Access to Childcare Fund Phase 2: Evaluation Report

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

social research

Contents

Executive summary

Background

The Access to Childcare Fund (referred to as ACF or the Fund) was established by the Scottish Government in July 2020 to test and run new models of School Age Childcare (SACC). The Fund formed part of the Scottish Government's ambition to build a system of SACC by the end of this Parliament, to provide year round SACC that is free to those who need it most.

The aim of the Fund was to make SACC more accessible, affordable and flexible for parents/carers (from hereon in referred to as 'parents' for brevity) from low-income families or those at risk of experiencing child poverty. The particular target groups were: lone parent families; families with a disabled adult or child; larger families (three or more children); minority ethnic families; families with a child under one; and families where the mother is under 25.

The first phase of the Fund (2020-2022) enabled 15 organisations to run SACC projects. Eight of these continued in the second phase: Clyde Gateway; Hame Fae Hame; Indigo; Support, Help and Integration in Perthshire; St Mirin's OSC; Stepping Stones for Families; SupERkids; and The Wee Childcare Company. They were joined by two pilot projects managed by the Scottish Government: Ayr United Football Academy and The Scottish Childminding Association.

The Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos to evaluate phase two of the Access to Childcare Fund (April 2022 to February 2023), including the pilot projects. There were two main aims of the evaluation:

- to assess the extent to which the projects contributed to expected outcomes on parents' employment, health and wellbeing; family costs and income; and children's health, wellbeing and relationships

- to synthesise learning and produce recommendations to inform the design of a system of school age childcare for Scotland

The evaluation included one-to-one or paired depth interviews with project lead(s); stakeholders; and parents and children/young people (from hereon in referred to as 'children' for brevity) who attended, within each project. The evaluation team also reviewed data from monitoring reports from each project.

Overview of Access to Childcare Fund projects

Project leads and stakeholders described various barriers families faced to accessing SACC that they were trying to address using ACF funding. These included a lack of accessible timings or locations; cost; stigma around targeted provision; and, in some cases, wider family wellbeing issues.

Projects offered a range of activities and support, depending on their focus and families' needs. Provision for children included activities (indoor and outdoor) and trips, as well as food provision and wellbeing support. Some projects also provided support to parents around employability, wellbeing and financial inclusion.

In some cases, partners (typically schools, or third sector organisations) were involved in running provision or in providing access to facilities, further support or referring families to projects.

Participation and reach

Projects were primarily targeted at families in the priority groups. However, there were projects that included families from outwith these groups, either through a place-based approach or on a case-by-case basis.

Attendance levels varied, from projects operating waiting lists to those where attendance was more changeable and not at capacity. The most highly represented groups included lone parent families and those with a disabled adult or child (partly due to the fact that two services catered exclusively for children with additional support needs (ASN)). Project leads mentioned that there was lower representation among non-working families, working families who require support, fathers, ethnic minority families and young mothers.

Projects were primarily promoted to families via schools, other stakeholders and wider advertising. Projects aimed to minimise stigma by widening access to provision and ensuring confidentiality for those using funded places.

Achieving accessible childcare

Overall, the projects appear to have been broadly successful in delivering SACC that is accessible to target families.

Features of projects that made them accessible included straightforward sign-up and referral processes; making provision easy to get to (for example by financing transport); and catering for the needs of children with ASN. This was underpinned by having dedicated and suitably trained staff and good relationships with schools.

However, some challenges remained in relation to provision of transport, support for children with ASN and staffing challenges more generally.

Achieving flexible childcare

While there were some projects that clearly achieved a very flexible service for families, for others this was less of a focus.

Features that allowed parents to use SACC flexibly included not requiring families to commit to a long-term contract and instead allowing for bookings (or cancellations) at short notice. Increasing the choice of sessions and flexibility around pick up/drop off times were also seen as important.

These processes were underpinned by having sufficient resources and skilled staff with strong relationships with families and a sound understanding of their needs. In line with this, the main challenges to providing flexibility were around funding and staffing SACC sufficiently.

Achieving affordable childcare

All projects had put in place measures that made their services more affordable for families and feedback on this was broadly positive. The main way this was achieved was via fully funded or subsidised places, which enabled parents and their children to access school age childcare services that otherwise they would have found difficult to afford. This was seen as especially important for families of children with ASN, where services would normally be very expensive for them. Adapting payment plans or booking options could also increase affordability (such as spreading out payments or only charging for the hours used).

When projects were able to minimise travel costs, this removed a further financial barrier, particularly in rural areas. This was done by providing transport directly or financially supporting families with paying for transport (although projects faced their own financial barriers in doing so).

Remaining barriers to providing affordable services included limits on subsidies of SACC fees (meaning some were still difficult for families to afford) and concerns around the long-term sustainability of funding.

Outcomes for parents

Overall, projects had made progress across all the intended outcomes for parents. Family support was an important factor in achieving this. There was evidence that every project had contributed to parents being able to start, maintain or progress their career, or engage in training. Key factors were having flexible timings and affordable services that made working a financially viable option.

Improvements in parental health and wellbeing were reported by projects and parents themselves. This resulted from having respite time, relieving stress and receiving direct support facilitated by projects (e.g., peer support groups).

While there were positive outcomes relating to families' financial circumstances, this was partially dependent on whether parents using subsidised places would have otherwise used paid-for childcare. However, it was noted that supporting parents with employment could help boost household income in the longer-term, in line with aims in the [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](#) around helping parents to enter, sustain and progress in work as a sustainable route out of poverty.

Outcomes for children and young people

Providing enjoyment and fun helped to boost children's mental health, fostered by a child-led approach to activities, and strong relationships with SACC staff. Projects had also identified wellbeing issues and addressed these through signposting or providing additional support themselves. Projects also increased physical wellbeing for children through facilitating active play and physical activity; providing access to food; and creating a safe place for children outside of school hours.

SACC was also seen to strengthen children's relationships (with both adults and peers) and develop their social skills. This was seen as particularly impactful among children with ASN who may face more challenges interacting with peers

outside of a structured environment. This was supported by having a mix of ages and continuity of staff.

Key lessons and conclusions

Overall, the evidence collected as part of this evaluation indicates that Phase 2 projects met the aims of the Fund – to provide SACC that is accessible, flexible and affordable for low-income families.

While projects trialled a variety of different approaches and models of SACC, there were some cross-cutting themes that impacted on their ability to successfully achieve the intended aims and outcomes:

- **Staffing the offer**. There were some difficulties reported around recruiting SACC staff that, for some projects, were ongoing. This was particularly relevant for recruiting staff to care for children with complex ASN, and for projects based in rural areas.

- **Fostering strong relationships.** Strong relationships between families and staff were viewed as a vital part of delivering SACC. Therefore, investing in the SACC workforce is an important consideration for wider roll-out. Factors to consider include: pay, conditions, training, job security, making staff feel valued and supporting staff wellbeing.

- **Partnership working.** Partners played a key role in maximising the reach and accessibility of projects via referrals. They also helped projects to achieve outcomes for families by providing additional sources of support to which project staff could signpost. Wider external issues, however, such as staffing challenges and high workloads within partner organisations, could negatively impact on projects' relationships with their partners.

- **Family support.** In order to benefit fully from SACC provision, parents needed support with a range of wider wellbeing issues. Providing this depended on building strong relationships with families as well as good partnership working. When projects employed a dedicated family support worker, they felt this had significantly enhanced their family support offer.

- **Inclusion of children with ASN.** Additional considerations around delivering SACC for children with ASN included: providing extra staffing/resource; recruiting staff with additional training (or providing this); tailoring activities or the physical space to meet different children's needs; and including additional accessibility support (e.g., transport).

- **Monitoring and evaluation**. Lessons around conducting good monitoring and evaluation in the future included: providing support to projects around evaluation methods; establishing a peer network for SACC services to share learnings; and clearly communicating the requirements and expectations from Scottish Government.

- **Sustainability**. There was a general concern expressed by project leads about sustainability of features (particularly funded places) that they had developed as part of the ACF without continued funding.

7

1. Introduction and methods

About the Access to Childcare Fund

The Access to Childcare Fund (referred to as ACF or the Fund) was established by the Scottish Government in July 2020 to run and test new models of School Age Childcare (SACC) and ran until February 2023. The Fund was managed by Children in Scotland and an expert advisory group. SACC is care provided to primary school-aged children outside of normal school hours. It includes both regulated childcare and organised children's activities (such as sports clubs) provided by individuals or groups other than schools, and not registered by the Care Inspectorate. The £3 million Fund formed part of the Scottish Government's ambition to build a system of SACC by the end of this Parliament.[1]

This ambition sits within the Scottish Government's wider commitment to tackling child poverty. SACC can contribute to this aim by enabling parents/carers (from hereon in referred to as 'parents' for brevity) to secure employment or take on further work and/or training, among other benefits for parents and children[2]. The aim of the Fund was to make SACC more accessible, affordable and flexible for parents from low-income families or those at risk of experiencing child poverty (as identified in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan[3]. The target groups were: lone parent families; families with a disabled adult or child; larger families (three or more children); minority ethnic families; families with a child under one year old; and families where the mother is under 25 years of age.

The first phase of the Fund enabled 15 organisations to run SACC projects. During the second phase of the Fund (April 2022 to February 2023), the focus of this evaluation, eight of the 15 organisations had their funding continued. Two further projects (The Scottish Childminding Association and Ayr United Football Academy) received funding as part of the second phase and were managed by the Scottish Government. The ten organisations funded in the second phase were: Ayr United Football Academy (AUFA); Clyde Gateway; Hame Fae Hame; Indigo; The Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA); Support, Help and Integration in Perthshire (SHIP); St Mirin's Out of School Care (OSC); Stepping Stones for Families; SupERkids; and The Wee Childcare Company.

Evaluation aims and questions

The Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos to evaluate the second phase of the Fund. There were two main aims of the evaluation:

- To assess the extent to which the projects contributed to the expected outcomes for the Fund:

---

[1] [Bright Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026](#). Scottish Government website.

[2] *ibid*

[3] [Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022](#). Scottish Government website.

- improving parents' employment, health and wellbeing
- reducing family costs and increasing family income, and
- improving children's health, wellbeing and relationships

- To synthesise learning from the projects and produce recommendations to inform the design of a system of school age childcare for Scotland.

The evaluation covered both process and outcomes, including consideration of how processes of setting up and implementing SACC models supported the outcomes achieved. (See Appendix One for more detailed objectives.)

More specifically, the evaluation aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How have the Access to Child Fund projects been delivered in practice?

2. What has the impact of the projects been for parents, children, and families as a whole (especially those in the target groups)?

3. What are the key lessons from delivery of the projects for a future system of school age childcare across Scotland?

This evaluation follows on from the evaluation of the first phase of the Fund which was carried out by Children in Scotland.[4] The evaluation of Phase 1 focused on initial processes and early indications of outcomes and found that, although the projects were constrained in their operation by the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges, they delivered a number of benefits. These included positive impacts on health and wellbeing for families, parental employment opportunities, family finances and partnership working. This evaluation aims to build on these findings by exploring how positive outcomes like these have been achieved, and which processes and approaches work well (or less well) for delivering accessible SACC.

Methods

The evaluation was qualitative in nature. This was considered to be the most appropriate design to meet the objectives of the research as it provides an in-depth understanding of experiences of delivering and accessing provision through the Fund. The aim in qualitative research is to identify as much diversity of experience rather than attempting to achieve a sample that is statistically representative of the wider population. Estimates of prevalence based on qualitative data are therefore inappropriate and this report avoids quantifying language, such as 'most' or 'a few' when discussing findings from qualitative interviews.

The evaluation included four main elements:

- one to one or paired in-depth interviews with each project lead(s)
- one to one or paired in-depth interviews with stakeholders

---

[4] [Access to Childcare Fund 2020-2022: final evaluation report](#). Children in Scotland website.

- one to one or paired in-depth interviews with parents and children and young people (from hereon in referred to as 'children' for brevity) who attended each project
- review of project monitoring reports

Sampling and recruitment

Project leads

The research team interviewed project lead(s) from each organisation (ten interviews including 14 participants). Introductions between the research team and project leads were facilitated by the Scottish Government. Interviews were carried out in January and February 2023.

Stakeholders

The research team then interviewed 11 stakeholders involved in planning, delivery, or referral (individual interviews for nine projects and a paired interview for one project). Stakeholders were suggested by project leads and contacted by Ipsos to invite them to take part and arrange an interview. The research team aimed to interview participants representing a range of organisations and roles. These included: headteachers; social worker; health visitor; local authority partners; childminder. This phase of the research also included an interview with a staff member from Children in Scotland who was involved in supporting the ACF delivery. Interviews were carried out between March and May 2023.

Families

Parents[5] and children who attended each project were recruited with the help of project leads. Project leads were briefed by Ipsos via email and provided with written information (Appendix One) to share with parents, inviting them to take part and to contact the research team directly. The research team then checked eligibility and arranged a suitable time for an interview. Project leads were asked to identify a number of families with the aim of interviews being carried out with three families from each project. Interviews took place between March and May 2023.

Depending on the age, ability and preferences of children who had attended the project and the preferences of their parent, the research team either spoke to children on their own (one group discussion with three children); the parent on their own (13 interviews); or conducted a joint interview with both parent and children (17 interviews). In total Ipsos carried out 30 family interviews, covering the experiences of 40 children who had attended a project[6]. A group discussion with 15 children was carried out by Indigo staff members[7]. This group involved 12 girls and three boys, aged between six and 11 years old (included in Table 1.3, although ethnicity was unknown for these children).

---

[5] No carers or other family members were interviewed by the research team.

[6] The experiences of a further 15 CYP were captured via a discussion group run by Indigo.

[7] This was carried out at the request of Indigo, in order to engage their children (many of whom could be classed as vulnerable and who may not be confident taking part in a depth interview) in the most effective and ethically sensitive way.

Tables 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 show the profile of these participating families.

Table 1.1 Profile of families

	Number of interviews
Total	**30**
Target group[8]	
Lone parent families	19
Families with a disabled adult or child	15
Larger families (three or more children)	3
Minority ethnic families	3
Families with a child under one year old	0
Families where the mother was under 25 years of age when first child born[9]	3

Table 1.2 Profile of parents

	Number of interviews
Total	**30**
Gender	
Man	2
Woman	28
Age	
Under 25	0
26 - 35	8
36 - 45	15
46+	7
Ethnicity	
Ethnic minority	2
Not ethnic minority	28

---

[8] The total does not sum to 30 as families may represent more than one target group.

[9] For the purpose of this research, given that most CYP invited to participate in this research were of school age, young mothers were defined as being under 25 at the time of their first child being born.

Table 1.3 Profile of children

Total	**55**
Gender	
Boy	24
Girl	31
Age	
5 - 9	39
10 - 18	16
Ethnicity	
Ethnic minority	6
Not ethnic minority	32

Review of monitoring reports

Projects were asked to submit quarterly monitoring reports to the Scottish Government as part of their funding. The reports covered topics such as: activities undertaken to achieve project aims, number of families supported, and impact of SACC provision on families. The research team received two sets of documentation from the Scottish Government between November and January 2023. These documents were reviewed prior to fieldwork to inform interviews with project leads. The research team then received final reports from each project from the Scottish Government in April 2023. These reports were then analysed as discussed in the following section.

Data collection and analysis

Discussion guides were developed for each audience to ensure all relevant issues were covered in interviews (see Appendix Two). In-depth interviews/paired in-depth interviews were conducted either by telephone or video call (depending on participants' preferences) between January and May 2023. Families were given £35 (as an online voucher or bank transfer) to thank them for their time. All interviews were facilitated by members of the research team and were recorded for subsequent analysis. The exception to this was the group discussion with children attending Indigo, which was facilitated by Indigo staff on site, with an Ipsos researcher observing virtually.

Data from interviews were summarised into thematic matrices (using Excel, with each column representing a theme and each row an individual interview so that the data could be sorted in different ways for further analysis). These were developed by the research team and drew on the research questions. These matrices were then reviewed to identify the full range of views and experiences under each theme.

This research was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research, ISO 20252.

Scope and limitations

It should be noted that several of the ACF-funded projects existed before the funding was available. Where possible, the evaluation focused on funded elements (which were different for each project) but, as it was not always possible to fully differentiate these from the overall operation of the project, the report generally refers to projects as a whole, especially when discussing families' experiences.

It was also not possible to differentiate between regulated provision and organised children's activities. This is due to there being only two projects offering organised activities and these two projects being both very different in nature and having other features differentiating them from the regulated projects. Furthermore, parents using the unregulated projects made no mention of this feature.

The evaluation focused on short term outcomes only and it was not possible to measure any medium or long term outcomes.

It was not possible to include families who would be eligible for ACF projects but did not take the offer up, although the views of project leads and stakeholders on barriers to engagement were covered. While this does not negatively affect the quality of the data, it should be kept in mind that there may be further barriers to participation that the evaluation could not identify.

Report structure and conventions

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2: **Overview of Access to Childcare Fund projects**. This chapter outlines the key barriers to accessing childcare identified by projects, as well as providing a summary of each phase 2 funded project.

Chapter 3: **Monitoring, reflection and change over time** details the methods used across projects for monitoring and self-evaluation, including what worked well and any challenges faced.

Chapter 4: **Participation and reach** discusses the attendance among the target group and how services were communicated, including the minimisation of stigma.

Chapter 5: **Accessibility** considers how, and to what extent, the projects achieved the intended aim of making their services accessible for families.

Chapter 6: **Flexibility** considers how, and to what extent, the projects achieved the intended aim of making their services flexible for families.

Chapter 7: **Affordability** considers how, and to what extent, the projects achieved the intended aim of making their services affordable for families.

Chapter 8: **Outcomes for parents** assesses to what extent intended outcomes for parents were met, including what worked well or less well and why.

Chapter 9: **Outcomes for children** assesses to what extent intended outcomes for the children attending funded provision were met, including what worked well or less well and why.

Chapter 10: **Key learning and conclusions**.

2. Overview of ACF projects

This chapter will comment on barriers families faced in accessing SACC and introduce each of the projects, including what they intended to achieve and what approaches they used to meet the aims of the Fund.

Barriers facing families

Project leads and stakeholders highlighted five main barriers families faced when accessing SACC that they were trying to address using the ACF funding. These barriers were also reflected in discussions with parents:

- **A lack of SACC in the local area**. A lack of provision was particularly noted for children with ASN (additional support needs) (relating to suitable venues and activities and having trained staff in place) as well as families living in rural areas or in more deprived areas.

- **Cost of SACC**. This was noted as a significant barrier for families (especially with more than one child, and for children with ASN) and resulted in work or increasing hours not being viable for some parents. Upfront costs were also highlighted as a challenge for parents moving into work and waiting for a first pay check. Whilst particularly impacting target group families, cost was also considered a barrier to families who would not be classed as low income[10] but for whom childcare costs can be difficult to afford.

- **Challenges getting to and from venues**. Suitable transportation was a particular barrier for children with ASN where SACC was not located within their school. There were also challenges for families living in rural areas in getting to settings using public transport or in making sure it is worthwhile travelling for the sessions.

- **Lack of suitable or flexible timings.** Timing of provision can be a particular challenge for parents with changing shift patterns and for those who need to collect children after 5pm.

- **Stigma when accessing targeted provision.** Some participants felt that there are families who would benefit from free or subsidised SACC but do not come forward because of feelings of embarrassment, particularly those living in small communities.

More generally, some projects located in more deprived areas noted the need to address barriers relating to employability, physical health and mental health which can affect families' ability to access SACC and increase their household income.

Projects felt they had a clear understanding of the barriers facing families through working in their local community (generally over many years) and from wider staff expertise. Other ways in which projects sought to understand barriers included: feedback from families; conversations with partners; and using learning from phase

---

[10] This includes anyone with an individual or combined income under the Child Poverty thresholds (under 60% of median household income after housing costs (estimates taken from Child Poverty in Scotland: the facts. CPAG website.

1 of the Fund. Some projects had also done previous trials of different models of SACC, outwith the Fund, to understand families' needs. The following chapters discuss how projects sought to address and overcome these barriers.

Partnership working

Partnership working in this context refers to when local authorities, public sector and third sector organisations come together to deliver for the needs of families. The extent to which partners were involved in delivery, and how, varied by project. In some cases, partners were involved in running provision (SACC and/or family support), or in providing access to facilities. In other cases, partners roles were to refer families for support or to provide advice/support to project staff. These were generally existing partnerships and included: local authority teams (social work, education, leisure and culture, community safety); schools (headteachers, parent teacher associations); Third Sector organisations (employability, welfare, financial support); and health visitors.

Range of activities

Projects offered a range of activities and support, depending on their focus and families' needs. For children this included:

- sports/physical activities
- outdoor activities (e.g., spending time in local park or playground)
- arts, crafts and puzzles
- cooking and baking
- music
- trips (e.g., to the beach or parks during holidays)
- wellbeing support
- food (snacks or meals depending on length of session)

For parents this included:

- employability (e.g., access to courses such as First Aid or coaching)
- wellbeing (e.g., walking groups, gym memberships, peer support, counselling)
- financial inclusion (e.g., welfare advice)
- crisis support (e.g., access to foodbank)

Overview of projects

Table 2.1 provides an overview of the range of provision delivered by the ACF projects. The projects are summarised in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

Table 2.1: Overview of ACF projects

	Holiday club	Breakfast/lunch club	Flexible hours	Outdoor activity	Rural provision	Subsidised/free	After school activity	Weekend	Family support	ASN	Transport	3rd sector partner
Ayr United Football Academy	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Clyde Gateway	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Hame Fae Hame	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Indigo	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
SHIP	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Scottish Childminding Association	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Stepping Stones	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
St Mirin's OSC	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
SupERkids	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
The Wee Childcare Company		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	

Summary of projects

Ayr United Football Academy (AUFA)

AUFA run after school and holiday provision focusing on physical activity (but offering a range of other activities) for children in the local area. The project is promoted by schools and delivered by AUFA coaches in four primary schools.

Key feature(s): organised children's activities; place-based provision; run by local football club

What did AUFA intend to achieve?

- Children take part in activities they would not otherwise have the opportunity to do
- Respite for families
- Parents/carers have greater opportunities to be able to work, study or gain qualifications

How did AUFA seek to achieve this?

- Free places
- Placed-based provision
- Partnership working
- Offering coaching qualifications

Clyde Gateway (Supporting Families Project)

Clyde Gateway is an urban regeneration company. The project focuses on employability, skills development, and wellbeing, whilst providing childcare to help families access services. Provision is targeted at unemployed, low income families in South Lanarkshire and referrals are made by schools.

Key feature(s): Family support worker who identifies families' needs; partnership working

What did Clyde Gateway intend to achieve?

- Increased partnership working/ collaboration
- Increased employment
- Increased educational attainment
- Improved physical health and mental health
- Increased access to after school childcare
- Improved financial inclusion

How did Clyde Gateway seek to achieve this?

- Free provision
- Tailored and holistic family support

Hame Fae Hame

Hame Fae Hame delivers wraparound childcare provision (including holidays) in Shetland. Subsidised places are available for families known to be in need and referrals are made by local authority partners.

Key feature(s): 'Pay as you go' booking model; rural provision

What did Hame Fae Hame intend to achieve?

- Increase range of activities
- Build on flexible model to maintain affordability
- Better resources to support children attending
- Provide support and respite to families identified as in need or vulnerable

How did Hame Fae Hame seek to achieve this?

- 'Pay as you go' booking model
- Subsidised places
- Flexible hours
- Child-led activity
- Improvement to facilities
- Improvements to staffing levels and conditions

Indigo

Indigo delivers wraparound out-of-school care, holiday provision and family support for families in Castlemilk, Glasgow. Families are referred by local partners and provision is free or subsidised depending on household income.

Innovative feature(s): Family support worker; tailored service for 11-16 year olds ('Indy Youth')

What did Indigo intend to achieve?

- Increased numbers of families with access to affordable childcare and able to contribute to its costs.
- Increased household income and financial stability.
- Increased family wellbeing.
- Increased numbers of families in sustained employment/training or learning.
- Improved understanding of progression steps for families with children with ASN.

How did Indigo seek to achieve this?

- Free/subsidised provision
- Use of an asset-based approach
- Advocacy, support and information for families
- Strong relationships
- Individual plans for children
- Peer support
- Highly trained staff

Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) (Access to Childminding)

The Access to Childminding project focuses on improving outcomes for low-income families by increasing their household income and reducing costs associated with childcare. Provision was available in five local authorities and referrals could be made by partners and childminders.

Key feature(s): Childminding provision

What did SCMA intend to achieve?

- Delivery of a sustainable childminding model that provides free/subsidised places, supporting one or more of the target groups
- Partnership working with local authorities, employability services, third sector and childminders
- Provide an evaluation framework for the Project so that the impact on low-income families can be measured.
- Focus on positive impacts for parents, carers and children

How did SCMA seek to achieve this?

- 15 weeks free provision
- Collecting feedback from families
- Tailored provision

Stepping Stones for Families

Stepping Stones is a charity that delivers subsidised provision (after-school, weekend and holiday) for children in Possilpark, Glasgow. Stepping Stones is based on a school campus and the project is advertised by staff and community partners.

Key feature(s): 'no wrong door' approach for childcare for all ages

What did Stepping Stones intend to achieve?

- Possilpark community will have a more integrated, flexible childcare service
- Children will be more socially integrated with improved health and wellbeing
- More families will have access to quality SACC with weekends as an integral part of the offer.

How did Stepping Stones seek to achieve this?

- Support of family support worker
- Subsidised provision
- 'Pay as you go' booking
- Child-led activity

St Mirin's Out of School Club

The club offers provision (wraparound, evenings, weekend and holiday) based in St Mirin's Primary School, Glasgow. They also provide an in-school specialism service to support children experiencing difficulties at school and a crisis intervention service providing additional support for families in crisis.

Key feature(s): Trauma-informed staff; providing support during the school day; close relationship with the school; creation of outdoor woodland space.

What did St Mirin's intend to achieve?

- Support children with a wide range of issues and concerns that are impacting on their health and wellbeing
- Support families with work commitments and ensure job continuity
- Provide immediate responsive support to families facing trauma, major life events and adversities

How did St Mirin's seek to achieve this?

- Free or subsidised provision
- Partnership working
- Focus on play
- Highly trained staff
- Variety of activities/interventions
- Strong relationships

SupERkids

SupERkids is a parent-led charity that delivers free provision (evening, weekend and holiday) for children in East Renfrewshire with complex ASN. Provision is based in a local special school.

Key feature(s): parent-led organised activities for children with ASN

What did SupERkids intend to achieve?

- Children will have increased opportunity to participate in fun activities, improving their confidence and independence in activities they are normally excluded from
- Children will have increased opportunities to meet other children and increase their well-being
- Families will have increased resilience to cope with their child's disability and the 24/7 caring responsibilities through accessible and subsidised activities

How did SupERkids seek to achieve this?

- Child-led activity
- Free provision
- Facilitating respite for parents/carers
- Being open to feedback
- Individual support for children
- Staff trained to support a range of needs

Support, Help and Integration in Perthshire (SHIP)

SHIP is a charity that delivers provision (after-school, weekend and holiday) for children in Perthshire with complex ASN. SHIP is based in a local special school and provision is free or subsidised depending on household income.

Key feature(s): Use of volunteers to help provide individual support.

What did SHIP intend to achieve?

- Flexible childcare to allow families to work/study or care for other children
- An accessible/affordable service

- An inclusive service that allows children the opportunity to make friends and learn life/social skills through play

How did SHIP seek to achieve this?

- Subsidised/free places
- Providing transport
- Highly trained staff

- Individual support for children
- Offering taster sessions
- Child-led activity

Wee Childcare Company

Wee Childcare Company delivers before and after-school provision at various schools in Angus. Transport is provided for children who attend other schools in the area and provision is subsidised.

Key feature(s): flexible booking system

What did Wee Childcare Company intend to achieve?

- Eligible children from low-income families will gain access to childcare that meets their needs
- Improved financial stability for families on the brink of poverty

- Improved wellbeing to all service users
- Better relationships between SACC Sector and local authority

How did Wee Childcare Company seek to achieve this?

- Subsidised places
- Providing transport
- Flexible booking
- Range of activities

3. Monitoring, reflection and change over time

Summary:

- Project staff had varying levels of experience in relation to formal monitoring required by the Scottish Government. However, all projects were responsive to the needs of, and feedback from, families.

- Monitoring had benefited projects in various ways, including: helping to identify and reach families; identifying ways to improve approaches to delivery; learning from and strengthening relationships with partners; and keeping projects "on track" in relation to their intended aims.

- However, challenges included: limited knowledge of evaluation; lack of staff capacity; low parent response rates; and parents feeling uncomfortable sharing personal information.

- Features that supported monitoring and evaluation included: support around identifying and measuring outcomes; having a peer network; and strong relationships between Scottish Government and projects.

This chapter will explore approaches to monitoring and reflection, including learnings to inform future planning and delivery of SACC.

The Fund had an emphasis on monitoring to facilitate the testing of different models of SACC and to help projects learn what works and adapt accordingly to make improvements. Projects were provided with reporting templates and were required to report quarterly to the Scottish Government on progress. Project staff had varying levels of experience in relation to formal monitoring, and this is reflected in data in the reports provided. However, it was clear that all projects were responsive to the needs of, and feedback from, families.

Information contained within monitoring reports varied. Some projects collected qualitative and quantitative information on the impact of provision from parents, children, and staff/partners at various points in time and produced visual outputs. This also included the use of systems to record support families received and resulting outcomes. Other projects focused more on recording the characteristics of families supported by the Fund.

A variety of methods were used to collect data from different audiences:

- From parents: via questionnaires (generally at the beginning or end of a term), at initial referral meetings with project staff to understand their needs, at (often informal) catch-ups with project staff.

- From children: by staff asking for feedback, through photos or videos.

- From staff: observations on the needs of families.

Benefits of monitoring

There were various ways in which project leads said ACF monitoring had benefitted

their project. These included:

- **Identifying and reaching families who might benefit from support:**

  "…before the project, we would never in a million years have asked families lots of personal details like household incomes and things like that. So, that has helped us identify families."

  (Project lead)

- **Identifying ways to improve their approach to delivery:**

  "[Reviewing our data] helps us to then sit down with [staff member] and our other service managers and say, 'okay, what are we going to do differently? How are we going to change?'"

  (Project lead)

- **Learning from and strengthening relationships with partners:**

  "We have never really asked our partners for feedback before, so it was quite interesting to say 'actually, how are we doing? What feedback have you had?'…we can have different conversations and build relationships with those partners and families and children too."

  (Project lead)

- **Making sure projects were "on track" in relation to their aims:**

  "It has kept you on track, you know exactly where you…what you're doing, where you want to be, and how you're going to get there..."

  (Project lead)

Barriers and learnings

Project leads discussed challenges they had experienced when undertaking monitoring and reporting, and how they had/would address these, including:

- **Limited knowledge of how to evaluate projects**, including on how to use specific tools such as a driver diagram. Training provided by Evaluation Support Scotland was described as helpful, and there was a desire for more support in this area.

- **Having staff capacity to spend time collecting and analysing data**. There were comments that monitoring and reporting requirements were onerous and led to management time not being charged for. One project would have hired a member of staff for administration had they known the work involved. However, one project noted that having ACF funding had reduced the time they needed to spend on applying for funding from other sources.

- **Low response rate from parents to requests for feedback**. One project changed the platform they used to distribute feedback forms to make it easier to complete, as it allowed access from different devices such as mobile phones and tablets.

- **Parents feeling uncomfortable sharing personal information** such as household income. Strong relationships between families and staff were felt to help overcome this.

23

More generally, it was noted that, because projects support families in so many different ways, and often go 'above and beyond', it can be challenging for staff to reflect on everything they do and communicate this to others:

> "Initially you thought this is obvious, obvious to you… because you forget how much is second nature, because that is your life."
>
> (Project lead)

When it comes to monitoring and evaluation best practice, several features were identified by project leads and stakeholders as important:

- **Identifying clear intended outcomes** and having support around this, recognising staff's varying level of experience:

  > "This is the first time I've been to this stage of monitoring and reporting, so having the Evaluation Scotland sessions was really helpful."
  >
  > (Project lead)

- **Understanding how to measure impact**, for example by identifying short, medium- and long-term outcomes and taking baseline measures.

- **A peer network to share learnings**. It was clear that staff valued having the opportunity to connect and share experiences with staff from the other projects as part of peer network meetings.

- **Strong relationships** between projects and the Scottish Government to help understand expectations and experiences of delivering funding.

Changes to SACC delivery

Projects' key aims had generally not changed over the course of involvement in the Fund. Instead, some project leads described how delivery processes had "evolved" over time in response to their practical experience of delivery or in response to feedback from families. This is explored in more detail in later chapters, but examples include changing times of activities to reflect parental preference, updating booking systems to improve accuracy, or adapting referral processes to better reach target families.

Some project leads also commented on changes they would ideally like to make to future delivery. These included: employing family support staff to advise on welfare and other sources of support, increasing staff numbers to make SACC available to more families, and extending reach into rural areas.

Project leads commented more widely on their aims across the lifetime of the Fund. Where it had not been possible for projects to fully meet some of their aims, this tended to relate to external factors such as the labour market, the impact of COVID-19 (including longer-term impacts e.g., on the labour market), or transport barriers. These factors are discussed in more detail in later chapters where they related to phase 2 of the Fund.

Changes to organisations

Project leads were also asked what impact the Fund had had on their organisation

more widely. These included having the time and resources to **test new ideas** and approaches to SACC delivery:

> "…there was lots of little things that had been hanging around for a long time and this funding gave us the people to actually find out the hard facts and then test out assumptions and what we thought might work."
>
> (Project lead)

There were also examples of projects being able to employ more staff or improve staff **pay and conditions**. However, there were concerns around these positive impacts being unsustainable without funding:

> "[The funding] was used to actually improve the staff pay [and] conditions, and I think especially before COVID, I think childcare staff in general were starting to feel quite undervalued and taken for granted."
>
> (Project lead)

> "We have staff employed specifically for after school clubs…without the funding they wouldn't be employed, that is a big worry for the future."
>
> (Project lead)

Projects also commented on the ways in which the Fund had helped to enhance their reputation and profile in the community. For example, one project lead felt that their family support worker role enabled them to be more consistent with their work within the community and to strengthen relationships. Another highlighted the opportunities afforded by the Fund to demonstrate the skill and pedagogy behind what SACC providers can offer:

> "There are cultural challenges between people's views of school age childcare. […] I think the funding has certainly helped them to understand better what we actually do and that there is clear knowledge and pedagogy and practice and thinking behind the work that we do."
>
> (Project lead)

4. Participation and reach

Summary:

- Projects were primarily aimed at families in the six target groups. However, projects included families from outwith these groups, either through a place-based approach or on a case-by-case basis.

- Families with a disabled adult or child and lone parents were the most highly represented groups. While projects had been well-attended, there is scope for greater representation among: non-working families; working families who require support; fathers; ethnic minority families and young mothers.

- Projects were primarily promoted via schools, other stakeholders such as social workers and wider advertising.

- Projects were mindful of the potential for stigma and used approaches to minimise this, including: making attendance less visible; and assuring confidentiality.

This chapter provides detail on: the projects' target groups; attendance, the ways in which projects were communicated and promoted, and how projects minimised any stigma that families may feel in attending. This feeds into the assessment of the extent to which projects have been accessible to target families and the factors associated with accessible provision (Chapter 5).

Targeting and eligibility criteria

As described in Chapter 1, the Scottish Government specified that ACF funding was to be used to reach families in the six target groups. This was adhered to by projects, although there was some flexibility, and precise eligibility criteria varied.

Two projects (SupERkids and SHIP) were specifically aimed at children with ASN and their families, although families may also have been in other target groups. The remaining projects were aimed at families in the target groups more generally. While there was a view that those in need did tend to fall into one of the six target groups, some projects used their discretion to offer provision to families they considered to be in need but not in one of these groups. They described these families as the 'working poor'.

One project noted they had seen a significant increase in families coming from wider referrals, rather than being already known to them, which they felt demonstrated there was a wider need in the community for their provision. Another project had taken the decision to subsidise families who were paying for the after-school club, first by 20% and then 25%, in recognition of the issues they knew these families were facing. In such cases, the target groups may have been used to prioritise but not as exclusive criteria:

"We kind of use the tackling poverty criteria as how to prioritise but, again, I think, kind of COVID and cost of living, has shown us that people from all different

types of backgrounds, that might maybe previously [have been in] quite comfortable circumstances, might require either some temporary or more ongoing support…so we don't accept eligibility just in case that excludes someone that really needs it."

<div align="right">(Project lead)</div>

Operating a more open eligibility policy was further reinforced by the fact that accessing any support was reported to be challenging for the 'working poor'.

"The majority of our families do sit within that (target group) […] but we had so many families telling us they were having to jump through multiple hoops to access any kind of support and… children and young people were being impacted because of processes … If a family needs help, they need help for a reason and, unless it's impossible or it's going to cause a problem with other children and families, then we wanted to make sure our service was as open as we could possibly make it."

<div align="right">(Project lead)</div>

To ensure provision was accessible to all who needed it, one project situated in an area of multiple deprivation (AUFA) used a place-based approach to eligibility, making provision available to all families attending local schools.

Attendance

Attendance levels varied from projects operating waiting lists for some/all activities to those where attendance was more changeable and not at capacity. In some cases, there was variability within projects, with some elements having waiting lists and other elements being less well attended.

It was not possible to calculate the overall number of families who used each service as attendance data collated by Children in Scotland, and provided to the evaluation team, was presented in terms of the number of families falling into each target group rather than the overall number of families attending a particular service, meaning that individual families were counted more than once. These attendance figures for each target group are shown in Table 4.2. They show that lone parents and families where someone has a disability/ASN accounted for the greatest proportion of families attending the projects. Attendance was lower for families with a child under 1 (likely reflecting the focus on school-age childcare) and young mothers.

SupERkids and SHIP were targeted at families with a child/children with ASN only, which goes some way to explaining the high numbers represented in this group. However, other projects also included provision for children with ASN, with one noting they had a disproportionate number of children with ASN. Attendance was also particularly high among lone parent families.

Table 4.2: Number of families attending from target groups[11,12]

Target group	Across all 8 projects (where data was available)	Of all families, number attending SHIP/SupERkids (exclusively ASN)
Families with a disabled adult or child	310	146
Lone parent families	234	29
Larger families (three or more children)	82	17
Minority ethnic families	81	19
Families with a child under one	21	2
Families where the mother was under 25 years of age when first child born[13]	8	0

Projects reflected on any differences in attendance across other groups (both target groups and other factors) and whether any had been more difficult to reach and engage. Those attending were all considered to be in need of the provision. However, that did not mean that projects necessarily felt they were reaching all those who would benefit. **Groups noted as being more difficult to identify and/or reach included:**

- **Non-working families** who did not feel they needed childcare (for projects where childcare is the only/main element). Further, SCMA noted that their main method of referral (offering funded places to families already using a childminder) had meant that, while they supported families who would benefit from the funding, they likely did not reach families not currently working.

- **Working families** who were in need of support but not in one of the target groups. As noted above, these families were recognised as requiring the support. However, challenges identifying them were noted:

  "You've got people who look like they should be able to afford it [but] childcare costs are huge, so it is finding a way to identify families who don't necessarily tick the boxes but are really struggling."

  (Project lead)

- **Fathers:** one project stakeholder noted that it is mostly mothers who have taken up the family support. Furthermore, while we do not have attendance data by sex, only two fathers participated in the evaluation.

---

[11] Note that families can fall into more than one category.

[12] Note that SCMA or AUFA are not included, due to data being counted and reported differently.

[13] For the purpose of this research, since most families participating had children of school age, young mothers were defined as being under 25 at the time of their first child being born. However, it is unclear whether all projects asked for this information upon application, meaning this figure may be an underestimate.

- **Ethnic minority families**: projects noted language and cultural barriers as reasons for not reaching more of these families.

- **Young mothers**: projects were unsure of the reasons for the very low uptake among this group. However, it is likely to be linked to the fact that the provision is for primary school age children and mothers under 25 are perhaps more likely to have a younger child. One project also noted that their past experience had been that younger mothers were less likely to be working, and therefore less likely to require childcare.

While projects felt their projects had been well-attended, with some operating waiting lists, and had reached families in the six target groups, there is scope for them to further widen their reach to include greater representation among the above groups.

How projects were promoted/communicated

Projects were predominantly based in schools and, regardless of the precise approach, **schools played a key role in referral and communications**. This could take the form of distributing universal communications to families via email or fliers (for AUFA, which was open to all in the school, and other projects with universal elements) or using their knowledge of families to target communications and refer them onto the project. Following this, projects took on the administration elements, minimising the burden on schools.

Other stakeholders (e.g., social work, health visitors) also identified families they felt would benefit and referred them to projects. This relied on effective partnership working with stakeholders, to ensure partners were aware of any eligibility criteria as well as what the project offered. The importance of relationships between projects/stakeholders and families was also highlighted as key to effective referral processes, both in terms of encouraging families to take up the offer and in the identification of families who would benefit but may not meet official eligibility criteria. Referral by schools or stakeholders was the only method used for some of the funded or subsidised elements of provision. In these cases, funded places were not advertised and referral was handled sensitively and discreetly to prevent stigma (discussed further below).

There were also examples of parents using the childcare element **as a result of seeking other types of support through the project** first:

"...whilst this funding is directed at supporting children and families requiring school-aged childcare, being part of the whole family support approach supports a much more significant return on investment...many families access the childcare element as a result of seeking support in other areas of family life, i.e. they did not necessarily come specifically looking for free or subsidised childcare"

(Project lead)

Wider advertising, e.g., via social media, posters, and word of mouth had also led

to referrals, with projects and partners noting that families had come to them having heard about the project. This wider advertising would typically focus on the project as a whole, rather than the availability of funded places, to minimise stigma, as noted above. One project highlighted the value of using posters as well as digital methods:

> "When we started to think that digitally there may be a little fatigue, we decided to purchase huge banners and put out a lot of posters. So, we […] went around every shop, every lamppost, so that they could visually see it on their walk to school, on their way home […] we think has made a positive impact because our capacity, certainly in [school], is almost full".
>
> (Project lead)

Some projects also held **open days and taster sessions** to give families an opportunity to find out more about the project before signing up while others were considering this as an approach.

Did projects minimise stigma?

Projects were very mindful of the potential for families to feel embarrassed about receiving support aimed at low-income families - and others knowing they were receiving this. They used carefully considered approaches, described below, to minimise this. Projects operating in smaller, more rural, communities felt that stigma was a particular issue for them. On the whole, however, stigma did not emerge as a significant barrier to participation among evaluation participants.

Stigma was not discussed with all families who took part in the evaluation due to the potential sensitivities of raising it. Where it was discussed, there were parents who did not view it as a concern due to the way in which it was handled by projects - treating them with respect and assuring them of confidentiality - and the fact they were grateful for the support:

> "[They] treat everybody with that respect. There is no judgment, there is no shame, no matter what walk of life you are. What is at the heart of this is the children and that is the difference. They take time, focusing so much on the needs of the children and really looking at them…it didn't even come into it that the parents were feeling judged."
>
> (Parent)

> "I totally get that [some people may feel stigma] but I was quite grateful. I work and I own my house so I don't get much support, that's really nice."
>
> (Parent)

However, stigma remains very difficult to eliminate completely when the projects, with the exception of the AUFA place-based approach, are targeted. Both parents and projects acknowledged this. Parents described concern about how they would respond if their children were questioned about attending. However, as the case below illustrates, this was overcome when parents recognised that the projects were there to support them and had seen the benefits for their family:

"I never really thought too much into it because, at the end of the day, it was a benefit for me and my children… However, I do often think, 'Oh God, like what if the children in the class ask my children how can they go and they don't get an invite?' But I'm quite fortunate that, so far, nothing like that has came about, because … I don't know how I would approach that."

(Parent)

Projects reflected these types of concerns and felt that stigma had been a barrier for some families:

"There have been applications where people have enquired and then decided upon themselves that they are not eligible, even though we personally would disagree, and I honestly can only presume it is through embarrassment that, you know, they would be subsidised, and that they would not use the service at all rather than take a subsidised place."

(Project lead)

A separate, but related, concern raised by a parent was a sense of guilt about taking up the support and a feeling that others may be more in need of it. Again, in the case below, the project had been able to reassure the parent that they were eligible for the support. However, there may be other parents who hold similar views, particularly if they are eligible on the basis of being in one of the target groups but not being low-income.

"I didn't want to take advantage, and sometimes I feel as if I'm taking something that could be used for someone else. But I was assured that, I'm not and that this place was good for [my son] and it was there to support both [him] and myself. And I can only thank [Project] enough, because it's helped me in the long run. […] It's not stigma, it's mainly my conscience."

(Parent)

Approaches used to minimise stigma

As described above, parents primarily attributed the lack of stigma experienced to being treated with dignity and respect. Projects described further ways in which they felt their set-up and processes had helped to minimise any stigma families could feel by alleviating concerns they may have about others knowing they were receiving support aimed at low-income families.

Features of projects that make targeting less visible

First, they had set up provision to ensure that families would not have to worry that being seen attending would let others know that they fell into one of the six target groups. There were two main ways of doing this, the first of which was to widen access to **families outwith the six target groups**. This could be achieved either through operating **a place-based approach**, or on a case-by-case basis for families in need:

"People would know you fall into one of those six [groups] if you attend, so we managed to get the government to say we could go with some families that weren't under the criteria and that helped [with stigma] as well."

<div align="right">(Project lead)</div>

The second way of making attendance less visible was to make the funded/subsidised elements **part of something more universal** rather than a separate service, such as having funded childcare provision within a service that is generally a paid service. In such cases, the minimisation of stigma was further supported by communicating funded or subsidised provision **via direct referral rather than wider advertising** as well as **retaining a nominal fee/donation** rather than offering free provision. This was thought to retain a level of professionalism and make families feel more comfortable with their relationship to the service.

"That is why we introduced the [nominal fee] because that removes the feeling of being different… They don't actually have to pay it, it is a donation we say, but it enables a level of respect and I felt equality between them where they felt 'okay, I am paying for a service, I still fill in all the same forms, you know, I still have to follow all the same boundaries, I still have the same contract', the only difference is the amount."

<div align="right">(Project lead)</div>

Physically locating the project in a building with other services, so that families can attend without it being obvious which service they are there to visit, was also seen to minimise stigma.

Assuring confidentiality

In registering families, projects assured them of confidentiality and maintained this throughout their time at the project. Where families were offered funded places, projects made efforts to ensure that they kept the detail required in referral forms to a minimum and that no one was aware of who had a funded place. This included staff working at the service, something viewed as particularly important in smaller communities:

"What I liked about this Access to Childcare was it actually removed the stigma slightly because [project lead] had made it very clear that she didn't want to know why we were referring these families. […] So not even the staff would actually know that they were on that funded place. And the two families that I had referred…I think they actually took that up because I was able to say to them 'no stigma here, you know, nobody's going to know."

<div align="right">(Project stakeholder)</div>

"If people know you're not going to emblazon it on the wall or put it on a sheet of paper - it's about knowing people, it's all about reassuring them that it will be kept confidential."

<div align="right">(Project stakeholder)</div>

Positive initial communications

Projects also considered the possibility of stigma in the language used to describe

their project to parents. Projects and stakeholders talked about **promoting the provision positively** and focusing on the benefits when discussing it with parents initially, for example as a 'health academy' for children and as childcare/wider support for parents.

Ensuring that conversations and referrals were handled sensitively and, ideally, done by those with an **existing relationship with the family** was also seen to help minimise the risk of causing offence when offering support and, in turn, make families feel more comfortable about accepting it.

> "… trying to approach families and let them know if they are eligible, you have to form that relationship first […] with the family to not cause offence."
>
> (Project lead)

One project also reflected more generally on stigma and noted that wider changes in their school community were perceived to have helped to minimise stigma more generally, for example fundraising for school trips so that everyone could attend without having to worry about paying for them.

5.   Achieving accessible childcare

Summary:

- Overall, the projects appear to have been broadly successful in delivering childcare that is accessible to those target families attending them.

- Features of projects that made them accessible included: straightforward and supportive sign-up and referral processes; making provision easy to get to; providing a service that appeals to families; and delivering provision that is accessible for children with ASN.

- Accessibility was underpinned by: having access to/positive relationships with schools; financing transport where required; having dedicated and responsive staff, and being able to recruit and retain suitably trained staff to support children with ASN.

- Accessibility challenges remained in relation to: provision of transport; support for children with ASN and staffing challenges more generally.

The following three chapters will cover to what extent projects met the three main aims of the Fund: making provision accessible (this chapter), flexible (Chapter 6) and affordable (Chapter 7) for families. They will also consider what processes worked more or less well in achieving this, and any challenges in providing accessible, flexible and affordable childcare and family support that remain.

Overall, the projects appear to have been broadly successful in delivering childcare that is **accessible** to those target families attending them. This assessment takes into account the findings of the previous chapter as well as the factors that helped to both engage and retain families, covered in this chapter.

Projects aimed to deliver provision that was accessible to target families. As described in Chapter 2, a lack of any local childcare was a barrier in some areas. Therefore, simply by existing, projects had gone some way to meeting this aim. However, while families who participated in the evaluation had typically been able to easily access a place at their project without having to go on a waiting list, some projects were operating at capacity, noting that **staffing challenges** were the main factor limiting further growth.

This aside, there were several ways in which projects sought to overcome (potential) barriers to access. These included: supportive and straightforward sign-up and referral processes; making provision easy to get to; providing a high-quality service; and the ability to cater for the needs of children with ASN.

These were underpinned by having: access to, and positive relationships with, schools; being able to finance transport where required; having staff who were dedicated and responsive to families, resulting in positive relationships being formed; and being able to recruit and retain suitably trained staff to support children with ASN.

Supportive and straightforward sign-up and referral processes

Straightforward sign-up processes were considered important in ensuring that families were not put off attending by administrative processes. This was borne out by the accounts of families who noted, regardless of the specific approach used, that it was very easy to sign up. The extent of registration information projects required varied, with some noting the tension between capturing the information required and not overwhelming families:

> "One of the big issues that families face is that they will have a lot of stuff being done or people doing things to them and they are not really involved and often don't remember who is calling them and what person is supposed to do what […] It's about kind of negotiating the paperwork a little […] not overloading the family just because it looks better on paper."
>
> (Project lead)

In some cases, where the registration process required more information, projects would assist families. They explained that this presented challenges but that these were easier for them to overcome than for the parent:

> "It is not easy, but it is a lot easier for us to do that than it us for a single parent who is juggling five, six, seven barriers, three children, trying to keep a job down, heat a house, debate with the housing association, handle a mental health issue, it is a lot easier for us to find some admin support."
>
> (Project lead)

Projects mentioned that there were instances where extra clarification or explanation was required in order to encourage families to sign up. This included persuading them of the potential benefits of the service or explaining eligibility criteria and why certain registration information was required. One project emphasised the need to make parents aware that participation was not contingent on them finding full-time employment:

> "I think when it became very much about sustaining employment that was a learning for us […] making sure that was clear [that access wasn't dependent on employment], that we seemed to get more referrals."
>
> (Project lead)

Communicating these things, or allaying other concerns, could be a particular challenge to engaging parents who spoke English as a second language. Other practical features that facilitated sign-up included: offering both paper and digital options and, for SCMA, offering **a single point of contact** with SCMA so that families did not have to look for a childminder themselves.

Enablers and barriers to supportive sign-up processes

Projects required sufficient staffing to put the time into helping families to sign up. To help with this, one project, Indigo, had employed a family support worker whose role included helping families at the registration stage:

"Accessing that information and having the headspace and the time to be able to sit down and find that information is part of the issue for many of the families. We need a person, you need someone who is going to handhold them in those early stages when life is at its most complex."

(Project lead)

Regardless of the staff members involved, projects stressed the need for patience and understanding of families' circumstances and the initial barriers they may face in engaging. They also spoke of the role of partnerships at this stage, for example schools helping when families were more difficult to engage. However, it was suggested that partnership working and data sharing could be further enhanced to help retain families who discontinue after a few sessions, for example if they have experienced a crisis.

One barrier identified was the need to balance having a straightforward sign-up process, requiring minimal details from families, with the need to collect information for monitoring and evaluation.

Making provision easy to get to

One of the most important accessibility features was ensuring provision was easy for families to get to. Parents stated that they would not use it otherwise:

"I think especially for parent carers [of children with ASN], your life is already full of so much going on that […] to get a break or to get childcare, you don't want it to be a hassle […]. That's what I feel about [project], if it was a hassle getting him there then the cons would outweigh the pros".

(Parent)

The main way in which projects ensured this was by locating the provision in, or on the same campus as, the school. This made it very easy for children to attend before/after school and for parents to drop off or collect them.

Families who used the SCMA childminding service also commented on importance of being able to access a childminder locally:

"That would have been a dealbreaker I think if she had lived far away, it wouldn't really have been much of a respite for myself or [children] because we would just be in the car driving."

(Parent)

Where it wasn't possible to locate provision within a school, or when delivering holiday programmes, providing transport helped to make it more accessible:

"If it is too far away, they are no going, unless somebody is going to pick them up or walk them. That's where the transport works so well for us during the holiday programmes."

(Project lead)

The provision of transport was especially important for children with ASN:

> "100% of those families [with children with ASN] that have taken transport have stated that without children being collected from school they would not have been able to use the service."

<div align="right">(Project monitoring report)</div>

Enablers and barriers to making provision easy to get to

Having access to, and positive relationships with, schools was the main factor facilitating ease of access to projects. Where this was not possible, having the funds to provide transport was required. Transport remained a challenge, however, particularly in rural areas where families had few public transport options and had seen their transport costs increase as a result of the cost of living crisis. While projects wanted to increase their transport offering, they were constrained by finding the staff to provide transport for short and specific times during the day, as well as financial barriers.

Providing a service that appeals to families

As well as ensuring that provision was accessible from a practical perspective, projects had to create a service that families wanted to use. Parents stressed the importance of their children being happy while there (discussed in Chapter 9) while parents who were receiving wider support also had to feel supported by the setting (discussed in Chapter 8).

Enablers and barriers to providing a service that appeals to families

Projects were able to deliver services that met the needs and expectations of families by **developing relationships with families**. This related to listening to them - to enable services to be family-led - as well as targeting support/tailoring approaches to meet the needs of individual families:

> "Allowing it to be entirely led by families is what makes the difference between reaching families and not."

<div align="right">(Project lead)</div>

> "[People] have lots going on or their circumstances are quite complex. But I think we've been able to be quite flexible, like people don't have to come in face to face if that doesn't suit them, if they want to have conversations split over five different phone calls […] that's fine."

<div align="right">(Project lead)</div>

Having sufficient staff who were committed to spending time developing relationships was the primary enabler to providing high quality service.

Delivering provision that is accessible for children with a range of ASN

SupERkids and SHIP specialised in provision for children with more complex ASN while other projects were used by children with ASN who attended mainstream schools. There were additional considerations in ensuring provision was accessible

for children with ASN. First, projects spoke about the need to **gain the trust of parents** to care for their children, something important for all parents but especially those of children with ASN:

> "It is a big trust to have your child that is needing a lot of support to go somewhere else other than looked after by you, especially if they have complex behavioural needs or complex medical needs […] we say families can stay with us if they want, until them and their child are comfortable."
>
> (Project lead)

This was backed up by parents, who reported that they felt comfortable leaving their children at the projects because they know they are safe.

The **location of the project** was a particular consideration in making provision accessible for children with ASN. As mentioned previously, this was important in making provision easy to get to. Furthermore, when it was based in schools, this helped both in terms of parents feeling reassured that it was a safe space and for children to feel comfortable, being in a familiar space:

> "It is familiar. The [project] set it up in a really secure building… you feel confident to leave him there because it is all risk assessed and so on."
>
> (Parent)

> "It is brilliant, because parking is so easy, getting in and out the building is so easy, it is somewhere he knows, and there is nobody else at the school at that time…it's not like it is a local community centre and there is another class on and you've got to try and make sure he doesn't slap anybody else on the way out … it's calm as well, they have got it really well thought out."
>
> (Parent)

One stakeholder described how incorporating different kinds of spaces could also help support children with different needs (e.g., quiet spaces).

Enablers/barriers to delivering accessible provision for children with ASN

First and foremost, projects had to have sufficient staff in place to deliver projects at the ratios required for the children in their care[14]. Furthermore, staff, in particular those at projects targeted at children with ASN, had to be highly trained to be able to meet the range of needs required. Once again, the dedication of staff to develop relationships with families was crucial.

> "She adores [staff member] … [name of child] was struggling to go and [staff member] said 'listen I'll go, I'll be there' and that was amazing … [name of child] went because she knew [staff member] was going to be there."
>
> (Parent)

One project discussed the difficulties they had encountered in dealing with

---

[14] For those with ASN, ratio requirements are different from the standards stated by the Care Inspectorate and more dependent on children's care plans.

challenging behaviour from some children due to not always having sufficient staff to dedicate to children who required additional support or not having the training or experience to manage it. This was not discussed in an accessibility context but does raise the possibility of the project not being accessible to all.

> "It brings up, I think maybe not enough staff, but it is also probably not enough expertise in dealing with some of the behaviours, so we do a wee bit of staff training, and the schools [invite] our staff along to their training."
>
> (Project lead)

Being able to access buildings that met the needs of children with ASN was the primary enabler to providing safe and comfortable spaces. For projects dedicated to children with ASN, special schools were ideal given they were set up to accommodate these needs. Indeed, one project stakeholder noted access to suitable premises as a barrier to expanding provision into other areas due to the specific requirements such as hoists and changing places.

Case study 1: Rachel and Scott

Rachel is a lone parent and works full-time. Her teenage son, Scott (who has additional support needs) attends an after-school club most school days. It is located in Scott's school and the timings of the club are ideal because Rachel can collect him after work. This makes it easy for her to use the service: "I'm not going out my way for him to attend, it is not a hassle… your life is already full of so much going on… you want it [childcare] to be straightforward and support[ive]."

There is no alternative after-school provision in the area that Scott could attend, and cost of hiring private care would be unaffordable: "I would be lost, because I wouldn't be able to really work, and work for me is my outlet as well."

Staff organise various activities including baking, crafts, and outdoor activities and they ensure that children with a range of abilities can take part. Scott really enjoys going to the club and spending time with his friends. Outside of after-school club he is less able to socialise with peers due to his care needs. The highly trained staff make a big difference to how much Scott enjoys attending and to Rachel's trust in the club: "They are really knowledgeable, really experienced…I feel we have built up these relationships with the staff over the years, and I trust them with Scott."

---

6. Achieving flexible childcare

Summary:

- While there were some projects that clearly achieved a very flexible service for families, for others this was less of a focus.

- Booking systems were an important part of flexibility. Features that enhanced this included: not requiring families to commit to a long-term contract; taking bookings at short notice; not penalising parents for last-minute cancellations; increasing choice of sessions; and being open to parents picking up or dropping off children at different times.

- Another way in which services provided flexible SACC was through adapting their service to meet the needs of parents/children. For example, through having a range of activities and types of support available.

- These processes were underpinned by having sufficient resources and skilled staff with strong relationships with families and a sound understanding of their needs. In line with this, the main challenges to providing flexibility were around funding and staffing SACC sufficiently.

The extent to which projects were felt to have provided a flexible service for families, that could easily adapt and respond to changing needs, varied. While there were projects where flexibility came out as a strength, others had focused on this to a lesser extent or had experienced practical challenges that limited their ability to respond flexibly to families' needs.

Flexible booking systems

Projects had different approaches to booking provision, from not requiring families to book beforehand to asking for more of an advance commitment from families. Not requiring a long-term contract and allowing them to **book provision with less notice** (e.g., not requiring them to book childcare for a term/year at a time) gave parents who were using services more scope to use childcare flexibly, as and when they needed it. Shorter notice periods also allowed parents to change their weekly schedule, as opposed to keeping to a regular pattern.

Notably, the Wee Childcare Company particularly focused on flexible booking and trialled three different notice periods (24 hours, a week or a month). The data collected by Wee Childcare Company as part of their monitoring and evaluation indicated that families generally preferred booking at shorter notice. While the families who took part in this research were happy with the booking systems they were offered, it was noted that other parents may find a month's notice difficult.

Hame Fae Hame operated a 'Pay as You Go' approach where parents were able to change the hours they used week on week, and only pay for the hours used. This flexibility was recognised and appreciated by families:

"I might phone up and be like, '[My child] is going to have a day off today, is that okay? Can he come in tomorrow instead?' They're just really flexible."

(Parent)

When projects provided drop-in services (such as St Mirin's Saturday play sessions) this went a step further in providing flexibility for families by not requiring any advance booking. However, it should be noted that this was for sessions focused more on family support or additional opportunities for play and less on providing childcare, where children would need to have a guaranteed space.

There were also examples of projects flexing their general approach to booking to support families with sudden, unforeseen circumstances. Families who had had to ask for their child to **attend a session at very short notice** said staff had generally tried to accommodate this. For example, one parent said that when their child was in hospital the project staff "were very empathetic" and happy to change the days they had booked to suit them better. Even when this was not possible, families appreciated feeling able to ask for this and knowing that projects would try to work around their needs.

Not penalising parents for last-minute cancellation also gave parents the flexibility to only use childcare when they wanted or needed it. Again, Hame Fae Hame's booking system was very flexible in this regard, and the project lead pointed out that this avoided encouraging parents to send children to SACC when they were sick.

Families also appreciated having a **choice of sessions**, and when provision operated five days a week, being able to choose as much or as little time within this as they needed:

"Having him just Monday to Thursday was really quite good for me, […] like, it is not an all or nothing, it's what days he needs."

(Parent)

Finally, participants mentioned that flexibility was enhanced when projects were open to parents **picking up or dropping off their children within sessions**, rather than at fixed, predetermined times:

"If you want to come in at quarter past eight, come in at quarter past eight rather than half seven, so we are very flexible and that works for parents."

(Project lead)

Enablers and barriers to providing flexible booking systems

To provide flexible booking, projects highlighted the importance of adequate staffing, as well as forward planning and designing activities to be 'interruptible'. Sufficient staffing was seen as critical to look after children at short notice and maintain minimum ratios and could not be operating at maximum capacity. Therefore, services that were fully- or over-subscribed, or facing staffing shortages, were less able to accommodate short-notice requests.

Projects also highlighted the cost implications of increased staffing, as well as coping with the loss of expected income if families aren't charged for cancelling. Generally, projects relied on ACF funding to offer these flexible features to families without passing on the extra costs and keeping their services affordable. For example, one childminder explained that they needed to have minimum hours in order to run a financially viable service and this meant they had previously had to turn some parents away, while another project lead recalled a service they had discontinued due to a lack of uptake making it unsustainable. There was a view that funding would be needed to make flexible childcare sustainable in the future:

> "We have brought on two new staff through the ACF so their wages are funded… So, we can usually flexibly respond to what is needed."
>
> (Project lead)

> "Now we have got the evidence that people will come if you design the service to meet their needs and not design the service to only be financially viable. But, even the flexibility, you need to make sure it is viable, and you can do that if it is underpinned by funding."
>
> (Project lead)

There was a view that offering flexibility for parents meant less certainty for staff, which could be challenging and 'take a toll' in terms of workload:

> "Now, that is not always easy, and it does require a huge amount of flexibility, and that in itself can be a challenge for organisations [...] that takes its toll on a team as well. [...] The funding has made it easier for us to do that, because it has given us that breathing space."
>
> (Project lead)

While flexible services caused challenges with forward planning, there were projects that had used their knowledge of families and experience of working with them to help them predict need and reduce uncertainty. For example, one project had kept spaces available for families who they knew would likely be in need of them, but who had not signed up in advance. One stakeholder also highlighted that having a good system to log and track hours booked was important when responding to changes requested by families.

Another project mentioned that they designed activities carefully, in order to support flexible pick-up schedules. For example, they typically planned shorter activities which are less disrupted by children joining or leaving at different times and did more structured activities at the beginning:

> "Our children can be picked up at any time, which is fantastic because it fits into family life, whether they have got swimming, football, food, etcetera, but it is also quite disruptive for us to be able to offer consistency in an activity. So, we have to be very flexible, we have to offer a mixture of short activities. [If we do a] baking activity, right at the start tends to be best."
>
> (Project lead)

Finally, there was a sense among families that the culture and values of projects

contributed to providing a flexible service. Parents commented on the positive attitude of staff who appeared genuinely committed:

> "They literally will do anything they can…I feel like it is a real place of understanding and wanting to make it work for the family, which is so refreshing when other childcare operators, you're used to them saying no."
>
> (Parent)

Flexibility in approach

Projects with more of a range of services available (as well as a range of suitable times) were also able to adapt to support different families' needs. St Mirin's OSC was an example of a project with different activities, not only within sessions but across sessions, as it provided various services focused on different types of support. This included: wraparound childcare provision as well as family support sessions for parents or children; a 'crisis intervention' support service; a 'school specialism' service focused on helping children who were struggling in school; along with additional opportunities for play and connection. They felt this enabled them to offer a more tailored 'package' to families and be flexible with their offer, depending on what kind of support they were looking for.

7. Achieving affordable childcare

Summary:

- All projects had put in place measures that made their services more affordable for families and feedback on this was broadly positive.

- The main way this was achieved was via fully funded or subsidised places. This was seen as especially important for families of children with ASN, where services would normally be very expensive. Adapting payment plans or booking options could also increase affordability (e.g., spreading out payments or only charging for the hours used).

- When projects were able to minimise travel costs for families traveling to provision, this removed a further financial barrier to access, particularly in rural areas. This was done by providing transport directly or financially supporting families with paying for transport themselves, although projects faced their own financial barriers in doing so.

- Remaining barriers to providing affordable services included limits on subsidies of SACC fees (meaning some were still difficult for families to afford) and concerns around the long-term sustainability of funding.

All projects had put in place measures that made their services more affordable for families, and feedback on this from the families taking part in the evaluation was broadly positive. While this was mainly achieved through creating fully funded or subsidised places, other elements had also increased affordability. These included: adapting payment plans or booking options and reducing or removing travel costs.

Funded places

Every project did this to an extent, ranging from offering fully-funded to partially-funded places, and from providing universally funded provision to a mix of funded and paid-for places. There was widespread agreement among project leads and stakeholders that, through doing this, projects generally succeeded in making provision more affordable to families. This was supported by family interviews, with parents typically saying they would not be able to use the services to the same extent, or at all, otherwise. This was viewed as particularly impactful given the rising cost of living:

> "Yes, [the subsidy made] a big difference […] it makes it workable. I think if it had been more then I would have cut him down to one day […] with the cost of living, I don't think I could have continued with it."
>
> (Parent)

Subsidised places were especially important for families of children with ASN where services would normally be very expensive, due to factors such as the staffing ratios required, making affordability of care even more of a barrier.

While fully funded places were guaranteed to remove financial barriers to all

families, partially funded places could also be used to make childcare more affordable when used in the right ways, such as assessing how much families could afford and subsidising accordingly. SHIP achieved this by asking about household income in their booking form to inform the cost of childcare, while one family at St Mirin's were originally paying for an after-school service, but were offered access to the breakfast club for free because the child had a need for it, but they wouldn't have been able to afford it otherwise.

However, despite subsidised places, there were examples of financial barriers to accessing provision that remained. Partially funded places could still prove expensive. For example, one stakeholder thought that, despite offering subsidised places, cost was still the main barrier for families. A family involved with the same project felt similarly, and would prefer to send their child to the project more often if it was more affordable for them.

Enablers and barriers to providing funded places

There were concerns about the sustainability of offering funded places (and affordable childcare more generally). There were strong views that providing free or subsidised places is reliant on continued funding and, when it is provided for a limited amount of time, was only a short-term solution. This was backed up by families saying that, when the funding stops, they will likely be unable to continue using the provision as much, if at all. One project had already experienced families disengaging from their project when the second round of ACF funding was still uncertain. They highlighted that it was difficult to re-engage these families, and that certainty and consistency around funding was important for parents making long-term arrangements. However, notably, when projects supported parents to establish or progress their careers (how this outcome was achieved is discussed further in the next chapter), there was evidence that this was a way in which projects could help families to be more able to afford provision in the longer term.

Payment plans

When there was a cost attached to provision, there were some examples of payment plans or flexible booking systems that helped to make this more affordable for families. One example of this was giving parents the ability to spread out payments instead of paying a large sum upfront. One family explained that having clear and detailed information helped them to budget:

> "They spread the cost throughout the year, which I felt was more manageable for me [...] Everything was itemised and explained on the sheet… It was all really informative and I was able to work it out for the whole year and plan our finances accordingly, so that was a good help."
>
> (Parent)

As mentioned previously, families benefitted when projects only charged for the hours of provision accessed and this helped to minimise costs for families who did not need to use all the available hours of provision. Similarly, a parent using a childminder pointed out that she was not asked to pay for childcare while she was

in between jobs in order to keep her space.

Projects had to have a financial cushion in order to absorb the changes in income associated with providing flexible approaches, for example when parents were not charged for sessions they booked but did not attend.

Addressing travel costs

In some cases, families incurred indirect costs, primarily travel costs, accessing provision. This was particularly the case in rural areas:

> "It [transport] is a massive issue [here], and the issue has become significant with us because of the drop in childminders […] We have got families travelling [far] every day, and transport costs are huge now. With the whole cost going up as it has, it has become a bigger and bigger issue, even for families on an okay income."
>
> (Project lead)

When projects included transport as part of their service, this typically saved families money. For example, one family living in a rural area said they only had one other after-school childcare option, but that they would have had to pay for a taxi to send their children there:

> "I'd have had to pay for an independent taxi company to pick them up from school to take them to the other setting … it would not have been worth it financially, it would have been an absolute nightmare."
>
> (Parent)

One rural project also gave an example of a family who were unable to attend due to not being able to afford the petrol costs. The project had been able to source some funding to cover the costs and enable them to attend:

> "For instance, we had a family last year who had become entitled to the free childcare but didn't have transport to get the child to the facility. So, after a whole day phoning round, we managed to find a small pot of money…to pay for the petrol for this child to actually come for the free childcare they were entitled to."
>
> (Project lead)

8. Outcomes for parents

Summary:

- Overall, projects had made progress across all the ACF intended outcomes for parents. Family support was an important factor in achieving all of these outcomes. This included signposting to support around employment or study, mental health and general practicalities such as housing or benefits.

- There was evidence that every project had contributed to parents being able to start, maintain or progress their career, or engage in training. Key factors were: flexible timings that could fit around parents' work hours. Affordability of services also made working a financially viable option for parents.

- Improvements in parental health and wellbeing were reported by projects and parents themselves. This resulted from enabling parents to have respite time, relieving stress around arranging childcare and running provision for parents such as peer support groups.

- While there were positive outcomes relating to families' financial circumstances, this was partially dependent on whether parents using subsidised places would have otherwise used paid-for alternative childcare. However, it was noted that supporting parents with employment could help boost household income in the longer-term.

This chapter considers to what extent, and how, the processes and activities carried out by the funded projects led to the desired outcomes for parents: increased parental employment and/or training; increased parental health and wellbeing; and improved financial circumstances.

Supporting parents with employment and/or training

There was evidence that every project had positively contributed to parents being able to start, maintain or progress their career or engage in training. Families explained that, without access to the funded projects, they would not have been able to work or study as easily or for as many hours, if at all. This was reinforced by the views and experiences of stakeholders and project leads, as well as data in monitoring reports:

> "Without it, I wouldn't be able to work at all. I'd have to be on benefits full-time, which is pretty extreme as I've worked my whole life."
>
> (Parent)

The main way in which this was achieved was simply through providing accessible childcare to parents at the times they needed to work or study and ensuring it was affordable (although the childcare was not dependent on employment, or seeking employment). However, the inclusion of additional support focused on training or employment was seen to enhance this outcome, as well as providing wider family support to boost parents' confidence.

> **Case study 2: Elizabeth, Lola and Thomas**
>
> Elizabeth is a lone parent. She has two children: her nine year old daughter Lola attends an after-school club. There are various activities at the after-school club including: arts and crafts, sports, and games.
>
> The cost of the after-school club is subsidised. Without that financial support, Elizabeth wouldn't be able to afford it which would impact on her ability to continue her studies. She hopes this will lead to an increase her household income.
>
> Elizabeth has developed strong relationships with the project staff over several years and staff regularly ask for feedback on how the service is working for parents and children. She feels that staff go out of their way to help with has any issues she has, including by changing days Lola attends the club to suit changing circumstances, but also by providing advice and support in other areas. This support is important to Elizabeth as she does not have many other connections in the local area.

Accessible and flexible timings

The timing of provision was critical in determining whether parents had sufficient time to work. Generally, the more hours of childcare offered, the more parents were supported to work. Specifically, timings that supported parents to work full-time included wraparound care, where after-school sessions began straight after school and ran later than standard working hours and breakfast clubs started early enough for parents to get to work:

> "We do have a breakfast club within the school but that earlier window (7.30) for parents has been appreciated."
>
> (Project lead)

While all projects met at least one of these criteria, there was evidence of unmet demand among families for times not yet offered by projects.

Provision during the school holidays was also important in enabling parents to work, for some even more so than during term-time. However, not all projects offered this for all school holidays and there were parents who faced difficulties working during these times.

Flexibility around booking provision was another important way in which projects supported parents to work, as parents who wanted or needed to work irregular hours could book childcare at short notice in order to do so. However, flexibility could also reassure parents considering committing to any form of employment, since they could generally rely on support from projects if they got held up at work or had to work additional hours at short notice.

Affordable childcare

Affordability was also strongly linked to parental employment. Firstly, through contributing to making childcare accessible to parents who needed it to work in the

first place, but secondly, by making working worthwhile financially for those on low incomes:

> "[Without a funded place] it would end up that there is probably no point in me going to work, because my money would end up paying for [my daughter] to go there."
>
> (Parent)

Subsequently, this meant that parents who were able to build a career and progress to a higher income were given the opportunity to do this, without the cost of childcare being prohibitive early on (for example, when studying or starting out in entry-level roles). Being able to progress was also linked to being able to access and afford more hours of childcare:

> "[Without a funded place] I probably wouldn't have went for a career change […] it is a big help just to be able to get a better job, a much better job than the one I was in."
>
> (Parent)

One project lead explained that having access to childcare helped parents suffering from ill health to remain part of the workforce, since it enabled them to take time to recover without facing additional barriers to returning to work:

> "[Parents'] health isn't always stable, and people have been able to access the ACF to keep their childcare place, which means it is easier for them to recover and then also transition back into work"
>
> (Project lead)

It was noted that anxiety about stopping receiving Universal Credit payments could be a barrier to projects supporting parents to start working. This was due to a fear that, if something was to go wrong, there may be difficulties or delays in restarting Universal Credit.

Confidence in the quality of services

A final accessibility factor that was mentioned in relation to parental employment was the degree of trust parents had in projects to deliver a high standard of care for their children. When parents trusted project staff, it provided peace of mind which enabled them to better focus on their work:

> "I [have] peace of mind [that my son] is looked after, I don't need to worry about, you know, going to pick him up or anything like that. So, it has definitely relieved a lot of stress within my workplace and how I am able to access work and be more committed to my job as well."
>
> (Parent)

As noted earlier, trust in the quality of care could be a particular barrier for parents of children with ASN. In their monitoring report, SHIP explained that addressing this had been important in driving their employment outcomes:

"At the beginning of the project families were using the sessions either for respite or for existing work. As the project has progressed…parents are now using the service for increasing their hours and to take on employment […] Parents have stated that this is because they now have the confidence that the club is reliable, and it is looking after their child's needs. They don't need to worry about being called during a session or the club not running."

(Project monitoring report)

Additional support

When projects provided parents with advice and support around accessing employment or education, this was seen to enhance outcomes. This was typically underpinned by close partnership working. For example, Clyde Gateway worked with local authority staff who specialised in employment, a family support worker, and other partners such as Routes to Work as part of their steering group. This enabled them to signpost parents to relevant opportunities, but also to provide direct support such as careers advice:

"Importantly, from attending these courses [via project] it had gave me an insight into what I wanted to do […] which is what led me to go to college."

(Parent)

Wider family support was also viewed as contributing to increasing parental employment. Projects and stakeholders emphasised the connection between positive parental wellbeing and being able to enter the workforce. One project lead felt that the early intervention work they carried out with families in crisis could lead to improved training or employment outcomes later on, as this helped families to cope with and process events which may otherwise present as a barrier to study or work:

"We have had parents who have used days for crisis and intervention who are now, because we offered that service at a time they needed it, they are now at college doing further education."

(Project lead)

"A parent that got made redundant [asked] if they could get support for health and wellbeing to get a sense of pride back and a bit of confidence back in themselves, so that started initially with [free] leisure membership. […] From that they then basically got qualifications [for their current job]."

(Project lead)

Increasing parental health and wellbeing

Increased parental health and wellbeing was achieved across all projects to varying degrees, with some projects particularly focusing on providing wider family support as well as childcare. Childcare provided by the ACF projects was linked to increased parental wellbeing in many different ways. While it could provide valuable respite time, there were examples of projects more actively supporting parents by either reducing stress for parents; providing support or advice; or running activities specifically for parents to attend.

Respite time

For parents who were not working while their children attended provision, having childcare meant they could enjoy respite from caring responsibilities. This was widely seen as important for mental health, as parents could focus on their own needs, using the time to run errands, socialise or relax:

> "I can have time for myself…I can either sit there with a cup of tea in silence … or, 'oh, it is so and so's birthday' or I need to go and run errands"
>
> (Parent)

> "[I can] go to the gym and do things, so it is great to have that break as well, so I think it definitely helps my wellbeing."
>
> (Parent)

Even among parents who worked during this time, there was a view that this could have wellbeing benefits and one parent described work as their 'outlet'.

Relieving stress

By providing an accessible service, projects reduced the stress around organising SACC for parents. This was especially true for lone parents or those with a small or no support network, and also reduced guilt or worry about relying on family members to provide care:

> "I'm not worried like who am I able to get [him] looked after by this week. I know he is there, he is in a safe environment when I'm away."
>
> (Parent)

When childcare was affordable, this could go some way to decreasing financial pressures for parents:

> "My finances haven't been great. […] I don't get a lot of money, and what I do get it's on the kids and bills and that so it's been a massive weight off my shoulders, as in I don't need to stress about anything."
>
> (Parent)

Flexibility around notice periods and booking provision helped to reduce worries when circumstances changed at short notice.

Support and advice

Parents spoke about how staff at the projects had helped or advised them with issues they were facing in their personal lives. This was particularly effective when staff had built up close relationships with families and understood their situation. For example, one parent explained that, because staff knew her daughter so well, they were able to provide more helpful, tailored parenting advice. Staff and stakeholders also emphasised the importance of minimising any sense of stigma or judgement, so that parents felt comfortable sharing things that were worrying them with project staff.

Indigo's family support worker role was seen as a particularly effective way of

providing parental support, with families stressing the impact of the individual relationships they had built with the family support worker:

> "I don't know what I'd do without her. It's as little as helping me to fill in a form. [...] She's my go-to person. I get myself worked up, I don't know who to call and things like that. If I phone [her] and say I don't know how to do this, she'll say I'll do it for you or point me in the right direction."
>
> (Parent)

> "I've been able to get things off my chest, I've been able to kinda talk to her and get things out, not using it as a therapy session, but I've been able to express my worries and the stresses that I'm going through and she's been happy to listen and saying listen we can offer you this help."
>
> (Parent)

Projects also provided signposting or referrals to external sources of support for a variety of issues, including housing, finances or accessing food.

Finally, parents highlighted that, apart from actively helping parents to resolve problems they were facing, just having understanding staff who listened could help them to feel supported and valued:

> "You never forget the way that people made you feel, and the way that they make you feel is like, you feel supported, you feel surrounded by love."
>
> (Parent)

Provision for parents

There were projects that ran provision for parents as well as children, with examples including peer support groups or talks from wellness professionals. These received positive feedback from parents taking part in this research, particularly activities that gave parents the opportunity to connect and support each other.

Impact on financial circumstances for families

There was evidence that families' financial circumstances were improved through accessing the ACF-funded projects, although this was highly dependent on the extent to which families saved money on childcare fees and whether families would have used a paid-for service as an alternative.

While data in monitoring reports focused more on access to work as a means to boosting financial circumstances, interviews with families indicated that this outcome was also met through saving money on fees, being signposted to financial advice, and receiving financial support directly (such as food parcels) or indirectly (such as including transport or food at provision).

Reducing the costs of childcare

Making childcare affordable for families was the main factor mentioned by parents when discussing the impact on their financial circumstances. This was primarily

related to removing or reducing the cost of childcare through providing subsidised places, but also flexible booking that only required families to pay for the hours they used. Families described being worse-off without the funded place, and having less money for everyday items such as food or household bills:

> "[Without a subsidy] we'd really have to watch what we're doing like driving, for petrol, and to make sure we have food and clothes for him and that."
>
> (Parent)

> [Without a funded place] "I think I would have really struggled especially during the winter months with the gas and electricity and stuff it has been a struggle, so not having to worry about that has helped a lot."
>
> (Parent)

The Fund had also impacted on parents taking on debt, for example one parent had borrowed money for childcare before receiving a funded place.

The impact of funded places was strongly felt by parents of children with ASN who experienced additional savings, since childcare for children with complex ASN can be very expensive due to the extra staff time and skills required.

However, it is important to note that alternative childcare arrangements would have not necessarily required spending money, for example parents mentioned children staying at home while they worked or being picked up by family members or, for non-working parents, they would just forgo the respite.

Furthermore, one project lead raised concerns about the insecurity around future funding required to maintain affordable services on families who had become dependent on it.

Signposting to financial advice

As part of general family support, participants specifically recalled referrals to financial support or advice, for example to the Money Advice Service or to support with specific issues such as paying rent, as well as advice from projects on how families could save money.

Including other paid-for elements within the service

When projects included things that families would otherwise have had to pay for in their service, this was another way in which they could help families to save money. As mentioned previously, providing transport could save families money. Families also recalled receiving food parcels or food vouchers when they needed it, or having food provided as part of provision. Other items that projects provided included free sanitary products in the bathrooms or providing gifts for families at Christmas. It was also suggested that, when children attended provision, families would be able to save on energy and heating costs or the cost of pocket money for other activities.

Supporting parents with employment

As mentioned previously, by supporting parents into employment, or to further their careers, projects helped families to boost their household income. This was another way in which projects could boost families' household income and reduce their risk of experiencing poverty (in line with the aims in the Tackling Child poverty Delivery Plan[15] around helping parents to enter, sustain and progress in work). Projects gave examples of parents who they had supported into work who no longer required subsidies and could now afford a paid-for place. One parent explained how the funding allowed her to "go through the ranks" at work as she was able to commit to full time hours and secure two promotions:

> "When I was able to have that childcare, that [was] affordable, I was able to progress as manager, and then up to five days, which hopefully would have impacted our financial and our family life and even professionally."

(Parent)

---

[15]   Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026. Scottish Government website.

9. Outcomes for children and young people

Summary:

- Positive impacts on children's mental health outcomes included increased enjoyment and fun, fostered by a child-led approach to activities and individual care plans (particularly for children with ASN).

- Projects had also identified potential mental health problems and addressed these through signposting to further support or providing additional support themselves. Strong relationships with SACC staff were key to enabling this.

- Projects achieved increased physical wellbeing for children through facilitating active play and physical activity; providing access to food; and creating a safe place for children outside of school hours.

- SACC was also seen to strengthen children's relationships (with both adults and peers) and develop their social skills. This was seen as particularly impactful among children with ASN who may face more challenges interacting with peers outside of a structured environment. This was supported by having a mix of ages, caring staff and continuity of staff.

This chapter covers how, and to what extent, the processes and activities carried out by the funded projects led to the desired outcomes for children attending the services. These outcomes are increased mental and physical wellbeing, and strengthened relationships.

Increasing mental wellbeing

Increased mental wellbeing came out strongly when participants discussed the ways in which children had benefitted from attending funded provision. This outcome was achieved through them enjoying being at SACC and having the opportunity to have fun, but also through more targeted mental health support or interventions.

Enjoyment and having fun

Parents generally felt their children enjoyed spending time at SACC, and that this boosted their mood when they were there (or even after they left). Children described various things that they enjoyed about their SACC, although this tended to relate to liking the activities or spending time with friends or the project staff. For children with ASN, SACC could be particularly impactful by giving them the opportunity to get involved in activities that were usually inaccessible to them:

> "He absolutely loves it, he is doing [activity], he just loves it […] I think about kind of typical children that are his age, they are what, some of them are going to football five times a week and they have different things, whereas he doesn't have that. But it is geared at the right level for him, and it gives him a sense of freedom."

> (Parent)

Taking a child-led, flexible approach supported creating enjoyable provision through tailoring provision to children's needs or preferences. This typically included providing children with a choice of a range of activities:

> "It's fun because the teachers are kind and you get to play and get to do whatever you want, […] and you get to stay with your friends. You get to play tig, you get to go out if you want to, but there's lots of games."
>
> (Child)

> "They have got different choices, whether or not it is like a sensory story or something else [and] he can say, no, or he might misbehave and then they know actually…like the staff are very intuitive, and they just know him, and they know to move him onto the next thing before there is any difficulties."
>
> (Parent)

Having **individual support plans** for children was cited as another way in which projects could tailor their provision, particularly for children with ASN. Close partnership working was seen to facilitate this. For example, one project received behavioural plans from the school they were based in, which fed into their own planning.

> "[We create care plans] to help with their social skills, or just to help with their inclusion into the service and taking part in the activities. There is a lot of work with Headteachers in schools to share chronologically of events, communications, IEPs (Individual Education Plans), […] there is a lot of networking and meetings that are required to get that up to date."
>
> (Project lead)

As noted in Chapter 5, **positive relationships** between staff and parents and children were an important factor in how well projects understood the families' needs. This, alongside having effective processes to collect and implement feedback, also increased projects' ability to be adaptive and responsive:

> "They ask so heavily for parental feedback, so they ask you, 'What clubs did you enjoy?' There is one sitting in the inbox at the moment, and it is like 'What did you not like? What days' work? What times work?'"
>
> (Parent)

Strong relationships between staff and children facilitated this and were particularly important when providing for children with ASN, who may require more of an individual, tailored approach to engagement:

Support with mental health

The second way in which projects increased children's mental wellbeing was by identifying and addressing situations in which children may be in need of additional mental health support.

Again, **close relationships** between children and staff were seen as important in facilitating this since, when staff knew children well, they were more likely to pick up on any unmet needs. Project leads and stakeholders also mentioned that, when

children felt comfortable with project staff, it gave them a further opportunity to disclose information about their experiences or how they were feeling that they may not have wanted to share with teachers or parents.

There were examples of projects supporting children's mental health needs either by **sharing information** with relevant partners or **using their own resources** to meet children's needs where possible. For example, one parent recalled how her son had been unhappy after starting school and SACC staff suggested that he would benefit from joining their breakfast club to give him an opportunity to transition more easily into the school day:

> "That is exactly what needed to happen, and once he started going in the morning it became, it was like night and day, it was like a transformation in his behaviour […] He is getting that opportunity to regulate through play, no matter what his emotions are, how he is feeling, he is having that opportunity through play in the morning to start his day."
>
> (Parent)

Another example of this was St Mirin's 'school specialism' offer for children who were experiencing difficulties in class. Staff who have completed trauma-informed training spend time with children one-to-one during school hours to work through any issues they may be dealing with. Monitoring report evidence indicated the success of this approach, with increases recorded in child wellbeing using the Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Profile. The project lead also shared anecdotal evidence of children no longer needing help from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) as a result of this early intervention approach:

> "Some of the children we work with no longer need CAMHS and we have been enough to support that child back into learning, and obviously if they are not learning the attainment gap is getting bigger, life choices and all that is reducing. […] Yes, it is expensive, but when you think of what it is that we are preventing, it is truly early intervention."
>
> (Project lead)

Other projects described disclosure procedures where they would share information with the school or with parents as appropriate, and signpost children onto further mental health support.

Increasing physical wellbeing

There were three main ways in which children's physical wellbeing was promoted across the projects, namely providing opportunities for physical activity and exercise; improving children's access to or relationships with food; and keeping children safe.

Physical activity

This was the main way in which provision was seen as supporting children's physical health. There were parents who felt that the impact of this went further than improving children's fitness levels, but also impacted positively on their mood,

behaviour and, in some cases, their sleep.

Elements that helped achieve this included providing active activities, such as sports, as well as having outdoor spaces that facilitated these and allowed children to run around.

Access to food

There was widespread agreement among participants that including healthy food at SACC activities was important. Again, providing children with choice was helpful in terms of making sure that children wanted or felt able to eat the food provided, although there were still cases where children did not like what was offered and needed to bring their own food. However, parents noted that incorporating food preparation could help to encourage children to try or eat more things:

> "He doesn't eat like fruit and vegetables here, but for some reason he eats fruit down there [...] I don't know if it is watching everybody else eating, so he will join in with them, but in the house, he is like, 'oh no, I will not eat that'. So, that is good."
>
> (Parent)

> "Sometimes it's a real struggle to get her to eat her tea […] [but] she'll come home with what they've made [at after school club] and she'll eat that for her tea and she will sit and eat it because she's had the opportunity to make it herself."
>
> (Parent)

Safety

There was a view that the projects provided a safe environment for children to go to after school, and in certain situations a safer place than alternative options - they provided a **safer alternative** for older children who would otherwise have nothing to do or have to travel elsewhere independently after school. For example, one parent recalled that their son had been harassed after school before but when their son was at the after-school club, they were reassured that he was in a safe place.

A stakeholder also mentioned that, when staff built close relationships with children, this could (and had) lead to disclosures that raised **child protection** issues that could then be investigated further. This was enhanced by close partnership working with social work or other relevant organisations. Similarly, one stakeholder highlighted the role that SACC practitioners could play in supporting child protection, by facilitating social work visits in an environment outside of school or home.

Strengthened relationships and social skills

The opportunity to socialise with peers and project staff at SACC came out strongly when children were asked about why they enjoyed going (as well as socialising with other children).

Relationships with peers

Both parents and staff gave examples of children who had gained confidence and social skills from attending provision.

> "He's a lot more sociable. Before he wouldn't mix with other kids, but now he does."

> (Parent)

Parents living in rural areas pointed out that this was important for their children, who may otherwise be more isolated outside of school hours.

It was also thought to be especially relevant for children with ASN, who may face more challenges interacting with peers outside of a structured and supportive environment:

> "He is not able to go out and play with other kids or he can't go out the back and play himself and things like that, so I think this definitely helps him in the sense of he is able to have that social interaction which he might not have had an opportunity to do."

> (Parent)

There was a view that having **children of different ages** being able to play together was also something that facilitated social skills, which children don't experience as much in school. There were examples of younger children learning from older children, while older children learned to be nurturing and take on responsibility for helping younger ones.

Relationships with other adults

Children typically liked the staff running their SACC, with parents describing close relationships where children had favourite workers who they knew well. When children had close relationships with the adults working at the projects, this depended to an extent on **individual staff** being friendly, caring and fun to be around. However, this was typically underpinned by having a child-centred **culture** and in some cases, access to good quality **training** for staff.

Where possible, having **consistency of staff** was also viewed positively as this helped children to build trusting and enduring relationships.

However, there were some examples of staff behaviour that children didn't like (such as shouting) that could be off-putting for children attending.

10. Key lessons and conclusions

Overall, the evidence collected as part of this evaluation indicates that ACF Phase 2 projects met the aims of the Fund – to provide SACC that is accessible, flexible and affordable for low-income families. Processes that facilitated these objectives were also shown to positively contribute to the intended outcomes for families: parental employment and/or training; parental health and wellbeing; financial circumstances; child health and wellbeing; and child relationships. Notably, through supporting parents with entering, sustaining or progressing in work, projects were also seen as having a longer-term impact on families' financial wellbeing and reducing their risk of experiencing poverty (in line with the aims in the Tackling Child poverty Delivery Plan).

Considerations for creating a wider system of SACC

While projects trialled a variety of different approaches and models of SACC, there were some cross-cutting themes that influenced their ability to successfully achieve the intended aims and outcomes. The following considerations will be important when designing a wider system of SACC.

Staffing the offer

While staff were critical to the delivery and impact of SACC, projects had experienced difficulties with recruitment which, for some projects, were ongoing. This was particularly relevant for recruiting staff to care for children with complex ASN, which required staff with more specialised skills and expertise.

There was a perception that staffing challenges were more acute in rural areas, due to a smaller workforce pool and the unique barriers presented by a lack of infrastructure. Rural areas were also seen as being more vulnerable to economic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, for example one project lead pointed out that many childminders in the rural area that they operated in had closed during this time (and not reopened).

Fostering strong relationships

Strong relationships between families and staff were viewed as a vital part of delivering SACC. Families described situations where individual staff members had made the difference between them signing up for provision or not, or to children wanting to attend. Project leads highlighted the importance of relationships in understanding families' needs, effective communication and reducing stigma. This was underpinned by the recruitment of high-quality staff, but also by retaining them in order to provide the consistency needed for building trusting relationships with families over time. Therefore, investing in the SACC workforce is an important consideration for wider roll-out that could help overcome recruitment challenges as well as facilitate the formation of relationships. Factors to consider include: pay, conditions, training and development and job security, as well as making staff feel valued, supporting staff wellbeing and maintaining morale to avoid risk of burnout.

Family support

It was widely acknowledged that the low-income families accessing ACF projects were typically facing multiple challenges alongside access to childcare. In some instances, these issues constituted barriers to accessing childcare in the first place or negatively impacted on the outcomes ACF projects were intending to achieve. Therefore, in order to benefit fully from SACC provision, parents needed support with a range of issues including poverty and the cost of living, mental health problems, alcohol and substance misuse, and various practical issues such as those relating to housing or personal finance. While some projects put in place active family support measures, all projects described providing some form of family support when working with families.

Family support elements of projects received very positive feedback and were appreciated by families who took part in this research. This was backed up from project leads and stakeholders who commented on the positive impacts they had observed from providing family support, and how outcomes were rarely achieved solely through provision of childcare alone.

Providing effective family support depended to an extent on building strong relationships with families as well as good partnership working. When projects employed a dedicated family support worker, this was seen as an example of best practice that increased the impacts for families.

Partnership working

As mentioned previously, partnership working is when local authorities, public sector and third sector organisations come together to deliver for the needs of families, and this took different forms across the funded projects. Partnership working emerged as another strong theme across projects that related to the successful engagement of, and provision for, families. Partners played a key role in maximising the reach and accessibility of projects via referrals. Partnerships also helped projects to achieve outcomes for families by providing additional sources of support to which project staff could signpost the families they worked with. When projects had stronger relationships with partners, maintaining regular communication and having steering groups, these benefits were enhanced. Wider external issues, however, such as staffing challenges and high workloads within partner organisations, could negatively impact on these relationships.

Inclusion of children with ASN

While only two projects catered solely for children with ASN, children with varying degrees of additional needs attended every project.

Whether these children attended bespoke services or were integrated into mainstream services, there were additional considerations around delivering SACC for children with ASN. These included: providing extra staffing/resource; recruiting staff with additional training (or providing this); tailoring activities to meet different children's needs; creating a suitable space and atmosphere, and including

additional accessibility support, for example including transport in provision was particularly important for this group.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation enabled projects to assess how well their processes were working and adapt to better meet the needs of families over time. However, as noted in Chapter 3, projects experienced challenges around collecting the required information (due to both a lack of staff capacity as well as sensitivities around recording personal information) and a limited understanding of methods of evaluation.

Lessons around conducting good monitoring and evaluation in the future included:

- Providing support to projects around evaluation methods (previous input from Evaluation Scotland was received positively).

- Establishing a peer network for SACC services to share learnings.

- Clearly communicating the requirements and expectations from Scottish government around monitoring and evaluation.

Sustainability

There was a general concern expressed by project leads about the long-term sustainability of many features of the ACF-funded projects that made them accessible, flexible and affordable to families. This was particularly mentioned in relation to providing funded places.

> "How can you keep it going? One of my answers always is: funding. Funding has to make it sustainable because there is no real other way that they [low-income families] are going to pay. So, it is maybe that funders have to think about longer term funding, and that's the sustainable way of meeting the targets and criteria."
>
> (Project lead)

Appendices

Appendix One: Detailed objectives

In order to meet the aims set out, the specific objectives for the research were:

1. How have Access to childcare funded-projects been delivered in practice?

   a) What approaches / models have projects adopted? How did these differ from previous models and approaches?

   b) What innovative approaches were adopted, including around joint/partnership working, community collaboration, and collaborative working with families?

   c) How did each project seek to make childcare more accessible, flexible and affordable for parents? What specific barriers to access were projects seeking to address (and how)? What specific outcomes was the project intending to achieve?

   d) How were projects targeted and promoted (particularly to each of the TCPDP target groups)?

2. What has the impact of the projects been for children, parents and families (especially those in the TCPDP target groups)?

   a) Who has and has not engaged with the projects – what has their reach been, especially to TCPDP target families?

   b) How successful were projects in tackling barriers to participation? What barriers remain (for TCPDP target groups)?

   c) What evidence is there of projects impacting on key outcomes, including: parental employment; parental health and wellbeing; children's health and wellbeing; children's relationships (with parents, peers, and others – e.g., teachers); family financial circumstances? (How) do these outcomes vary between different families (TCPDP priority groups)?

   d) Which elements of projects (including family support elements) contributed to these outcomes and how?

   e) What unexpected consequences did projects have, whether for providers, stakeholders, parents, children and families, or others?

3. What are the key lessons from delivery of the Access to childcare projects for a future system of school age childcare across Scotland?

   a) What projects/elements of projects worked more and less well, why, and for whom?

b) (How) have projects changed as a result of monitoring and reflection? What lessons around monitoring, evaluation and learning are there to inform future planning and delivery?

c) Drawing on learning across the evaluation, what are the key issues and recommendations for a wider system of school-age childcare in Scotland?

Appendix Two: Information sheets

Information sheet for project leads

Research to inform the Evaluation of the Access to Childcare Fund

Further information

Why do you want to speak to me?

Ipsos Scotland (an independent research organisation) is carrying out an evaluation of the Access to Childcare Fund on behalf of the Scottish Government. As part of this, we would like to hear the experiences of project leads. This will contribute to the overall research objectives of understanding to what extent projects achieved the intended outcomes for children, parents and families and to explore the project processes, including if and how projects overcame access and participation barriers.

What will the research cover?
The research will cover:
- What your project involves
- Target audience of project
- Design of your project/decisions about what to deliver and how it differs from previous models and approaches
- The intended outcomes of your project and how the project processes help to achieve them
- Communicating the project to your target audience
- If and how your project has changed over time
- Engagement with the project
- Barriers to attendance and overcoming these
- Perceived impacts of the Access to Childcare funding:
  - For children, young people, parents/carers
  - For their project, providers and partners
- Partnership working
- Lessons learned/ideas for improvement

How will my answers be used?
Your responses to the interview will be completely confidential and anonymous and will not be seen by anybody outside of Ipsos Scotland, the independent research organisation, and the transcriber.

We will use the interviews to inform the findings of the evaluation. They will be used alongside the findings of the interviews with project stakeholders, interviews with families and the analysis of monitoring data to write a report that will be published by the Scottish Government. Any quotes included in the

report will be anonymised. However, given the small number of projects involved in the evaluation, we cannot fully guarantee that someone would not be able to make an educated guess at the quoted project. After the interview, we would give you the opportunity to note any comments you would not like to be included as quotes as well as offering you the chance to review any elements of the draft report we feel may be identifying.

With your consent, we would like to audio-record the discussion (to save us taking notes), but you can still take part even if you would prefer us not to do this. All your data will be securely stored on our servers by Ipsos in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and deleted after the end of the project.

You can read the privacy notice for the project here: https://assets-uk.ipsos.com/scotland/ACFevaluation/privacy.pdf

How can I take part?
Please get in touch if you'd like to take part, by responding to this email, or phone me on the number in my email signature.

Information sheet for families

Research to help understand the impact of the Access to Childcare Fund

Ipsos Scotland (an independent research organisation) is carrying out an evaluation of the Access to Childcare Fund (ACF) on behalf of the Scottish Government. The ACF provided funding to 10 childcare projects, including the one you use, to make them more accessible, flexible and affordable for families.

We are interested in hearing about your experiences of the project you attend, including what has worked well and what could be improved.

How can you help?

Ipsos would really like to talk to parents/carers, children and young people who took part in a project funded by the Access to Childcare Fund.

This would involve a short (around 30-40 minutes) one-to-one interview with a researcher from Ipsos via telephone or video call, depending on what suits you. The interview would be at a time that works for you and will be informal and relaxed – you don't need to prepare or to know anything to take part. We want to hear about your experiences and there are no right or wrong answers. We are hoping to speak to people during February.

We would like to hear both parents/carers and children/young people (if they feel able to). We will speak to families together for the first half of the discussion, while the second half will be questions just for parents/carers. We will do our best to put children at ease in the interviews and ask questions in a child-friendly manner, for example we may use smiley faces as a way for children to express their views.

As a thank you for taking part you or your family will receive **£35** (this can be cash via bank transfer or vouchers for Amazon or Love2Shop). Please note that receiving a bank transfer may sometimes impact on any benefit payments or tax positions, so it is worth checking this before choosing whether you would prefer a voucher or a bank transfer. Receiving an e-voucher will not impact on any benefit payments or tax positions.

How will we use the information you provide?

Ipsos will use information from the interviews to write a report for the Scottish Government that will be published **but we will not include anything that**

could identify you or your child, for example your name or contact details. It will not be possible for the Scottish Government to know who has taken part in the research or what they have said.

Everything you say will be confidential and your data (e.g., your contact details and notes on your interview) will be stored securely and deleted at the end of the project.

With your permission, the discussions will be audio recorded. Only the research team will have access to the recording, which will be securely destroyed after completion of the research.

Taking part in the research is completely voluntary. If you agree to take part, you are free to change your mind at any time without giving us a reason.

We have a privacy policy with more information about how we handle your data which you can see here:
https://assets-uk.ipsos.com/scotland/ACFevaluation/privacy.pdf

How can I take part?

If you have any questions or would like to take part, please contact the research team using the following details:

email: access2childcarefund@ipsos.com
phone: 0131 385 1064
text: 07581 015453

It would be helpful if you can mention the name of the project you attend when you contact us.

Once you get in touch, we will give you a quick call to explain more details about the research and answer any questions you may have. We'll also ask you a few questions about yourself to check that you're eligible to take part. We will need to get permission from a parent or carer to speak to any young people under 16 to take part.

If you or your child need any additional support in order to take part in the interview i.e., a language interpreter or a BSL interpreter let us know and we will provide this for you.

Information sheet for stakeholders

Research to inform the Evaluation of the Access to Childcare Fund

Further information

Why do you want to speak to me?

Ipsos Scotland (an independent research organisation) is carrying out an evaluation of the Access to Childcare Fund on behalf of the Scottish Government. As part of this, we would like to hear your perspective of the funded project you are involved with as a local delivery partner or stakeholder. We would like to know what has been delivered, how it has worked for families and any lessons learned. This will contribute to the overall research objectives which are to understand the extent to which projects achieved the intended outcomes for children, parents and families and to explore the project processes, including if and how projects overcame access and participation barriers.

What will it involve?

It will involve a conversation with a researcher for up to an hour, either via video call (Teams/Zoom) or telephone. The interview would be at a time that works for you and will be informal and relaxed – you don't need to prepare anything before taking part. We want to hear about your experiences and there are no right or wrong answers. We are hoping to speak to people during February.

What will the research cover?
The research will cover:
- Design of the project
- Partnership working
- The intended outcomes of the project and how the project processes help to achieve them
- Communicating the project to the target audience
- Engagement with the project
- Barriers to attendance and overcoming these
- Perceived impacts of the ACF funding:
    - For children, young people, parents/carers
    - For their project, providers and partners
- Lessons learned/ideas for improvement

How will my answers be used?
Your responses to the interview will be completely confidential and anonymous and will not be seen by anybody outside of the Ipsos research team and the transcriber.

We will use the interviews to inform the findings of the evaluation. They will be used alongside the findings from interviews with project leads, interviews with families and the analysis of monitoring data to write a report that will be published by the Scottish Government. Any quotes included in the report will be anonymised.

With your consent, we would like to audio-record the discussion (to save us taking notes), but you can still take part even if you would prefer us not to do this. All your data will be securely stored on our servers by Ipsos in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and deleted after the end of the project.

You can read the privacy notice for the project here: https://assets-uk.ipsos.com/scotland/ACFevaluation/privacy.pdf

How can I take part?

If you have any questions or would like to arrange an interview, please contact the research team using the following details:

email: access2childcarefund@ipsos.com
phone: 0131 385 1064
text: 07581 015453

If you need any additional support in order to take part in the interview i.e., a language interpreter or a BSL interpreter let us know and we will provide this for you.

Appendix Three: Discussion guides

Discussion guide for project leads

Access to Childcare Fund project lead discussion guide
Initial notes on project
Space for name, general notes on project. Include focus areas from driver diagrams and any other information that is relevant.
Section 1: Introduction and consent (5 mins) Aim: to make sure we gain informed consent from participant before taking part including consent for recording.
THANK PARTICIPANT FOR TAKING PART & INTRODUCE YOURSELF. Introduce yourself, your role and Ipsos Scotland Remind participant that the interview will last around 60 minutes and check it still suits to conduct it now. Remind participant/s of the aims of the research: The Scottish Government has asked us, Ipsos Scotland (an independent research organisation), to carry out an evaluation of the Access to Childcare Fund. As part of this, we would like to hear about your experience of leading an ACF funded project. This will contribute to the overall research aims of understanding to what extent projects achieved the intended outcomes for children, parents, and families and to explore the project processes, including if and how projects overcame access and participation barriers. We will also be speaking to children and families who have attended the projects as well as project stakeholders. Once we have spoken to everyone, we will write a report and it will be published by the Scottish Government in summer 2023. Remind participant/s that we are evaluating the fund as a whole rather than individual projects. FOR ALL OTHER THAN AUFA AND SCMA: The interview will cover the whole period, from when you first applied for the funding up until now but will focus more on what's happened since the first evaluation report produced by CiS.

Provide reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Explain that no identifying information about them (e.g., names or contact details, or notes on their interview) will be seen by anyone outside of Ipsos Scotland and the transcriber.

Inform participant that any quotes used will be anonymous. However, we cannot fully guarantee when published that someone would not be able to make an educated guess at the quoted project due to the small number of projects in evaluation. After the interview we will give you the opportunity to note any comments you would not like to be included as quotes or review anything in the draft report we feel may be identifying.

Remind participant that there are no right or wrong answers and they don't have to answer any questions they don't want to answer. They can decide to stop the interview at any point.

Let participant know that you have read monitoring reports prior to the interview and have a general awareness of their project and intended aims. However, this interview is to gain a deeper understanding of how projects used the funding and ensure we capture project learnings.

Check if participant has **any questions.**

Request permission to record interview. Explain that this is for transcription and analysis purposes and that recordings will not be shared outside the research team at Ipsos.

That's recording us now. Could I quickly ask you to confirm for the recording that you are happy to take part based on the information we just discussed?

Section 2 – Background of role and background of project (3 mins) (8 minutes total)

Aim: to build rapport and gain understanding of the participant's project and their role.

To begin with could you tell me a bit about your role in the project and how long you have worked there?

We'll talk in a moment about the ACF funding specifically, but could you briefly give me more of a general overview of [name of project]?

Section 3 – Overview of project; planning and delivery (15 mins) (22 mins total)
Aim: To understand how the funding was used for the project. What specific outcomes were they hoping to achieve from the service and for whom?

And now moving on to the Access to Childcare Fund funding. Broadly speaking, what did you hope to achieve with the funding at the outset?

What were the barriers to accessible, flexible and affordable childcare that you were hoping to overcome?

What did you think the funding could add to your existing service in order to address these barriers?

- Would you say there was anything innovative about what you planned to do or was it an approach that was more tried or tested?

Who were the target group/s you wanted to reach? Were these the same groups you already worked with? Why did you choose this group/these groups? Probe on specific TCPDP groups (Note to researcher: Highlight relevant ones before interview)

- lone parent families

- families with a disabled adult child,

- larger families,

- ethnic minority families

- families with a child under one year old

- families where the mother is under 25 years of age

How did you go about understanding what the barriers for families in your target groups were and what might help to overcome them?

- Did you use existing knowledge, or did you consult or collaborate with families/other organisations?

- How well do you feel these approaches worked?

Have the key aims of the project changed over time?

What would you say is the key aim of your ACF funded project now?

And what are the specific outcomes you are hoping to achieve for the target group now? (Note to researcher: these should be included in monitoring materials so cross reference to check that we have the most up to date version of the outcomes they are seeking to achieve. We will come back to ask about meeting each of these outcomes later in the discussion)

PROBE FULLY.

ASK IF AIMS OF PROJECT CHANGED OVER TIME:

We'll come back later to discuss further how and why the project has changed over time.

First, however, I just want to check that I have the details of the different elements of your funded project right. Can I confirm that you used the Access to childcare funding to

help fund the following areas (Note to researcher: Highlight relevant ones before interview)

- Holiday club

- Breakfast/lunch club

- Flexible hours

- Outdoor/play increased outdoor activity

- Rural provision

- Subsidised/free places

- After school activity

- Unregulated afterschool activities

- Weekend

- Family Support

- ASN

- Transport

- Childminding

Can you just tell me a bit more about how the service operates in practice?

PROBE FULLY ON THE DETAIL OF EACH OF THE ELEMENTS MENTIONED ABOVE

And who are the key partners you work with in delivering the projects?

- What are their roles in the project?

- Were they also involved in the planning stages?

- Were these existing partnerships or new ones?

What has gone well in terms of partnership working?

And what challenges have there been?

Section 4 – Communication and engagement strategies (10 mins) (32 total)
Aim: to understand how projects communicated their projects to target groups and how target groups engaged with the projects

Now, changing the subject slightly, how do you go about communicating the project to target families before they join?

Probe:

- Wider promotion e.g., websites/materials

- Indirect communications via partners

- Referrals from partners

Do the approaches used vary at all by target group?

Do you think there are issues of embarrassment or stigma for children or families attending targeted services like these?

Was there anything specific that you tried to communicate the offer in a non-stigmatising way?

From your perspective, how well do you feel your approach to promoting the programme is working?

- Any difference by target group?

- Are some approaches working better than others?

- Has it changed over time at all?

And how well attended would you say the project has been?

- How does this compare with any targets / expectations you had?

- Is the project better attended by some target groups than others?

- How does it vary by different elements of the project?

Were there any groups that were harder to reach or engage with?

- Why/what are or were the barriers/challenges?

- Is there anything you've done that has helped reach these groups in particular?

Were there any other general barriers to attendance / challenges you experienced engaging with children and families?

- Have you been able to mitigate these barriers?

Section 5- Project outcomes (13 mins) (45 total)
Aim: To find out more about how project has met the fund's aims and intended outcomes of their projects.

We'll now move on to talk about the impact of the project and the outcomes for children and families.

To what extent do you feel the project has met the fund's aims, that is to provide accessible, affordable and flexible childcare to low-income families from the six priority groups? PROBE FULLY ON EACH OF THE THREE (ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, FLEXIBLE)

- How is your project measuring this? E.g., feedback from families?
- Any differences in outcomes for different priority groups?

What would you say are the key elements of the project that have facilitated these aims being met?

As mentioned earlier you are focusing on <mark>X</mark> key outcomes for children and families. I'd just like to go through each now in turn and ask to what extent you feel this outcome is being achieved and what data/evidence you are using to measure this.

PROBE FULLY: ASK FOR EACH OUTCOME AREA THEY FOCUSED ON:

- How is your project measuring this?
- What are key elements that have facilitated this?
- Were there any differences in outcomes for any of the target groups?

IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED:

What influence would you say partnership working has had on the project's outcomes?

And what has been the impact of the family support work?

Were there any unintended or unexpected consequences of the project?

More generally, what impact, if any, has the funding had on your organisation?
PROBE:

- on your frontline staff
- on the operation of your service
- what has it allowed you to do differently / try / do additionally that you wouldn't have been able to do otherwise?

And what impact, if any, has being part of the Fund had on your partnership working more generally?

Section 6 – Monitoring change over time and building on learning (8 mins) (53 total)
Aim: To find out how projects have adapted and changed as a result of monitoring and reflection and how this will inform future delivery.

We're coming towards the end now and I would just like to take some time to for us to reflect on how the project has changed over time. **So, how, if at all, has the delivery of the project changed since the start of the funding period?**

- Were there aspects of the programme you identified as not working so well?

What have any changes in delivery been informed/influenced by?

IF NOT MENTIONED IN QUESTION ABOVE: **What role, if any, has the monitoring and evaluation you've been doing played in the project's development over time?**

- How, if at all, has it helped you to overcome any challenges?

More generally, how have you found the process of undertaking monitoring and evaluation for your project?

- What elements of it have been most/least useful?

- What, if any, challenges have there been in meeting the monitoring and evaluation requirements?

- Has the process helped at all in achieving the desired outcomes of your project?

How could the monitoring process have been made more useful for you?

And is there anything that could have made it easier to complete?

Section 7- Lessons Learned (5 mins) (58 total)

Aim: To draw on lessons learned more widely and ideas for improvement

---

That's us coming to the end now. **Overall how would you summarise what difference the fund has made to the families you work with?**

What lessons, if any, have you learned from this process, that will inform the future delivery of your model?

And what lessons have you learned from your involvement with the fund that you think could be applied more generally to make other childcare services more accessible, affordable and flexible for low-income families?

- What advice would you give to someone else setting out to make their service more accessible, affordable and flexible?

Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

Section 8: Wrap up (2 mins) (60 mins total)

THANK PARTICIPANT & STOP RECORDING.

Now the interview has finished are there any comments you have made that you would like to not be included as direct quotes in the report? You can also get back in touch with us later if you think of anything you'd like not to be included. We'll offer you the chance to review any sections of the draft report we feel may be identifying before submitting it to Scottish Government.

NB: MAKE NOTE OF COMMENTS NOT WANTING TO BE INCLUDED BELOW OR IF APPROPRIATE MARK IN GUIDE ABOVE.

The next stage of the research is to speak to both project stakeholders and families who have attended projects funded by the ACF about their experiences. We are yet to decide if all projects will be included in this stage of the research. If your project is selected, we will be back in touch by email with more information.

Discussion guide for families

Access to Childcare Fund - Families discussion guide
Initial notes on project
Space for name, general notes on project. Include focus areas from driver diagrams and any other information that is relevant.
Section 1: Introduction and consent (5 mins) Aim: to make sure we gain informed consent from participant before taking part including consent for recording.
Thank participant for taking part and introduce yourself and Ipsos Scotland. • **Remind participant/s of the aims of the research:** The Scottish Government has asked us, Ipsos Scotland (an independent research organisation), to get feedback from families about different models of after school childcare. The aim of the research is to find out what went well and what could be done better in future. We'll also be speaking to people who helped organise the childcare project you took part in. Once we have spoken to everyone, we'll write a report summarising what everyone has said and that will be published by the Scottish Government. • **Provide reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality:** • It will not be possible for the Scottish Government or anyone else to know who took part in the research. We will include quotes in the report, but these would be anonymous. No identifying information about individuals or families (e.g., names or contact details) will be passed on to anyone outside the research team (me and my colleagues at Ipsos). • Remind participant that the interview will last around 30-40 minutes. (If joint interview, explain that the child will only need to stay for the first part – around 15/20 minutes) and that they will receive a thank you voucher/payment which you will sort out at the end of the discussion. • Remind participant that there are no right or wrong answers. It's really useful to hear what could have been done better as well as what went well. • Emphasise that taking part is completely voluntary - they don't have to answer any questions they don't want to answer and can decide to stop the interview at any point.

- Remind that they are free to change their mind and decide not to take part at any time before or during the interview, or after the interview until the findings have been written up.
- Check if participant has any questions.

NOTE: Collecting children consent is important here as we will so far have only communicated with the parent/carer. Spend time making sure children understands what the interview is about and what we/the Scottish Government will do with the information. Offer to go through information sheet if necessary.

- Request permission to record interview. Explain that this is for transcription and analysis purposes and that recordings will not be shared outside the research team at Ipsos.

That's recording us now. Could I quickly ask you to confirm for the recording that you are happy to take part based on the information we just discussed?

Section 2 – Background/building rapport (2 mins) (7 minutes total)
Aim: to build rapport and gain understanding of participant's life.

To start with, could you tell me a bit about yourself/yourselves?

- (If video/phone interview) where do you live
- Who do you live with
- What do you do on a typical day?
- (FOR children) What kinds of things you like doing?

Section 3 – Background on the project they attended (5 mins) (12 mins total)
Aim: To understand which project they attended and how it worked

It would be great to hear a bit about the after school childcare project you/your child attend. You attend [project] is that right?

Can you tell me a bit about what that involves?

- Where?
- When and how often/how long attending for? Is that the same every week?
- With whom?
- What they do there? [note will discuss further]
- Is there food provided? [will ask more about this later]

Section 4 – Outcomes for children (8 mins) (20 total)
Aim: to explore perceived outcomes for children from attending the project

KEY OUTCOMES: IMPACT ON PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT AND PARENTAL WELLBEING

Note to interviewers:

OVERVIEW

Overall, how do you/your child feel about attending [the project]?

- Does child enjoy it / are they happy to go?
- FOR child: What do you like about it?
- FOR child: What is not so good about it?

FOR OLDER CHILDREN/PARENTS (IF NO child): **How, if at all, do you think you/your children (children you look after) benefit from attending?**

IF children ARE TAKING PART, PLEASE ASK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS IN MORE DETAIL. IF PARENT ONLY, SECTION HEADINGS BELOW CAN BE USED AS PROMPTS FOR ABOVE QUESTION BUT NO NEED TO PROBE IN DETAIL.

RANGE AND CHOICE OF ACTIVITIES

REFER TO ACTIVITIES MENTIONED EARLIER – TRY TO ESTABLISH RANGE/CHOICE/VARIETY
You mentioned that you do [ACTIVITIES], do you do similar activities each time? How often do you do different kinds of activities?

- Is there enough variety?
- Is there enough choice?
- Does children get do new activities / learn new things?
  IF YES:
    - What kind of things?
    - What is the best thing they have discovered/tried?
    - What is the impact of getting to trying or learning new things for the children? How does it make them feel?
- Does variety/choice impact on how much they enjoy attending?

Have you been asked what of things you wanted to do while you are there?

- When/how often?
- Is it important to children to be part of decisions at the project?

FOOD

IF FOOD PROVIDED: **Tell me a bit more about the food provided**
- Does children enjoy / eat it?
- Is there much choice?
- Are there healthy food options available?
- What difference does it make to children having food provided? Is it important for them?
- Is the food similar to what they usually have at home?
- Does children learn about food at the project?
- Has this had any impact on the food they eat at home/how they have meals at home?

IMPACTS ON children WELLBEING
How did attending affect how children/your child felt in general?
(e.g., did it impact how the children felt outside of/after the project?)
PROBE AROUND:
- Happiness
- Confidence or self-esteem
- Any other mental health impacts?

Does children do more physical activity at the project than they would normally?
- How do they feel about this?
- What effects does this have on them? Positives / negatives?

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS
Which adults are normally leading the project/looking after you?
- What are they like? Does children like the staff?
- Does children interact/spend much time with the staff?
- What do staff do well?
- What could they do better?
- Does spending time with staff make a difference to them?
  PROBE around e.g., impact on enjoyment, support to do new things

Do you get to spend time with others around your age?
- What do they think about this? (e.g., what is good/bad about this?)
- Do they get on well with peers?
- Has spending time with other children made a difference to them?
  PROBE around e.g., impact on mental wellbeing, enjoyment, confidence

ENVIRONMENT/BEING OUTSIDE
You mentioned the project take place at [LOCATION]. What do you think about the this?
- What do they like/dislike about this?

- What makes it a nice (or not) place to be?
- Do they spend time outdoors? Is this important/positive for them?
- What effects does this have on them? Positives / negatives?

SUMMARY

Is there anything you think could be improved about the project?
- Is there anything they particularly like that there could be more of? Or less of?
- How could people running activities like this encourage more children/families like you to come along?

Any final thoughts/feedback they think it would be useful for us to know?

THANK CHILD FOR TAKING PART AND EXPLAIN THE NEXT SECTION IS FOR PARENTS ONLY.

ASK PARENT IF THERE IS ANYTHING THEY WOULD LIKE TO ADD ON HOW THEIR CHILD FEELS ABOUT GOING AND WHAT THEY THINK HAVE BEEN THE MAIN BENEFITS FOR THEIR CHILD

Section 5 – Access and barriers (8 mins) (28 total)
Aim: to explore how easy it was to find out about and access the project, and how it compares to any alternatives

When and how did you first hear about the project?
- What were their first thoughts when they first heard about the project?
- Did they think it was the sort of thing that would they/their children would feel able to attend? Why/why not? (Why) did it appeal to them?
- Were they invited directly or was it something that anybody could sign up to?
  - How did they feel about being invited to take part?
  - Did they like being invited in this way? (If not, how would they like to be invited?)
- IF PARTICIPANT MENTIONS THEY WERE SPECIFCIALLY TARGETED FOR SUPPORT: Some people have suggested that there may be some stigma around attending these kinds of projects. Is that something you've experienced?

Would your child have been able to attend other childcare settings if the project hadn't been on?
- What would you/they have done instead?
- How does this compare?

Overall, how easy or difficult was it for you / your family to attend?
PROBE ON:
- **Signing up:**
  - How did they sign up? How easy was it to do this?
- **Timings:**
  - Are the timings convenient? (Do they fit with other commitments?)

- o Are they flexible? Is this important?
- o How do the timings compare to other childcare options?
- o What would be ideal for you in terms of the timings for this kind of childcare?
- **Travel to activities:**
  - o Does children travel alone or accompanied by adult/sibling?
  - o How do they get there – walk/public transport/car?
    - How long does it take?
    - How easy it to get there?
  - o Is there support provided to help your family travel to/from the project?
    - Is any transport provided?
    - Is the cost of transportation covered?
  - o Is there anything that would make it easier for your family to get to the project?
- **Cost:**
  - o Does it cost them anything to attend? (Directly or indirectly)
  - o What, if any, impact does this have for them?
- **General barriers:**
  - o Is there anything else that makes it difficult/can make it for you it difficult to attend?
    - Is there anything that would help to make that easier?
  - o Is there anything that normally makes it difficult to access after school childcare/that you expected might be an issue but turned out not to be?
    - E.g., additional support needs, not speaking English as first language etc.
    - What made this project different?

Have the organisers of the project asked for any feedback on how things are working?
- If yes, were there any changes as a result?
- How would you ideally prefer to be asked about your views on the project?

Section 6- Outcomes for parents/carers (9 mins) (37 total)

Aim: to explore perceived outcomes for parents/carers

KEY OUTCOMES: IMPACT ON PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT AND PARENTAL WELLBEING

OVERVIEW OF SUPPORT/PARENTAL INOLVEMENT WITH PROJECT
We've spoken about children's experience of attending the project. I'd also like to understand more about your experiences of the project.

What kind of support, if any, have you personally received through the project?
IF YES, PROBE FOR DETAILS AND IMPACTS

- Direct support / signposting to other support?
- What type of support - e.g., financial support / support to access study, training or work?

PARENTAL IMPACTS
Overall, what have been the key benefits of the project for you [and your partner/husband/wife]?

GO ON TO ASK ABOUT FOLLOWING ELEMENTS (IF NOT COVERED IN SUFFICIENT DETAIL):

PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT
Is there anything you've been able to do yourself that you wouldn't have been able to do without the project?
Probe on:
- Opportunities to study/train/work
- What is it about the project that's made the most difference in making this possible for you? / What would normally stop you doing these things?

FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES
Has attending the project meant your family saved money at all?
IF YES:
- On what?
- What impact did this have?
- Did the reduction in childcare costs ease pressures on the overall family budget?

PARENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING
How, if at all, has the project had impact your wellbeing?
PROBE ON mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing

FOOD
We've spoken a bit already about the food at the project. Is it important to you that food is offered?
- What did you think of the food offer?
- Has attending the activity has any impact on your knowledge of preparing food or how you have meals at home? (e.g., learning around nutrition, cooking skills, appreciating eating together)

Section 7- Summary & thoughts on improvement (2 mins) (39 total)
Aim:

Overall, how would you summarise your / your family's experience of the project?
- IF NOT COVERED: What do you think have been the key benefits for your family?
What is it about the project that made the most difference to you/your family?
(PROBE ON HOW THIS HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE - accessible, affordable, flexible?)

How (if at all) could the project be improved even more?

- Is there anything they particularly like that they would like to see more of?
- Anything there could be less of?
- How could people organising similar projects in future encourage more children/families like you to come along?

Any final thoughts/feedback they think it would be useful for us to know?

Section 8: Wrap up (1 min) (40 mins total)

That's everything I wanted to ask you today, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me today. I really appreciate it. I'll stop the recording now [STOP RECORDING].

Before I let you go, I just need to sort out how to get your thank you payment over to you.

Check whether prefer BACS transfer (note that this takes minimum 2 weeks) or voucher (Amazon or L2S)?

RECORD DETAILS (INCLUDING DETAILS FOR PAYING BACS) IN SECURE SPREADSHEET.

Just to remind you, we'll be writing a report to summarise everything you and others have told us about the school-age childcare projects. It will be published on the Scottish Government website, so you'll be able to search for it and read it if you're interested. It will probably be published this Summer.

If you would like, we can send you a link to the report when it's published. If so, we'll keep your name and email address for this purpose and wait to securely delete it until after we've sent you the link to the report. MAKE A NOTE OF THIS IN THE RECRUITMENT SPREADSHEET.

That's everything from me. Do you have any questions before we finish?

THANK AND CLOSE.

Discussion guide for stakeholders

<table>
<tr><td>

Access to Childcare Fund stakeholder discussion guide

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

Initial notes on project

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

Space for name, general notes on project involved with and general involvement. Include focus areas from driver diagrams and any other information that is relevant.

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

Section 1: Introduction and consent (5 mins)
Aim: to make sure we gain informed consent from participant before taking part including consent for recording.

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

THANK PARTICIPANT FOR TAKING PART & INTRODUCE YOURSELF.

Introduce yourself, your role and Ipsos Scotland

Remind participant that the interview will last around 60 minutes and check it still suits to conduct it now.

Remind participant/s of the aims of the research:

- The Scottish Government has asked us, Ipsos Scotland (an independent research organisation), to carry out an evaluation of the Access to Childcare Fund. As part of this, we would like to hear about your experience of being involved with an ACF funded project.

- This will contribute to the overall research aims of understanding to what extent projects achieved the intended outcomes for children, parents, and families and to explore the project processes, including if and how projects overcame access and participation barriers.

- We have spoken to project leads and will also be speaking to families who have attended the projects. Once we have spoken to everyone, we will write a report and it will be published by the Scottish Government in summer 2023.

- Remind participant/s that we are evaluating the fund as a whole rather than individual projects.

Provide reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality:

- Explain that no identifying information about them (e.g., names or contact details, or notes on their interview) will be seen by anyone outside of Ipsos Scotland and the transcriber.

- Inform participant that any quotes used will be anonymous. However, we cannot fully guarantee when published that someone would not be able to

</td></tr>
</table>

make an educated guess at the project the quotes relate to due to the small number of projects in evaluation. After the interview we will give you the opportunity to note any comments you would not like to be included as quotes or review anything in the draft report we feel may be identifying.

Remind participant that there are no right or wrong answers and they don't have to answer any questions they don't want to answer. They can decide to stop the interview at any point.

Let participant know that you have a general understanding of the project and their partnership with funded project from the project lead interview. However, we are also interested in how the project is working from the point of view of partners.

Check if participant has **any questions.**

Request permission to record interview. Explain that this is for transcription and analysis purposes and that recordings will not be shared outside the research team at Ipsos.

That's recording us now. Could I quickly ask you to confirm for the recording that you are happy to take part based on the information we just discussed?

Section 2 – Background of role (2 mins) (7 minutes total)

Aim: to build rapport and gain understanding of the participant's role.

To begin with, could you just tell me a bit about your role – generally first and then briefly in relation to [name of project]

Section 3 – Overview of project; planning and delivery (7 mins) (14 mins total)
Aim: To understand the design of the project and who was involved in the planning and creation of the service

Thanks, and I'd now like to understand a bit more about your involvement with [name of project].

Before you became involved with [name of project] had you worked with [name of organisation running project] before? PROBE FOR DETAILS

And when and how did you first become involved with [name of project] specifically?
PROBE:

- Was this before or after the project had received funding?

- IF BEFORE: Were you involved in the funding application?

As you may know, the Access to Childcare Fund, that funds [name of project] aims to find ways of improving access to accessible, flexible and affordable for target families. The target families [name of project] wanted to reach are: Note to researcher: Highlight relevant ones before interview)

- lone parent families
- families with a disabled adult child,
- larger families,
- ethnic minority families
- families with a child under one year old
- families where the mother is under 25 years of age

Prior to [name of project] starting, what would you say were the barriers to childcare for families in these groups?

IF INVOLVED IN THE FUNDING APPLICATION:

At the funding stage, when the project was being designed, was there any consultation or collaboration with families/other organisations about barriers or did you use this existing knowledge?

- How well do you feel this worked?

Would you say there was anything innovative about what [name of project] planned to do when designing the project or was it an approach that was more tried and tested?

Section 4: Partnership working (6 mins) (20 total)
Aim: to understand stakeholders' roles in the project and how partnership working is going

Can you tell me a bit more about the partnership you have with [name of project]?

- What role do you have?
- Do you work with any other partners of just [project lead]?

What has gone well in terms of partnership working?

And what challenges have there been?

What has helped to overcome them?

Have there been any wider impacts on partnership working as a result of your involvement in [name of project]?

Section 5 – Communication and engagement strategies (10 mins) (30 total)
Aim: to understand how projects communicated their projects to target groups and how target groups engaged with the projects

Now, changing the subject slightly to thinking about how the project is communicated to target families before they join. Do you have a role in this?
IF YES:

How do you go about doing this?
Probe:
- Wider promotion e.g., websites/materials
- Targeting families directly

Do the approaches used vary at all by target group?

ASK ALL:
Do you think there are issues of embarrassment or stigma for children or families attending targeted services like these?

Is there anything specific you/[name of project] tried to communicate the offer in a non-stigmatising way?

From your perspective, how well do you feel the approach to promoting the programme is working?
- Any difference by target group?
- Are some approaches working better than others?
- Has it changed over time at all?

And how well attended would you say the project has been?
- How does this compare with any targets / expectations you had?
- Is the project better attended by some target groups than others?
- How does it vary by different elements of the project?

Are there any groups that were harder to reach or engage with?
- Why/what are or were the barriers/challenges?
- Is there anything you've done that has helped reach these groups in particular?

Were there any other general barriers to attendance / challenges you experienced engaging with children and families?
- Have you been able to mitigate these barriers?

Section 5- Project outcomes (8 mins) (38 total)
Aim: To find out more about how the project has met families' needs and the intended outcomes of their projects.

We'll now move on to talk about the impact of the project and the outcomes for children and families.

To what extent do you feel the project has met the fund's aims, that is to provide accessible, affordable and flexible childcare to low-income families from the six priority groups? PROBE FULLY ON EACH OF THE THREE (ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, FLEXIBLE)

- Any differences for different priority groups?

What would you say are the key elements of the project that have facilitated these aims being met?

And what impact would you say [name of project] is having on families you know who are using it?

[name of project] is focusing on X key outcomes for children and families. I'd just like to go through each now in turn and ask to what extent you feel this outcome is being achieved for the families you work with**.**

PROBE FULLY: ASK FOR EACH OUTCOME AREA THEY FOCUSED ON:

- What do you think are the key elements that have facilitated this?
- Were there any differences in outcomes for any of the target groups?

What influence would you say partnership working has had on the project's outcomes?

Section 7- Lessons Learned (5 mins) (43 total)

Aim: To draw on lessons learned more widely and ideas for improvement

That's us coming to the end now. Overall how would you summarise what difference the fund has made to the families you work with?

What do you think has worked well with [name of project]?

And what do you think could be improved?

And what lessons have you learned from your involvement with the fund that you think could be applied more generally to make other childcare services more accessible, affordable and flexible for low-income families?

Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

Section 8: Wrap up (2 mins) (45 mins total)

THANK PARTICIPANT & STOP RECORDING.

Now the interview has finished are there any comments you have made that you would like to not be included as direct quotes in the report? You can also get back in touch with us later if you think of anything you'd like not to be included. We'll offer

you the chance to review any sections of the draft report we feel may be identifying before submitting it to Scottish Government.

NB: MAKE NOTE OF COMMENTS NOT WANTING TO BE INCLUDED BELOW OR IF APPROPRIATE MARK IN GUIDE ABOVE.