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Qualitative Research with Flying Start Families

Wave 2 report: Executive Summary

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This document is also available in Welsh.

Qualitative Research with Flying Start Families: Wave 2 report Executive Summary

Arad Research



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

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
EHV entitlement	<p>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.</p>
Childcare entitlement	<p>Flying Start provides quality childcare which is offered to parents of all eligible two to three-year-olds for two and a half hours a day, five days a week for 39 weeks. In addition, there should be at least 15 sessions of provision for the family during the school holidays.</p>
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 three themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perinatal and support in the early years • early intervention approaches to supporting vulnerable parents • programmes to support parents in positive parenting.
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</p>

	<p>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>
SLT	<p>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.</p>
LAP	<p>Language and Play. LAP forms part of the SLC entitlement of Flying Start and is a universal, informal SLC intervention. LAP sessions are often delivered as 'drop-in' sessions across local authorities but can also be offered as a course (usually between four and six sessions). LAP offers a variety of play activities to help develop language skills and interaction between parents and their children.</p>
Wave 1, 2 or 3 families	<p>Families interviewed during the three annual phases, or waves of research. Wave 1 (in 2015), 2 (2016) or 3 (in 2017).</p>
SoGS assessment	<p>The Schedule of Growing Skills. SoGS is a standardised developmental assessment tool used by professionals who need to establish the developmental levels of children. Practitioners within Flying Start use the tool to assess the developmental level of children aged two and three years old.</p>
High/Medium/Low	<p>Families defined by their local authority Flying Start</p>

need families	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).
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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 from Wave 2 of the research based on fieldwork conducted between May and August 2016.¹
2. The Flying Start programme was launched in 2006/7 and provides targeted support to children and families in some of the most disadvantaged areas in 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, social and emotional development and their physical health. Flying Start offers four main entitlements:
 - an enhanced health visiting service (EHV);
 - free part-time, high quality childcare for two- to three-year-olds;
 - access to parenting support; and
 - support for Speech Language and Communication (SLC).²

Aims of the research

3. The aims of this project are:
 - to understand families' experiences of the Flying Start programme;
 - to identify any perceived impacts of the programme for Flying Start families.
4. The research addresses the following questions:

¹ The Wave 1 report (Welsh Government, 2016a) can be accessed here <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-evaluation-flying-start/?lang=en>

² The Early Language Development (ELD) entitlement was changed to Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) following the publication of Flying Start SLC guidance in 2015 (Welsh Government, 2015c).

- 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) included a total of 72 interviews with families and six interviews with Flying Start co-ordinators and staff. Wave 2 has included a total of 72 interviews with families comprising 53 follow-up interviews with families from the first wave (longitudinal sample) and 19 interviews with a 'supplementary' sample of families to replace those who were unable to participate in a repeat interview. The 72 Wave 2 interviews with families and six interviews with Flying Start co-ordinators and staff were conducted between May and August 2016. Wave 3 will include a further 72 interviews, comprising repeat interviews with

families from the first and second waves where possible, as well as a 'supplementary' sample to replace any families who are unable to participate in a repeat interview.

Overall findings

6. The findings of Wave 2 interviews show that most parents continued to access at least one of the entitlements they accessed during Wave 1, an indication of families' sustained engagement with Flying Start. Most parents continued to have high levels of satisfaction with services delivered under the four entitlements and provided examples of positive experiences of staff, service delivery and facilities or locations. In addition, most parents felt that Flying Start has had a positive impact on their child's development and was making a positive contribution to their own skills and knowledge as a parent.

Engagement and expectations

7. Families' levels of engagement with Flying Start remained broadly similar when comparing those interviewed in Waves 1 and 2. Interviews showed variations in the extent to which families engaged with each entitlement and this appeared to be influenced by several factors including: the age of child(ren); parental experience and confidence; families' levels of need and the strength of parents' relationships with Programme staff (particularly Health Visitors) as well as the expected frequency of contact set out in Flying Start guidance.
8. Wave 2 findings show that families continue to engage with entitlements for a variety of reasons. Parents engaged with the EHV service when seeking advice on specific health or developmental issues as well as through core contacts (e.g. routine appointments for developmental assessments). Families in Wave 2 tended to report lower levels of engagement with the EHV entitlement (as would be expected) as their children were now older than when they were

interviewed in Wave 1. For many of these families, their main engagement with their health visitor had been related to their child's two or three-year assessment.³

9. As in Wave 1, families' engagement with the childcare entitlement depended on the age (and therefore eligibility) of their child for this service. Some families had continued to access childcare since their Wave 1 interview and some had started to access this entitlement during Wave 2 following their child's second birthday. Parents' main motivation for accessing the childcare entitlement was for their child to socialise with other children. Barriers to accessing the childcare entitlement for parents in Wave 2 were similar to those reported in Wave 1. This included the timing of sessions and location of the settings.
10. Levels of engagement with the SLC and parenting entitlements remained consistent between Waves 1 and 2. Parents tended to participate in courses to gain knowledge or skills, to improve future job prospects or to socialise with other parents. Parents who attended SLC groups and sessions noted that they did so to meet other parents and so that their children could socialise with other children their age. The main barriers to engagement with SLC groups and parenting courses were that the timings were not convenient for some parents; or that parents were not aware of the groups or courses on offer.

Experiences

11. Parents' experiences of each of the entitlements are reported independently below. However, the holistic nature of Flying Start

³ The *Flying Start All Wales Health Visiting Core Programme (Welsh Government, 2013b)* outlines the frequency with which routine Health Visitor contacts are expected to take place: weekly up to 6 weeks from birth followed by contact at 8, 12 and 16 weeks and a minimum of 2 contacts between 6-12 months. Following this, visits are expected to take place at 18 months, 2 and 3 years (to include developmental assessments). The Programme notes that the frequency of contacts should be informed by individual care plans developed based on assessments of the needs of the child. This means that families identified as high need may require more frequent Health Visitor contact than those identified as medium or low need. Furthermore, parents may initiate additional contact with their Health Visitor as required when particular issues arise.

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.

12. As in Wave 1, parents in Wave 2 had high levels of satisfaction with the services provided under each of the entitlements and provided examples of positive experiences where they felt services had been delivered well. Parents expressed positive views on the delivery of services including staff, locations, facilities, activities and availability of Welsh-language provision and support through the Programme.
13. Most parents had positive views on the EHV entitlement and were highly satisfied with the advice and support they received from their Health Visitor. Although families reported that they had required less contact with their Health Visitor during Wave 2, parents were satisfied with the frequency of contact and found it reassuring that they could contact their Health Visitor if they needed to. Families' relationship with their Health Visitor seemed to influence how they engaged with the EHV and other entitlements. Parents who described their relationship with their Health Visitor more positively tended to be more likely to follow their advice as well as engage in other Flying Start services. In general, families reported that they were happy with the level of information they received in relation to their child's developmental assessments and many commented on the approachability, responsiveness and flexibility of Health Visitors. As in Wave 1, parents who had been continuously supported by a single Health Visitor appeared to be more satisfied with the entitlement than parents who had accessed several different Health Visitors.
14. Families who had accessed the childcare entitlement during Wave 2 were highly satisfied with the staff, settings, facilities, communication and advice received from childcare staff. Parents expressed positive

views regarding the quality of the childcare, the range of activities for children and the fact that the provision enabled their children to socialise with others of a similar age. Some parents described how childcare workers had worked effectively with other Flying Start staff, such as Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs), supporting their child. A few parents reported that the timings of Flying Start childcare sessions were not convenient for them as they clashed with their 'school run' or work-related commitments.

15. Parents interviewed during Wave 2 reported high levels of satisfaction with the parenting entitlement. Those who had accessed this entitlement provided positive views on the range of parenting courses they had attended and one-to-one support they had received. This included the usefulness and relevance of information and advice as well as quality of staff providing this support. Some parents felt they had gained useful parenting tips such as how to manage their child's behaviour or ideas about activities they could do with their child. However, some parents suggested the timings of parenting courses could be improved (e.g. evening courses could be more convenient for working parents).
16. As in Wave 1, most parents reported high levels of satisfaction with the SLC entitlement in Wave 2, including group sessions and one-to-one support. Parents who accessed SLC support had positive views on the opportunities this had provided them to sing, play, read stories and interact with their child and for their child to socialise with other children. Those who had received SLT support were satisfied with the way the SLT had communicated with the family and provided feedback on their child's development.
17. Some parents had accessed childcare, EHV and SLC entitlements through the medium of Welsh but very few parents had accessed parenting support through the medium of Welsh. This was because most courses parents reported attending had not taken place through the medium of Welsh and also reflected the fact that relatively small

numbers of parents attended courses, regardless of language. Parents were satisfied with the quality of Welsh-medium provision across the entitlements but mixed views on the availability of Welsh language services. Parents' views on Welsh-medium childcare provision and on the use of incidental Welsh in childcare settings (e.g. songs and rhymes) were positive. A few parents reported that a Welsh-speaking Health Visitor was not available to them and noted that they would have liked this option. Some parents did not recall being told that Welsh-medium Flying Start childcare provision was available and a few parents noted that Welsh-medium childcare was available but not located conveniently enough for them.

Perceived outcomes and impacts

18. Most parents interviewed during Wave 2 reported that Flying Start has had a positive impact on their child's development as well as on their own skills and knowledge as a parent. The longitudinal nature of this study has enabled us to test whether the various outcomes that parents attributed to the Programme during Wave 1 interviews had been observed by parents in Wave 2.⁴
19. The majority of parents in Wave 2 believed Flying Start has had a positive impact on their child. Although some parents highlighted specific services (e.g. childcare or SLT) they felt had made an important contribution to their child's development, most parents tended to attribute impacts to the Programme as a whole. Some parents also felt that Flying Start had benefitted their child indirectly by improving their own parenting skills.
20. Most parents reported that they believed the Programme had a positive impact on the following aspects of their child's development:
 - Speech, language and communication skills;

⁴ This was undertaken by including the main impacts reported by parents in Wave 1 as prompts in the Wave 2 interview guide. The interview guide for Wave is included as Annex 1 of the main report.

- e.g. being more talkative; learning and using new words (in English and Welsh); speaking more clearly; vocabulary and sentence formation; recognising and singing new nursery rhymes;
- Readiness for school;
 - e.g. counting, recognising numbers letters or the alphabet; levels of concentration; adapting to time away from parents and different routines; holding and using a pencil; interest in drawing and painting; interest in books and sitting and listening to stories;
- Social skills and behaviour;
 - e.g. socialising with other children; sharing and taking turns; interacting with adults; dealing with tantrums and anger management; dealing with challenging situations; confidence; and happiness.

21. In addition, some parents reported that the Programme had a positive impact on the following:

- Practical skills
 - e.g. using cutlery and cups; potty training; sleep routines; tidying up; brushing their teeth;
- Health
 - e.g. identifying and providing advice on health issues such as nappy rash, eczema, asthma, tooth decay, food allergies and intolerances; making referrals to other health professionals (e.g. physiotherapists, dentists and dieticians); acting as a conduit of information between families and other health professionals.

22. The majority of parents interviewed in Wave 2 believed that Flying Start had a positive impact on their parenting skills and knowledge as well as the overall well-being of their family. Parents in Wave 2 were more likely to refer to these types of impacts than those in Wave 1,

with many parents noting that they were continuing to use knowledge and skills they had gained from the Programme before their Wave 1 interview. Most parents reported that the Flying Start had a positive impact on the following aspects of their own skills and knowledge:

- Their approach to parenting;
 - e.g. ideas of activities that they could do with their children; diet and mealtime routines; new ideas for meals and how to encourage their child to try different foods;
- Their approach to supporting their child's learning;
 - e.g. tips for reading with their child; ideas for songs or nursery rhymes;
- How they communicated with their child;
 - e.g. making eye contact; ideas for how to play with their child; using positive language and open questions;
- How they managed their child's behaviour;
 - e.g. praising good behaviour; establishing boundaries;
- Parental confidence and the extent to which they felt well-supported;
 - e.g. opportunities to ask staff questions; parents noting they felt 'reassured', 'supported' and 'more confident' as there was support available
- Parental well-being.
 - e.g. opportunities to socialise with other parents; referrals to mental health support services; time to undertake housework, further education or part-time work.

23. In addition to the above impacts, some parents felt that advice from Flying Start staff had positive impacts on how long they had continued

breastfeeding their child, their approach to weaning (e.g. increased knowledge on diet and nutrition) and their awareness of home safety issues.

24. Families reported examples of impact more frequently during Wave 2 compared with Wave 1. This is perhaps unsurprising given that their children are now more developed than they were at the time of their first interview and that families have had more opportunities to engage in additional Flying Start services. Furthermore, the approach to gathering parents' perceptions of impact in Wave 2 (using the main impacts identified in Wave 1 as prompts) may have elicited a greater number of examples of reported impact from parents. Wave 3 of this study in 2017 provides an opportunity to examine to what extent families feel that these impacts are sustained as their child develops and makes the transition to the Foundation Phase. Wave 3 also provides an opportunity to explore how the perceptions of parents in Flying Start areas compare to the experiences of parents who are not eligible to access services through the Programme.