore, 2016; Dallimore & Graham, 2017). Some analysis has highlighted that it is the case that early years education, like primary school is increasingly perceived to be an entitlement, a public service - whilst childcare is often seen as

distinct, as a commodity for parents to purchase often subject to (sometimes very high) fees paid by parents (Dallimore, 2016). Traditionally in Wales this separation has led to different systems of funding, regulation, inspection, guidance and different workforce entitlements, pay and conditions.

Explaining this point, Dallimore (2016) highlights that, in Wales, a child is not legally required to start school until the term following their fifth birthday, although the majority of children start school following their fourth birthday. ECEC services in Wales include schools that provide non-compulsory early education in nursery classes, childcare settings such as day nurseries, registered childminders, pre-school playgroups and Cylch Meithrin (Welsh-medium playgroups). These are commonly defined as 'formal' ECEC services as opposed to the non-parental care provided by grandparents, other relatives or friends usually called 'informal'. Reflecting the split in the rest of the system, Dallimore (2016) has emphasised that generally care and early education services are not well integrated in Wales.

All local authorities in Wales fund part-time education for three-year olds in schools ('maintained' settings) and most offer early education in other ('non-maintained') settings.



Photo: Kate Oates / Save the Children



Photo: Kit Oates / Save the Children

Dallimore (2016) has analysed population and school roll data to show that 88% of all three-year-olds in Wales are enrolled in maintained school nursery classes. This compares to 36% in England, he also emphasises that this is the case despite 96% of 3-year-olds benefitting from some funded early education. Therefore, while in England most three-year-olds, four-year-olds, and a growing number of two-year-olds are in 'childcare' settings, in Wales, most three and four-year-olds are in maintained school nursery classes for their ECEC provision. It is argued that this may limit the incentive for schools to integrate with wider settings in Wales and impact the strength of the private childcare sector in many areas across Wales.

As a solution to the aforementioned, increasingly disparate systems of care and education in Wales, the Graham review (2014) recommended an overhaul of the current system was required to ease the tensions. Graham (2014) stressed the need for a simplified offer that brought the focus squarely back to the needs of the child, stating that a piecemeal offer to get parents back into work would, ultimately have an adverse impact on children (Dallimore & Graham, 2017). Graham (2014) emphasises that other countries do not make the same distinction between childcare and early education and cites evidence that when

education and care are integrated there are significantly lower levels of child poverty and inequality (Penn et al., 2004). Where split systems exist, as in the UK, she states they 'exist side-by-side' with relatively high levels of inequality, lower levels of maternal employment (Naumann et al., 2013) (Naumann et al., 2013) and child poverty (Kaya et al., 2010). The point is emphasised by strong international evidence that children and families benefit the most in countries where the care and education elements within early childhood are unified (Graham, 2014).

The Review (Graham, 2014) concluded with a strong recommendation that the development of a 'Single Quality Framework' is an essential foundation upon which to build effective and efficient structures and in turn have a lasting impact on improving outcomes for children. The core areas that the Review highlighted were a need to improve **inspection and regulation, childcare sufficiency, workforce, the Welsh language and consistency of assessment across the early years**. In recent years the Government has taken a range of steps, acting to support local authorities in implementing the childcare sufficiency duty, revising and updating statutory guidance and tools but there are still a range of areas where recommendations are yet to

be implemented. Graham (2014) also recommends that for ECEC policy to be effective there should be single Ministerial responsibility for ECEC and responsibility at a local level should be unified under local ECEC boards that can help support local decision making allowing consideration of the consistency of access to, and quality of, services across Wales. Save the Children believes this change would also offer a space to develop and share expertise and best practice to work towards the most cost-effective models of delivery. The current policy context in Wales seems to offer a unique opportunity to explore and progress this recommendation, the development of new Public Service Boards and the Wellbeing Plans attached to them, population needs assessments under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, new requirements on local childcare sufficiency assessment and the pilot of Children First all seem to point to a rare chance to build in the proposal of a greater local focus on ECEC into this work.

There are two inspectorates in Wales with responsibility for monitoring the quality of early education and childcare settings. Estyn and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) Both inspectorates have now developed a joint inspection framework which, based on learning from initial pilots has been subject to further pilots. In the Welsh Government's newly published Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan (Welsh Government 2017i) there is a commitment to developing a joint inspection system for private and third sector nurseries which provide the Foundation Phase. Save the Children welcomes this and hopes that this will lead to the development of a shared understanding of what quality looks like across the sector. We also hope that this can be achieved with some urgency given the groundwork that has already taken place between the two inspectorates. As stated above, Graham's review in 2014 highlighted the need to improve the inspection system and we concur that this will be key to bringing more consistency to ECEC and help to ensure that the offer is one of quality for all children.

There is currently no uniform requirement for the ECEC workforce in Wales in terms of qualifications or ratios of staff to children and the requirement for all providers who care for children up to the age of 12 to be subject to regulation and inspection was only introduced in 2016. The EPPE

study emphasised the importance of appropriately qualified, higher-level practitioners for ECEC as this was a key factor in improving outcomes for children (Graham, 2014). However, Welsh Government has now announced an ambitious plan for a highly skilled childcare, play and early years' workforce' (Welsh Government 2017i). The plan outlines a raft of changes to standards, training and qualifications for staff working within childcare or play, covering children in the age group 0-12. There is also an aspiration to make the sector an attractive career choice and mention of 'better quality jobs.' Save the Children welcomes this investment in the workforce and particularly notes the acknowledgement in the report of how important this will be for the most 'disadvantaged' children.

DELIVER A MORE INTEGRATED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SYSTEM IN WALES.

When talking about a simplified, coherent ECEC provision it is important to ensure Welsh language provision is a core part of the picture. Evidence on the availability of Welsh-medium childcare suggests there remain gaps in provision in some parts of Wales and that there is variance in the ways demand for Welsh-medium provision is assessed. Welsh Government's recently published Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers strategy (Welsh Government, 2017h) highlights a long-term aim to make sure children under five have had sufficient contact with the Welsh language to be able to start on their journey towards fluency. Embedding and combining the goal to expand Welsh-medium early years provision as a core part of the tackling poverty agenda and the need to improve access to high quality ECEC, holds significant potential. We believe thinking smartly about the use of funding to achieve this goal also offers significant opportunities for ensuring all children across Wales, regardless of their background or where they live, have the opportunity to become confident Welsh speakers while also ensuring they are given the support needed to have the best start in life. The Welsh Government's newly published Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan (Welsh Government 2017i) commits over the next ten years to offer more opportunity to qualify through the medium of Welsh and enhance their Welsh language skills as well as support for staff in English medium settings to improve their ability to use more Welsh at work.

Ensuring that Flying Start, the Welsh Government's flagship early years provision, is benefiting children is also a key part of a simplified, coherent and effective picture. In light of our ScotCen (Hinchliffe, 2017) analysis of the MCS, trying to ascertain how statutory ECEC is impacting children living in poverty and on closing the attainment gap is of particular interest for us. In February 2017, Welsh Government published the latest in a series of evaluations of the Flying Start programme, which focused on evaluating the impact on educational attainment of children who had benefited from services under the programme (Welsh Government, 2017d). The evaluation presents differing impacts of Flying Start: a small direct positive effect on absenteeism, no effect on attainment and a mixed effect on children being identified as SEN (referred to as SEN prevalence in the report). The evaluation finds no significant direct impact of Flying Start on educational attainment. These findings, and the acknowledged complexity of evaluating the programme, highlight the need to look at options to better assess children's developmental progress in the early years.

When we consider the Foundation Phase early years offer for 4-7 year olds, this has again been developed based on international research evidence on the most effective approaches to ECEC. The Donaldson Review (Donaldson, 2015) of the curriculum, 'Successful Futures', was positive in its assessment of the Foundation Phase and recommended many its principles should be incorporated into the proposed new curriculum for Wales. An implicit aim of the Foundation Phase later restated in Building Resilient Communities (Welsh Government, 2013b) is to reduce inequalities in social and educational outcomes. In this document Welsh Government established a target to: **“narrow the gap in attainment levels between learners aged 7 eligible for free school meals and those that are not eligible for free school meals, who achieve the expected levels at the end of the Foundation Phase, as measured by the Foundation Phase Indicator, by 10 per cent by 2017. The difference between e-FSM and non-FSM attainment in 2012 was 18.3 per cent”** (Welsh Government 2013b, p.14).

In recent years evaluations and inquiries into the Foundation Phase have raised questions about its effectiveness in impacting on the attainment levels

of children from low-income families. In 2015, a National Assembly for Wales Committee Inquiry (NAfW) into the educational outcomes of low income children highlighted that given an important feature of the Foundation Phase was to reduce inequalities in social and education outcomes there should be some evidence of it making a contribution to closing the attainment gap but they were not satisfied that this evidence exists. The inquiry recommended that Welsh Government develop an understanding of the reasons for the lack of impact and seek to address them, to ensure that the full potential of the programme is realised. In 2015, the final report evaluating the Foundation Phase found that the introduction of the Foundation Phase has not, to date, been associated with any significant changes in the differences in educational outcomes between pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 based on their gender, their ethnicity or their eligibility for free school meals (Taylor et al. 2015). For pupils eligible for free school meals (an indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage), the evaluation estimates that they are nearly 30% less likely to achieve Level 4 or above in KS2 English than other pupils. After the introduction of the Foundation Phase this differential remained the same (Taylor et al. 2015).

The data we present in this report from the Millennium Cohort Study (Hinchliffe, 2017), further underlines the need for concerted attention to why a range of interventions are still apparently being found to have little impact on closing the attainment gap between children living in poverty and their better off peers. As we have shown, there are likely multiple reasons for this and a range of different factors can make a difference.

With the current lack of evidence on the impact of Flying Start and other interventions we cannot be confident that the current ECEC provision in Wales is of a high enough quality to close the attainment gap between children living in poverty and their better off peers. **To help better track and evidence the impact, we strongly welcome the Welsh Government's rollout of the Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF) and the Foundation Phase Profile (FPP) across Wales as a welcome and vital step forward** (Welsh Government, 2017e). We welcome that the EYDAF has been designed to correspond with assessments carried out by health professionals

to support early identification of possible developmental delay, special education needs or additional learning needs to inform the provision of additional support for children who need it.

Returning to evidence presented earlier in the report about the importance of support in the prenatal-to-three period for families facing adversity (Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, 2016), Save the Children would echo the recommendation made by Graham (2014) for Welsh Government to make sure the EYDAF represents an on-going common assessment tool (common across professions, settings, agencies and sectors) to be used across all early childhood settings 0-7 years.

3.1 NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: ADDRESSING AFFORDABILITY, FLEXIBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES TO ACHIEVE PARITY OF PROVISION FOR ALL CHILDREN ACROSS WALES.

Throughout this report we've explored how high-quality ECEC could make a significant difference to children living in poverty. We've looked at how a single, coherent system for the provision of ECEC could help deliver this. However, too many families in Wales are still trying to fight a system that makes life more difficult. Paying for childcare eats up a huge chunk of a family's income and it's also really hard to navigate – free hours and exemptions are available, but it can be hard to make sense of them (Dallimore, 2016). This at a time when families are facing new and increasing pressures from changes to the economy and the welfare system. The previous section looked at the importance of ensuring that there is a coherent ECEC system. However, any system also needs to be affordable and easy for families to use, so they can get the support they're entitled to. As it stands ECEC provision and entitlements in Wales remain complex and the services and provision offered are still not equally distributed or accessible to families across the country. There is also still a big question mark about how far they are reaching all children living in poverty and whether or not a child receives high quality ECEC is still, too often left to chance. Finally, there is very little support for those parents, who in the early years are choosing to use informal childcare (via family or grand-parents) or those not

accessing formal early education services, to help them to support their child's early education and development.

In this section, we assert that a series of barriers are preventing children living in poverty from being able to benefit from the sorts of high quality provision that we know can make a difference. Whether or not they access support is too often being left to chance. Save the Children therefore believes that addressing these accessibility, affordability and flexibility barriers needs to be a key part of attempts to address and to close the attainment gap.

3.1.1 AFFORDABILITY AND COST: ADDRESSING BARRIERS FOR PARENTS

***"There is only one childcare place in [my area] that doesn't cost the earth. There are hardly any childminders either and I have been very lucky to find the one I use at the moment which is heavily subsidised, but to most local people this is still too much money. As wages are lower in this area the cost has to be lower. Recently the after-school club has opened in our village but without it I wouldn't be able to work full time. I need to work full time to be able to pay my mortgage and bills."* (Save the Children and Family and Childcare Trust survey 2011)**

We recognise that in Wales, direct financial support to parents to help with cost and affordability of childcare remains by and large the reserve of UK Government and is currently addressed through a complex system of entitlements and tax breaks through Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare. The Welsh government can also support parents to pay for childcare by funding places. Some services are universal and fully state funded, such as the Foundation Phase early education entitlement for three and four-year-olds. Some areas, under a new Welsh Government pilot, now receive an additional 20 hours. Other services such as Flying Start childcare services are fully funded and free but only to some parents and dependent on where you live (Dallimore, 2016). Most formal childcare services are paid for by parents but may also be subsidised by a complex system of tax breaks

and benefits under Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) that help some families more than others. Others rely on informal childcare provided by friends or grandparents to help fill the gaps but those who do not have that support are often further disadvantaged (Dallimore, 2016). In Wales, the split between responsibility for these funding systems with Welsh Government responsible for early education funding that is distributed by local government in various ways, while funding via the tax and benefits system comes from decisions made by the UK Government. This adds to the complexity and makes a coherent and integrated system in Wales all the more challenging.

Accompanying the Welsh Government's recently introduced, extended 30-hour offer pilot new research published by Welsh Government aims to understand parents' and guardians' experiences of their current childcare arrangement (Welsh Government, 2017f). Several issues were revealed as the main factors affecting how parents selected and combined childcare and these included; cost, location, and suitability of childcare with working commitments. The high cost of paying for nursery was reported by many parents as the biggest barrier to families finding childcare arrangements that best suit their needs; it was reported that a significant proportion of the salaries of mothers working part-time goes towards childcare costs. This is supported by the findings of this year's Childcare Survey, by the Family and Childcare Trust which finds that families are still spending up to 45 per cent of their disposable income on average childcare costs (Family and Childcare Trust, 2017).

Welsh Government should be congratulated for doing what it can to develop innovative approaches to childcare provision in Wales, particularly targeting support to improve employment prospects for parents where childcare is the main barrier to accessing training or job opportunities. In December 2016, Welsh Government launched the PaCE project. PaCE is a £13.5m project jointly funded by Welsh Government and the European Social Fund (ESF). The programme covers the cost of childcare while parents undertake training, work experience or volunteering and gain the skills they need to get a job. The programme is designed to support those parents aged 25 and over not in employment and young parents (16-24) not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) who are offered individual support and solutions to

meet their childcare needs through community-based Parent Employment Advisers. PaCE builds upon services in the community such as Flying Start and Families First and covers all the local authority areas across Wales. Welsh Government has also awarded CWLWM, a childcare consortium comprising the five main childcare organisations, £5 million under the Children and Families Delivery Grant to support them to develop solutions to the issues facing families in accessing childcare. However, the effectiveness of these interventions have not yet been evaluated. Also, while the innovative use of European Social Funding is welcome, the sustainability of such projects is a concern. Given ongoing debates over Brexit and the impact on future funding, more sustainable models of funding for supporting maternal access to the labour market and addressing issues of affordability need to be considered for all four nations of the UK.

3.1.2 ACCESS, FLEXIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY: ADDRESSING BARRIERS FOR PARENTS

Costs aren't the only problem: many parents can't find or may not be eligible for the ECEC their child needs. In Wales, under the current system, it remains the case that, the degree of provision depends on the age of the child, and where they live. Too often the current system means there isn't a parity of provision for all children. The availability of childcare also varies considerably in different areas of Wales, some parents benefit from a wide range of choices while in other areas there are far fewer options that may not meet the needs of children and families.

STATUTORY PROVISION: LEAVING CHILDREN'S FUTURES TO CHANCE?

FOUNDATION PHASE

Since 2008 and the introduction of the Foundation Phase, all three year olds in Wales are entitled to a free, part-time ECEC place for a minimum ten hours a week during term time. This represents a total of 380 hours (some local authorities such as Vale of Glamorgan have tended to offer more).

The Foundation Phase brought together what was previously known as the Early Years (from 3 to 5-year-olds) and Key Stage 1 (from 5 to 7-year-olds) of the National Curriculum to create one phase of education for children aged between three and seven. All local authorities in Wales fund part-time education for three year olds in schools (maintained settings) and all but one (Neath Port Talbot) offer early education in other (non-maintained settings). Non-maintained settings include full day-care providers and sessional day-care which can be funded by the local authority on a per-child basis for providing an early education place. While the minimum number of hours that a child must receive is set at 10 hours per week by Welsh Government, the hours funded and provided varies widely across Wales. Three-year-olds in some areas receive more than the basic requirement. Local authorities often offer 12.5 hours or even 15 hours per week in maintained and a number also fund non-maintained settings in excess of 10 hours per week.

The sometime inflexible nature of how the Foundation Phase is delivered may also act as a barrier to parents. In 2013, the Welsh Government set up a flexibility pilot scheme, with four local authorities (providing a cross-section across Wales) – Carmarthenshire, Denbighshire, Neath Port Talbot, Newport - taking part (Welsh Government, 2016c). 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 (Welsh Government, 2016c). This Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilot was evaluated in 2016, identifying the forms of flexibility offered generally helped parents' work/life balance and made their daily routines easier to manage, this was particularly the case for wrap around childcare (Welsh Government, 2016c). The potential impact of increased flexibility on Foundation Phase settings

and the impact on the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum was an area identified as needing further exploration. It also highlighted a need to explore the fact a relatively small number of children in Wales (between 5-12%) do not access their statutory 10 hours of free early years Foundation Phase education and recommends further research into why this is the case. The evaluation is also clear that in any future roll out of flexible provision there is a need to be clear about the strategic aim of increased flexibility and the logic behind this strategy.

ENHANCED FREE ECEC OFFER FOR 3 & 4 YEAR-OLDS - 30 FREE HOURS PILOT FOR WORKING PARENTS

From September 2017, working parents with three and four year olds in pilot areas of Wales will receive a combined total of 30 hours of early education and childcare during term time. The current free early education provided by the Foundation Phase will form part of this offer. For 9 weeks of the year, outside of term time, parents will also receive 30 hours per week of childcare.

The rationale for a targeted rather than universal offer is made in an options paper developed by the Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW) (Paull & Xu, 2015). The paper analysed the impacts on family income and poverty and on parental work. A universal offer was estimated to represent an annual budget cost to the Welsh Government of £144 million, compared to £61 million for the work requirement assuming a 100 percent take-up and an hourly delivery cost of £4. The analysis modelled the impact on child poverty of each offer using a measure which deducts childcare costs from net income. It shows that a universal offer would reduce child poverty more than an option with a

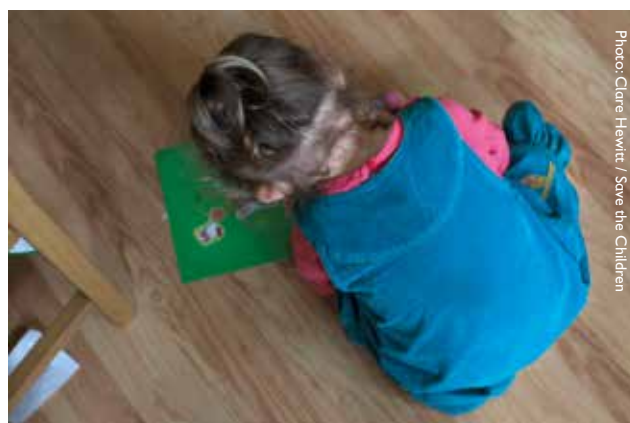


Photo: Clare Hewitt / Save the Children

work requirement. What's more the analysis did not include any modelling of the impact of an increased universal provision on the attainment gap and future educational outcomes of children living in poverty.

Save the Children are concerned that the 30 hours offer is for working parents only as there is limited evidence that this will benefit the poorest children, this does not represent an equitable offer for all children. We would argue that there may be better ways of investing in ECEC. The most compelling evidence suggests that a part-time (15 hours) entitlement for all two-four year olds would be more effective in addressing the attainment gap and future educational outcomes of children living in poverty.

FLYING START

In addition to the free universal ECEC provided under the Foundation Phase, some 2-year-olds in Wales receive additional free childcare under the Welsh Government's Flying Start programme. Flying Start is available to families living in the most deprived areas of Wales and as it is area-based being eligible often depends on where you live not on your need. Based on international evidence of the interventions that can have the most impact for children, services included within it provide enhanced health visiting, parenting support, support for early language development (primarily in the form of language and play programmes) and free, high quality, part-time childcare.

The programme started in 2006/07 and was expanded from 2012. Flying Start provides free 'quality' part time childcare: for all eligible 2 to 3 year olds for 2.5 hours a day, 5 days a week for 39 weeks. This should also include at least 15 sessions of childcare provision for families during school holidays.

The Welsh Government committed to double the number of children benefiting from the programme from 18,000 to 36,000 by the end of 2016. The Government met this target during 2014-15. Latest figures show that Flying Start now provides services to just over 38,000 children. Following expansion of the scheme, an element of outreach was also included, requiring local authorities to identify children outside defined Flying Start areas, who would benefit from the services. In January 2014, the Welsh government stated that the

outreach element of Flying Start would allow local authorities to choose from a suite of options to be submitted as part of their Flying Start delivery plans. Take up of Flying Start childcare is very high; 86 per cent of offers of childcare in a Flying Start childcare setting were taken up during 2015-16 (StatsWales, 2016) although this does represent a 3.5 point decrease on the 2012-13 figure (90 per cent). A total of 7,772 children received Flying Start childcare in 2015/16. In January 2017, Welsh Government published the results of a second in series of three reports from a three-year qualitative research project with Flying Start parents. The aim of the 'Flying Start Families: Wave 2 report' was to explore experiences of families in engaging with the Flying Start Programme (2017g). In terms of barriers accessing the childcare element of Flying Start, these included the location of the childcare settings and the timing of sessions. Responses included that session start or finish times clashed with when they needed to collect their older children school and so they were not able to access the childcare entitlement or working parents noted that they required childcare for longer than the 2.5 hours sessions offered through Flying Start due to work commitments.

In December 2016, the Welsh Government released data estimating the percentage of children age 0 to 4 years in income deprivation by Lower Super Output Area (LSOA). Save the Children has commissioned analysis (LGDU-W, 2017) which examined this data alongside current Flying Start coverage information to explore if there are any pockets of children considered to be in income deprivation that are not covered by the Flying Start programme. The analysis revealed that:

- **49,014 (28%)** children (0 to 4 years) in Wales are considered to be in income deprivation;
- **21,768 children (0 to 4 years)** in Wales who are in income deprivation live in non-Flying Start areas. **This equates to 45% of all children living in income poverty.**
- It is also important to note the strong variance across Wales. Estimates of children living in income poverty living in non-flying start areas vary by local authority, ranging from 25% in Merthyr to 60% in Ceredigion.

There are 107 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Wales with at least 40% of resident children (0 to 4 years) considered to be in income

deprivation that are not covered by the Flying Start programme,

The LSOA of interest with the largest number of children (0 to 4 years) in income deprivation is Gaer 5 in **Newport**. This area has 92 resident children (0 to 4 years) considered to be living in income deprivation. The LSOA of interest with the highest percentage of children (0 to 4 years) considered to be living in income deprivation is Rhyl East 1 in **Denbighshire**. In this area, 74% of children are considered to be living in income deprivation.

The top 10 LSOAs of interest across Wales with the highest percentage of children in income deprivation have a total of around 752 resident children (0 to 4 years), of which, just under 485 are considered to be in income deprivation. This is 65% of children aged 0 to 4 years in these areas.

All but two of the local authorities in Wales have LSOAs of interest. There were no potential areas for consideration in Monmouth and Powys. This suggests that the current Flying Start areas may be adequate in these authorities therefore they are not considered in the analysis. **Cardiff** is the local authority with the most LSOAs of interest (24). Six local authorities contain more than 5 LSOAs of interest.

More detailed information on this research is available on request.

CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY: NON-STATUTORY FORMAL PROVISION

Welsh Government has recently identified that the new 30-hours 'Childcare Offer for Wales' is "*likely to be the primary driver of change for the childcare sector in the coming years*" (Welsh Government, 2017c). However, it remains unclear whether the vision of rolling out the enhanced offer across Wales can be delivered within the current childcare infrastructure in Wales (Dallimore & Graham, 2017). In Wales, unlike England the majority of three and four-year-old children currently receive either part-time or full-time Foundation Phase early learning in schools via the maintained sector. This means that Wales does not have a diverse and established independent childcare sector which can help fill any gaps and provide additional childcare. The response from England to the new 30hrs offer has shown that even in a childcare sector with a much larger

proportion of private and voluntary childcare providers there are significant challenges with delivering the offer.

To help assess this Welsh Government has produced a new analysis (Welsh Government 2017c) to estimate childcare capacity in Wales to deliver against the pilot offer and intended roll out across the whole of Wales by 2020. The report estimates that there are approximately 175,000 children up to the age of four living in Wales. Combined, there are just less than 80,000 formal childcare places, of which 45,000 are potentially full day places for children aged 0-4 years-old. Therefore, there are not enough places for all children to attend full time. Around two thirds of households with dependent children aged three or four are eligible to receive the new Childcare Offer. If all of those children who are eligible took up the offer, it would mean that just over 46,000 full time places would be required. This means, at current estimates, if all full-time places were devoted to providing the Childcare Offer, there would still not be enough places. The analysis also estimates the number of hours available to children in each area, if all wanted to attend a formal childcare setting. The results show significant variance across Wales. It suggests that even the areas with the highest capacity per child are able to provide little more than six hours per child; there are some areas with no childcare availability. The average level of availability across the whole of Wales is two hours and 40 minutes per child. What is more, there appears to be higher childcare capacity levels in urban and affluent areas. The areas around main towns and cities have slightly higher averages than ore rural areas. Of particular concern to Save the Children is that lower levels of availability are typically found in rural and disadvantaged areas. For example, there is typically less than one and a half hours of childcare available per child in both Mid-Wales and the South Wales.

This analysis is particularly concerning if we consider what this report has so far shown about the importance of high quality ECEC as part of the picture of reducing the attainment gap for the poorest children. If structural issues are affecting availability of childcare in some of the most deprived areas of Wales the impact of this on the poorest children accessing high quality ECEC urgently needs to be better understood and addressed. Welsh Government (Welsh Government,

2017c) does state that as part of pulling together the workforce plan, the childcare sector in Wales has been given priority sector status and new funding has been announced - more than £100,000 to strengthen the childcare sector was announced in August 2017. The Welsh Government's Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan (Welsh Government 2017i) outlines their new approach to building capacity in the sector which centres on providing business support for the sector. This support for capacity building is being prioritised in line with aspirations to extend the 30 hours offer to working parents. Save the Children has grave concerns about this approach firstly because there is a lack of evidence on the positive impact on either children or parental employment of the 30 hours offer and without a robust, common inspection and regulation framework it is hard to see how quality of provision can be assured.

THE ROLE OF INFORMAL CHILDCARE

When thinking about how ECEC can best be directed to ensuring all children in Wales have the best start in life, the role of informal childcare in the overall picture of childcare in Wales also merits consideration. Dallimore (2016) based at Bangor University has been studying what role informal childcare plays in childcare choice in Wales. This is some of the only research carried out to date into informal childcare in Wales - often provided by family, friends and grandparents. The findings of this early research points to the significance of this source of care for young children in Wales. Understanding this better will be important to consider further as part of the debate on quality and the provision of ECEC. Taking this early research into account, we can cautiously suggest that for children from families with lower incomes, during the time they are not accessing ECEC in school or through Flying Start settings they may be either receiving care at home from parents or informal care from families and friends. While this needs further research to be understood fully, it seems supporting parents, carers and grandparents with ways to support their child's early learning is an important part of the picture.

Welsh Government's Prosperity for All: A National Strategy (2017b) outlines the intention to '*introduce a new model of Community Learning Centres, providing extended services with childcare, parenting support,*

family learning and community access to facilities built around the school day'. While we are still in the process of understanding how this new model will work in practice it seems like an excellent opportunity to explore how to provide support to parents, carers and grandparents with the skills and confidence to support their child's early learning and development. Save the Children has significant expertise in family engagement and programmes that could support this and we look forward to working with partners to support this development.

Save the Children believes that all children deserve a fair start in life. Every child should have the same quality ECEC and equal access to opportunity no matter what their needs are, what their family's background is, where they live or how much money their parents earn. We shouldn't be taking a chance on children's futures. We believe that the utmost priority needs to be given to making sure there is parity of availability and access to quality childcare, however it is provided as well as removing cost and flexibility barriers that still exist for too many families living in poverty in Wales. This will improve consistency and reduce the element of 'chance' when carers and parents choose a placement for their child.

4 The future and next steps



Photo: Clare Hewitt / Save the Children

This report has drawn on new analysis and wider international evidence showing what makes the most difference in the early years for children living in poverty. Save the Children is therefore calling for a clear, simple and coherent early childhood education and care offer for Wales. We recognise that this is an ambitious long-term plan.

The current approach in Wales is fractured and fragmented. We know Wales is committed to solving the puzzle and has made great strides in delivering high quality ECEC to an increasing number of children in Wales. Yet, key pieces that would deliver a world-class system that works for parents and maximises impact for children are still missing. Our figures paint a clear picture that that many children in poverty are being left furthest behind. This is supported by evaluations of key Welsh Government programmes which question the effectiveness of existing programmes in closing the attainment gap. We fear that at least part of the problem is that because the access and eligibility of children living

in poverty to ECEC is being left to pure chance, many children living in poverty are missing out on high quality early education and care that could help redress the balance and prevent them starting school behind their better off peers.

Addressing these gaps and finishing the jigsaw in a way that best supports young children's early learning presents a huge challenge. Each of our calls set out below represents a piece of what we see as the Early Childhood Education and Care jigsaw. We have focussed on the short-term and immediate steps we believe are necessary to move towards a system that better supports young children in Wales to meet early learning outcomes/ milestones in the long-term. At a minimum, these basic pieces need to be in place, before we can start to solve the puzzle of how to make sure no child is left behind. We all have a role to play in solving the puzzle and making a difference for the future and all children in Wales.

SAVE THE CHILDREN'S RECOMMENDATIONS

We are calling on Welsh Government to:

1 Fill the gaps: Deliver a single, simple and coherent system for high quality early education and care

- Provide key updates on progress that have been committed to and deliver on recommendations for a 'Single Quality Framework' for ECEC in Wales.
- Establish sole Ministerial responsibility for all aspects of early childhood education and care (including Welsh language provision) and ensure a focus on the role of ECEC in tackling the attainment gap.

2 No child left behind: Ensure equal access to high quality ECEC for all children in Wales with a specific focus on providing additional support to all children living in poverty:

- Guarantee a minimum of 15 hours a week of high-quality, free at the point of use ECEC for all children aged between two and four and living in poverty:

- Extend the minimum eligibility for ECEC hours per week from 10 to 15 for three and four year olds in non-working households
- Introduce a new entitlement of 15 hours per week of ECEC for all two year olds living in poverty

We are calling on all political parties to:

- **Join our mission to complete the 'ECEC jigsaw' and support the calls above**

We are calling on all stakeholders to:

- **Support parents, carers and grandparents to engage in their children's early learning** at home by working together to explore how ECEC settings and the new Prosperity for All Community Education Centres can support families

At Save the Children it is our mission to boost early learning. We want Wales to have a world-leading approach to early education and childcare and over the next years we are committed to helping to build the evidence, to create the arguments for change and to start the conversations needed to make this happen.



Photo: Claire Hewitt / Save the Children

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