



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

RESEARCH

Review of the childcare support available for parents in education, training or returning to work (summary)

A review of the childcare support available in Wales for parents in education, training or returning to work, with a focus on identifying gaps in support.

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Introduction

This report presents the findings from a review of the childcare support available for parents in education, training or returning to work. The review aims to understand what types of support are available; what gaps, if any, in support are present; whether the support available is sufficient to remove the barriers to education and work for these parents and what changes, if any, would be required to reduce the barriers for parents in education or training or seeking to return to work.

The review was carried out by Arad Research using desk research, interviews with Welsh Government national programme and support leads and interviews with representatives from further education institutions (FEIs) and higher education institutions (HEIs) and employment programme administrators.

Welsh Government strategies and programmes already in place support childcare provision in Wales. The Childcare Offer for Wales provides working parents of three and four year olds with a mixture of childcare and early education for up to 30 hours a week (made up of at least 10 hours of early education and up to 20 hours of Government-funded childcare). While the

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Childcare Offer helps with the childcare costs of eligible parents, parents just outside the labour market and actively seeking employment as well as those in education and training (apart from apprenticeships) are currently ineligible.

The report explores the childcare support available to students in further education, students in higher education and to those individuals looking to enter or return to work.

Existing provision

There is existing provision for parents in education and training, primarily through the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) and the Childcare Grant (CCG).

The FCF is a discretionary fund managed by individual further education institutions but funded by the Welsh Government. It is targeted towards learners who are experiencing financial hardship and can include supporting with the cost of childcare. The FCF is flexible and can be adapted to local needs and context. The CCG is a grant for parents on a higher education course and is administered by Student Finance Wales.

There are existing schemes to support parents into work, most notably Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE); Communities for Work (CfW) and the Flexible Support Fund (FSF).

PaCE is a joint project led by the Welsh Government in partnership with DWP and is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). It operates in local authorities outside former Communities First clusters. The Project provides childcare support for parents whilst training or looking for work, where childcare is their main barrier. PaCE aims to support parents aged 16 to 24 not engaged in education, training or employment and economically inactive parents aged 25+.

CfW is a joint project led by the Welsh Government in partnership with DWP and Lead Delivery Bodies, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). It operates in former Communities First areas. CfW aims to increase the employability of 16 to 24 year olds who are not in education, employment or training, and economically inactive and long-term unemployed adults who have complex barriers to

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employment. The support can cover childcare costs, for example whilst attending an interview or training/work experience.

The FSF offers financial assistance to people claiming unemployment benefits to help them take part in activities to move them closer to the labour market, which can include financial support for childcare costs. This is a discretionary fund administered by Job Centres.

Other support mechanisms include Flying Start and smaller regional employability schemes.

Gaps and barriers

Despite a range of programmes and funding sources, there are still groups potentially missing out on support or inadequately supported by some schemes to the point of this being a barrier to them pursuing education, training or employment. These groups include:

- postgraduate students
- healthcare students
- two-parent households where one is in work (although the earnings of the other parent may be low)
- parents with several children
- under-represented groups such as Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities
- disabled learners
- refugees and asylum seekers

In addition to childcare costs, there are also other challenges that create barriers for parents. These include:

- the complexity and length of some of the application processes
- complicated eligibility criteria and thresholds for some of the schemes
- lack of confidence of parents
- lack engagement amongst some parents with available schemes
- lack of suitable or flexible childcare

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- poor access to public transport and its frequency, particularly in some rural areas

Conclusions and recommendations

Flexible and comprehensive childcare support should be an integral part of support mechanisms to allow parents to access education, training and employment.

The research has shown that despite the positive impact of childcare support (through the childcare element of FCF, CCG and a range of employability and skills programmes) there are still groups potentially missing out on the opportunity to return to education, training and employment, as well as additional challenges which create barriers for parents.

While there is a need to further explore how those missing out on financial support for childcare could be better supported, it is not recommended that the Childcare Offer should be redesigned to accommodate students and those on the cusp of employment. As an alternative, the gaps in support should be addressed by reviewing the scope of current programmes and creating better links between them.

Actions are required to reduce the complexity of childcare support schemes and eligibility requirements. The methods in which communication is made with learners should be reviewed to address promoting the package of support to these target groups and clarify the support available.

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

- liaise with stakeholders in FHE and employability programmes to ensure there is detailed and clear information on access and eligibility to all sources of childcare funding support, including at a wider UK level
- work with stakeholders in FHE and employability programmes to explore

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options for streamlining eligibility criteria, means-tested thresholds, funding caps and methods of support

- work with partners to simplify application systems to all childcare-related programmes, with particular reference to the CCG.
- liaise with education institutions and Student Finance Wales to review whether maximum support caps could be lifted for those most in need of childcare support
- explore options to provide childcare support for postgraduate students through current HE Childcare Grant structures.
- target further childcare support to asylum seekers, particularly those participating in ESOL courses. This could be achieved through current programmes such as FCF and PaCE
- work with appropriate stakeholders to reassess thresholds for childcare support and ensure that those currently just over the threshold have the opportunity to access childcare support
- work with NHS Wales to ensure that students following healthcare degrees receive parity for childcare support
- work with partners in FHE and employability programmes to develop flexible childcare support for other groups such as part-time and distance learning students and volunteers
- ensure that monitoring and evaluation systems are robust and allow analysis of return on investment (ROI)
- explore future models to replace EU funding, which allow for continued investment in support that adequately reflect childcare costs

Contact details

Full Research Report: Arad Research (2021) A review of the childcare support available for parents in education, training or returning to work. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 32/2021.

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

For further information please contact:

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