

Dadansoddi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

01/2016

PUBLICATION DATE:

18/01/2016

[www.gov.wales](http://www.gov.wales)

# Qualitative Research with Flying Start Families

## Wave 1 report: Executive Summary

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Arad Research



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

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ISBN: 978-1-4734-5711-9

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## Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
Childcare entitlement	Flying Start provides quality childcare which is offered to parents of all eligible 2-3 year olds for 2 and a half hours a day, 5 days a week for 39 weeks. In addition, there should be at least 15 sessions of provision for the family during the school holidays.
EHV entitlement	The Enhanced Health Visiting entitlement requires local authorities to provide one full time equivalent Health Visitor per 110 children aged under 4 in Flying Start areas. This represents a lower caseload than the universal service and is to ensure delivery of intensive support to Flying Start children and their families. The primary function of the Flying Start Health Visitor is to support the family in the home, assessing both the child and the family (in terms of high, medium and low risk) and make appropriate referrals.
FSID	Flying Start Identification Numbers used by local authorities to identify parents and children entitled to Flying Start services.
High/Medium/Low need families	Families defined by their local authority Flying Start team as needing a high/medium/low level of support. Precise definitions of the levels of need vary across local authorities but take account of factors such as health problems, deprivation, age of parent, language and the availability of support networks. In this report, the level of need of the family is included alongside quotes to give context to the family situation (where this information was available to the research team).
HV	Health Visitor

Lower Super Output Areas	Small geographic areas used for the collection and publication of small area statistics. They are used across National Statistics and specifically as part of the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (Welsh Government, 2015a)
Parenting entitlement	<p>Every family with a Flying Start child must be offered formal parenting support at least on an annual basis. This can be in groups or one-to-one in the home with a mix of formal and informal support depending on need. The parenting offer is based on the following 3 themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perinatal and support in the early years</li> <li>• early intervention approaches to supporting vulnerable parents</li> <li>• programmes to support parents in positive parenting.</li> </ul>
SLC entitlement	<p>Speech Language and Communication entitlement. Flying Start offers families a range of opportunities to access groups and courses (e.g. Language and Play) as well as support from Speech and Language Therapists and other staff focused on speech and language development. The SLC entitlement was known as the Early Language Development (ELD) entitlement (up until 2015) and was also previously known as the Language and Play entitlement. The ELD entitlement was changed to 'Speech, Language and Communication' (SLC) following the publication of the Flying Start SLC guidance in 2015. Speech, Language and Communication is a broader description and includes all the skills required for children to become competent and confident communicators.</p>

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SLT	Speech and Language Therapy/Therapist. The majority of local authorities employ SLT staff through Flying Start. However, families may also be referred by Flying Start staff to universal SLT services.
Wave 1, 2 or 3 families	Families interviewed during the three annual phases, or waves of research. Wave 1 (in 2015), 2 (2016) or 3 (in 2017).

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## **Executive summary**

1. The Welsh Government commissioned Arad Research to undertake qualitative research with Flying Start families. This longitudinal study is being undertaken in three stages (described as Waves 1, 2 and 3) between 2015 and 2017. This report outlines the findings of Wave 1 of the research based on fieldwork conducted between May and October 2015.
2. The Flying Start programme is a key component of the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty agenda (Welsh Government, 2015b). Flying Start provides targeted support to children and families in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales, to make a decisive difference to their lives. It focuses on the identification of need and on early interventions to improve children's language, cognitive and social and emotional development and their physical health. Flying Start offers four main entitlements: an enhanced health visiting service; free part-time, high quality childcare for 2-3 year olds; access to parenting support; and support for Speech Language and Communication (SLC).

## **Aims of the research**

3. The aims of this project are:
  - to understand families' experiences of the Flying Start programme; and
  - to identify any perceived impacts of the programme for Flying Start families.
4. The research addresses the following questions:
  - How do parents engage with Flying Start services and what helps and hinders engagement?
  - How do parents decide which entitlement(s) they engage with and when?

- In what ways do parents experience the different Flying Start entitlements (i.e. enhanced health visiting, childcare, SLC, parenting support)?
- What expectations do parents have of the Flying Start programme?
- To what extent do parents perceive Flying Start has delivered against any expectations?
- How does Flying Start relate to other services (including schools/other family support programmes/health services? For example, are there experiences of Flying Start 'signposting' to other services and what are the outcomes of this?
- How well do Flying Start parents believe the programme has identified and responded to the needs and wishes of families in terms of Welsh language provision?
- What, if any, do parents perceive to be the medium- to long-term impacts of the programme for their family?

### **Overview of approach**

5. The aim of the research is to visit families at three points during their engagement with the Flying Start programme. Wave 1 of the study (2015) has included a total of 72 interviews with families and six interviews with Flying Start co-ordinators and staff. The fieldwork was undertaken between May and October 2015 and forms the basis of this first report. Waves two (2016) and three (2017) will include interviews with families from the first wave where possible, as well as a 'supplementary' sample to replace any families who are unable to participate in a repeat interview.

### **Findings**

6. Overall, the evidence suggests that most of the families interviewed are satisfied with their experiences of engaging with services delivered under each of the Flying Start entitlements. In addition, most parents feel that Flying Start has had an impact on at least one aspect

of their child's development and their own knowledge of, and approach to, parenting.

### **Engagement and expectations**

7. The majority of families who took part in the Wave 1 interviews had a broad understanding of the aims of Flying Start and the reason they were eligible for the Programme. Parents had been introduced to the Programme by their Flying Start Health Visitor. Half of the parents had accessed the Parenting entitlement (either through a group, course or one-to-one support delivered in the home). Around half had accessed Flying Start childcare (although not all parents were eligible for the Childcare entitlement yet). A few parents reported accessing a range of services under the SLC entitlement: courses and sessions; singing and play groups; and one-to-one support.
8. Parents' reasons for engaging with the Programme included:
  - to learn new skills or acquire knowledge for themselves;
  - to socialise with other parents;
  - to enable their child to socialise with other children;
  - to help with their child's development;
  - previous positive experiences of attending groups or courses;
  - to provide them with time to do other things (e.g. household tasks);
  - positive relationships with Flying Start staff.
9. Some parents described reasons they had not engaged with entitlements. These barriers to engagement included:
  - that they did not feel they needed the services on offer or that they did not see the relevance of the services to their child's development;



- perceptions that services were for parents of children with specific developmental or behavioural issues;
- perceptions that their child was not yet ready to access the services;
- locations or timings of provision not being convenient;
- a lack of confidence or fear of being 'judged' by staff and other group members.

## **Experiences**

10. We report parents' experiences of each of the entitlements independently below. However, the holistic nature of the Programme means that it is important to recognise the interconnections between entitlements and the limitations of analysing experiences of one entitlement separately from the others. For example, activities that are part of the SLC entitlement may be delivered within Childcare settings or through the EHV without parents being aware of this. This should be borne in mind when reviewing the findings.
11. Overall, most parents were satisfied with the services provided under each of the entitlements and were able to provide examples of positive experiences and effective delivery of services. Generally, parents had positive views on staff, locations, facilities and activities delivered through the Programme.
12. Most parents accessing the Parenting entitlement were satisfied with the quality of support or advice, content of courses, approach of staff and practical arrangements. Parents who had accessed one-to-one support in the home appreciated this support and had positive views on it. Some parents reported accessing a range of courses and the majority had found the content to be relevant to their needs.
13. Most parents who had accessed the SLC entitlement had positive views on the advice and support they had received or groups and

courses they had attended. The majority of parents commented positively on the facilities and locations used as well as the supporting resources provided to parents (e.g. book bags). SLC groups and sessions were seen by some parents as opportunities to access informal advice and support from staff and other parents. The small number of parents who accessed SLT support had positive experiences of this support and their comments suggest that SLTs and other Flying Start staff work in partnership effectively to support the development of these families' children.

14. Parents expressed positive views on Flying Start Childcare, referring to a number of specific aspects of the entitlement including: good communication between staff and parents; accessible locations; good facilities; the quality, approachability and responsiveness of staff; and the availability of Welsh-medium and bilingual provision. Some parents compared Flying Start childcare favourably to non-Flying Start provision and some felt that Flying Start childcare was 'more structured' than other provision. A few parents referred to examples of partnership working between the Flying Start childcare staff and staff delivering other entitlements (e.g. SLT).
15. The majority of parents had positive views on different aspects of the EHV entitlement, with comments relating to the good quality and perceived positive outcomes of advice and support provided. Parents were satisfied with the frequency of access to Health Visitors and around half commented on the accessibility, approachability, responsiveness and flexibility of staff. The entitlement met the expectations of a majority of parents with a few reporting that their Health Visitor had exceeded their expectations. Ways in which Health Visitors had exceeded expectations included: helping parents to complete forms or applications; liaising with health professionals; spending more time with them than they had expected; and supporting the parent with their own health or well-being (e.g. support with mental health issues).

16. Overall, parents had positive views on the availability of Welsh-language provision and support through the Programme. Most parents did not require access to Welsh-language services. However, a few parents reported that they did need access to staff who could provide advice and support in Welsh, as well as Welsh-medium or bilingual childcare. These parents generally felt they had been able to access the Welsh-language services they required. However, a small number of parents who wanted to access Welsh-language services reported that these had not been available because of a lack of Welsh-speaking staff or provision being too far away. Parents had positive views on Welsh-medium childcare provision and on the use of incidental Welsh in childcare settings (e.g. songs and rhymes).

### **Perceived outcomes and impacts**

17. Families reported a range of perceived outcomes and impacts during this first phase of interviews. It is worth noting that a number of the families interviewed during the first wave of 72 interviews are at a relatively early stage of their engagement with Flying Start. As such, it is reasonable to expect that the programme's impact on families will increase over time.
18. The majority of parents felt that Flying Start had made a positive difference to at least some aspect of their child's development. Examples are included below under five themes that emerged from the research:
- Talking and communication
    - e.g. being more talkative; learning and using new words (including Welsh words); speaking more clearly; understanding and using longer words; being more confident in interacting with others; and listening more;

- Reading and counting
  - e.g. increased interest in looking at books; being able to concentrate on books for longer; better able to listen to stories;
- Practical issues
  - e.g. improvements in sleep patterns; brushing teeth; drinking from a cup; holding or using cutlery; holding a pencil; getting dressed; tidying up;
- Behaviour and attitude
  - e.g. improved confidence; more able to socialise; taking turns; greater resilience; fewer tantrums; improved anger management;
- Health and well-being
  - e.g. breastfeeding for longer; healthier eating; improved understanding of information from other health professionals; earlier identification of health issues.

19. A range of perceived impacts were also reported for parents themselves in terms of their own knowledge, skills and approach to parenting. Below we outline the key themes that emerged in terms of parental impacts:

- Talking and communication
  - e.g. more ideas for SLC & play activities; making eye contact; giving their child opportunities to speak first; using songs and rhymes learnt through the Programme.
- Reading and counting
  - e.g. using books they had received through the Programme; spending more time reading to their child; giving their child opportunities to turn the pages of books;

- Practical issues
  - e.g. sleeping environment; sleep timings and routines; breastfeeding; bathing; safety in the home; weaning; potty training; diet and mealtime routines;
- Behaviour and attitude
  - e.g. using more positive language; praising good behaviour; using Star Charts for incentivising good behaviour;
- Health and well-being
  - e.g. more reassured; more confident; less worried; calmer household; less isolated; earlier identification of parental health issues; more time for other activities.

20. Given the nature of the study sample (focusing on parents with a youngest child aged below 30 months), it is perhaps unsurprising that many parents felt it too early to judge whether Flying Start had an impact on their child. However, the longitudinal nature of this study provides an opportunity to revisit these issues with parents in 2016 and 2017 as their child develops and makes the transition to the Foundation Phase.