

National evaluation of the wraparound care pilot project

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Key findings

Parents taking up the wraparound pilot provision thought that on the whole it provided affordable, good value and accessible childcare.

The models in the five areas developed different ways of integrating the core and wraparound provision. Support by a lead agency was crucial, as well as strong central management and coordination to bring early education and childcare closer together and promote partnership between different providers.

Schools are an important resource in developing integrated provision, and provide a good foundation on which to build. Many of the pilot partnerships involved primary schools working with pre-school providers, as well as other partnerships providing parent and family support and other community services.

Of the parents taking up the wraparound pilot provision, 56% said this gave them more choice for work and/or study. A third (32%) were able to look or apply for jobs (this included people who were already working and those who were not). One in five had changed jobs, and one in five had changed working hours. Parents using the wraparound pilot provision also increased their use of formal childcare once the child started school.

The pilot settings were providing an overall standard of care and education equivalent to that of the national sample in the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study. Pilot settings in the voluntary and private sectors gained similar scores on quality as settings from the same sectors in the EPPE study.

Both parents and providers reported positive benefits for children, including curriculum continuity and consistency in Foundation Stage provision (particularly where there was collaboration between providers of core early education places and extended provision), continuity of care and routine, benefits for children with special needs, and smoother transition to school.

75% of the children using integrated provision had already attended some type of formal childcare. Users of pilot provision were using significantly more hours of formal childcare compared to those not using the pilot provision, who were using significantly more hours of informal childcare.

The service most frequently provided in addition to childcare was information on the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit.

Closer examination of extended provision within the pilot settings revealed two approaches. In the extended education approach, children experienced two core early education sessions (although only one was their 'official' funded early education place). In the extended care approach, extended provision was separated from early education provision (thus children experienced one early education place, plus separate extended care). Both worked well.

Preliminary observation suggested that a package combining a high quality early education place and separate extended care **could** provide a beneficial educational experience for children. This is strongly supported by the EPPE study, which found no difference in outcomes for children attending education provision full-time over those attending part-time.

Although the maintained sector provided the highest quality extended provision, the **key** factor in high quality integrated care was a quality core early education place. Thus a 'package' comprising a 'school quality' early education place plus extended provision in any sector, can provide a stimulating experience for children to develop their cognitive and social skills.

Nearly half of the pilot centres offered other services for parents, such as tax-benefit advice, counselling, training or career advice, parental support and health care services

The research

This research looks at five pilot projects delivering extended provision 'wrapped around' a core early education place to improve developmental outcomes for children and meet the needs of parents. The pilot was announced by the Government in October 2000 as part of its early years expansion programme (Inter-Departmental Childcare Review, 2002; La Valle et al, 2000; Woodland, Miller and Tipping, 2002).

This study was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills to evaluate the implementation, effectiveness, and quality of provision of pilot projects in five local authorities providing Wraparound Care. It is highly relevant to current policy development, and adds to the growing literature on evaluation and integration. The experiences of the five pilots will provide useful information to local authorities and others seeking to develop and extend their services to families and children and to schools seeking to provide childcare or other extended and community services.

The five pilot areas and their programmes

Five local authorities were invited to put forward 'original and innovative proposals for providing integrated education and care for young children'. Each designed very different approaches to suit their different contexts:

Cornwall faced issues of rural isolation & employment deprivation;

Ealing had areas of significant social need, income and employment deprivation and was culturally diverse with a large traveller population;

Kirklees included diverse communities in terms of deprivation, ethnic mix and geography;

Lancashire illustrated the contrast between the multiply-deprived ex-tourist town of Morecambe, and the relatively affluent, but rurally isolated, Lune Valley; and

York contrasted relatively affluent villages with low levels of childcare, with low income and employment deprived estates in the inner city.

Research objectives and methods

The research, funded by the Department for Education and Skills, was carried out during 2002 and 2003 by a consortium including the Department of Social Policy and Social Work and the Department of Educational Studies in the University of Oxford, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

The evaluation assessed the pilot projects' implementation, and the impact for both parents and children. It explored the following questions:

- ▶ What kind of provision did the pilot projects aim to establish, and who used the provision? How well did the projects meet the needs of their areas?
- ▶ How did the pilot projects tackle problems of flexibility, sustainability, or changing staff cultures?
- ▶ Was the provision offered by pilot projects of high quality?
- ▶ What was the impact of wraparound provision on parents' entry or re-entry into the labour market, education or training?
- ▶ What was the effect of attending a wraparound place on children's social interaction and behaviour?
- ▶ What was the cost of offering extended provision as part of an integrated day for three and four year olds?

Methods for assessing the **implementation** of the wraparound provision programme included the following:

- ▶ documentary analysis
- ▶ a questionnaire completed by childcare providers
- ▶ interviews with key people in the five pilot projects, and
- ▶ data collection from the local evaluators in each of the five areas.

Methods for assessing the **impact** of the wraparound provision programme included the following:

- ▶ in four of the projects, a self-completion questionnaire survey of 527 parents in 23 'pilot area' schools and eight matched 'non-pilot area' schools. Pilot area schools were identified using information from wraparound care providers on the destinations of the children who had experienced a pilot 'place' and then moved on to primary school. Questionnaires were sent home in the children's book bags or distributed at events hosted by the primary schools. The questionnaire provided information on parent characteristics, employment, and use of childcare;
- ▶ a follow-up telephone interview with 339 parents, which included a social behaviour profile of their children (using ten questions from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: Goodman, 1997);
- ▶ parent focus groups; and
- ▶ observations in fifteen centres to assess the **quality** of the extended provision in a sample of settings (maintained sector, voluntary playgroups and pre-schools, and private day nurseries) using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, or ECERS-R (Harms et al, 1998).

Wraparound care for three and four year olds

For the purposes of the pilot a wraparound care place was defined in the DfES guidance as **'care for three and four year olds provided before and/or after an early years education place and directly facilitated by the provider'**. A 'wraparound day' thus includes a free 2.5 hours early education place as 'core provision', with extended provision (for which parents generally pay) offered before and/or after that free place to provide an integrated day. This study has considered a range of models which co-ordinate these two elements to offer a 'package' of **extended provision** wrapping around an **early education place**. The model chosen depended on four key choices:

- ▶ Choice 1 – should a setting extend its own provision to offer both elements of the 'integrated day', or collaborate with other providers to form a 'partnership'?
- ▶ Choice 2 – to what extent will the core education and extended elements of provision be integrated?
- ▶ Choice 3 – who will take on responsibility for management?
- ▶ Choice 4 – which sector/s will offer the core and extended elements of provision?

The impact of wraparound care provision on parents

Impact on work or training

The identification of quantitative impacts on parents' work or training patterns was severely limited by the unexpectedly small numbers of children in the five pilots who had gone through the programmes, resulting in an unexpectedly small sample size in the parent questionnaire survey. There were small positive differences between parents in the areas with access to wraparound provision and those from areas without access, in rates of full or part-time working/education or training, in hours of work and in reliance on out-of-work benefits, but none of these results were significant at conventional levels. Using the pilot wraparound care provision may, however, have increased use of formal childcare once children started school.

The telephone interviews provided more positive evidence of the impact of wraparound care provision. More than half (56%) of the parents reported more choices for work and/or study, a third (32%) were able to look or apply for jobs (this included people who were already working and those who were not), while one in five had changed jobs, and the same proportion had changed their hours of work.

Additional provision or replacement for existing arrangements?

The key determinant of whether or not parents used the pilot provision seemed to be previous use of formal childcare. The majority (75%) of children who attended the pilot provision had already attended some form of formal childcare beforehand. Parents appear mainly to have used the pilot provision as additional, rather than replacement, childcare. Once they started using the pilot provision, three quarters of parents were using three or more forms of childcare, compared to only half before the start of the pilot period. Compared to non-pilot parents, those using the pilot provision used a greater number of providers to cover the same number of hours per week on average. Parents using pilot provision also used many more hours of formal childcare than the non-pilot parents, who used significantly more hours of informal childcare.

Affordability, accessibility and flexibility

Almost all parents surveyed considered the pilot provision to be affordable, good value and accessible. Only 8% reported difficulties in securing an extended provision place when they needed it. A very high proportion (90%) said the provision was easy to get to. Flexibility, however, varied. Some provision was almost fully flexible – parents could literally 'turn up on the day' and book their child in for whichever hours or sessions they needed; this was greatly appreciated by parents, who also valued provision of short term or emergency care. Other provision required payment and booking in advance.

Other services

In addition to meeting local demand for childcare, some settings aimed to provide a wider range of services for parents and families. Almost half (46%) of the pilot providers offered parent services such as tax-benefit advice, counselling, training or career advice, parental support and health care services. Most commonly cited services were information on the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit (43% of the pilot providers), health services (27%) and courses and training (30%).

The impact of wraparound care on children

Both parents and providers reported positive benefits for children. These included curriculum continuity and consistency in Foundation Stage provision (particularly when providers of core early education places and extended provision collaborated); familiarity in routine and continuity of care;

benefits for special needs children from early intervention; smoother transition to school; improvements in children's social skills; and educational benefits in areas where children received little stimulation in their home environment (particularly for full-time children). Children also seemed to cope well with what might be considered a long day, and with moving between providers – provided there were familiar faces and routines, procedures for passing on information, and good collaboration between providers. On the standardized assessment of children's social and behavioural development there was no difference between children in the pilot settings and those in comparison areas.

Assessing quality of provision

The quality of care and education in a sample of the pilot settings was assessed using the ECERS-R observational rating scale. Observations were conducted on **extended provision** only, and comparisons made with a national data set collected (1997-1999) as part of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) research funded by the DfES (Sylva et al, 1999 a, b).

The pilot settings were providing an overall standard of care and education equivalent to that of the national EPPE sample. The quality profiles were very similar to trends in the national sample. Extended provision offered by pilot settings in the maintained sector was of the highest standard, followed by private day nurseries and then playgroups. However, while scores achieved by pilot settings in the maintained sector were broadly similar to their national EPPE equivalents, pilot settings in the voluntary and private sectors gained higher overall scores than settings in the national study from the same sectors.

Educational quality

Extended provision in the pilot settings took two forms: '**extended education**' when children had another session of 'core' education with a second group of part-time children receiving their free entitlement and '**extended care**', when children had one core early education experience plus separate extended care. Observations conducted in the pilot settings suggest that extended provision which offered a second 'educational experience' in the extended part of a child's day provided a more educationally stimulating experience for children. But is it 'better' for children to have access to two early education experiences in one day? Observations at one 'extended care' pilot setting suggested that a package combining a quality early education place and separate extended care could provide a quality experience for children. This is strongly supported by the EPPE study, which found no difference in outcomes for children who attended education provision full-time over those who attended part-time.

Combinations of core and extended provision

The EPPE research suggested that the maintained sector provides the highest quality centre-based education provision across a variety of quality domains and not just 'academic' ones – that is, there is an advantage to children having their core early education place within the maintained sector. But does it matter which sector offers the extended provision? Results in the current pilot are similar to trends in the national EPPE sample and indicate that the maintained sector also provides the highest quality extended provision. Thus provision offering both early education places and extended provision within the maintained sector might offer the highest quality experience for children across the day. However, the previous analysis of educational quality suggests that the key factor for an integrated package is a quality core early education place. If so, a 'package' comprising a 'school quality' early education place and extended provision in the maintained or the voluntary and private sectors could also provide a quality experience. A rigorous comparison is needed of the quality of different combinations of provision.

Wraparound care in practice

How many wraparound care places have been created and taken up in the pilot projects?

Uncertainty over the definition of wraparound care in the pilot projects made it difficult to assess the numbers of places created. For example, some places were taken up by children who needed wraparound care provision but were not eligible for the pilot projects – they were too young, or already at school. Other projects included holiday playscheme places, although, strictly speaking, these had to be excluded from the evaluation, since there was no 'core education' place during the holidays to which 'extended care' could be attached.

Assessing take-up of places also proved problematic, particularly in settings which provided both the core education place and extended care. For settings which offered extended provision only, it proved straightforward to calculate the number of children accessing extended provision on a particular session or day. But many settings did not keep records of which specific sessions were funded as core education places and which were paid for by parents as extended provision. A method of assessing take-up of extended provision is suggested in the full report.

Costs

The pilot settings found it difficult to separate the specific costs of extended provision from the general costs of running their centres. Case studies were therefore presented to illustrate costs of setting up and running wraparound care in sample settings across all sectors. Rates charged ranged from around £1 per hour to around £5 per hour, with the average cost per hour (assuming full take-up) £1.87. Adjusting for actual take-up raised the average cost per hour for extended provision to £2.33.

Setting up and managing wraparound care provision

Premises, staffing, registration, marketing, logistics and planning were important issues, which start-up funding helped to overcome. Lack of knowledge in financial, funding and legal matters was also an obstacle during the early stages, and support and advice from the lead organisation was necessary. Overall management in the five pilot areas rested with project boards bringing together all the main 'actors' or 'stakeholders'. This was seen as crucial in bringing early education and childcare closer together and promoting partnership between different providers, whether management was 'hands-on' and pro-active, or more 'hands-off' and pump-priming. At site level, responsibility for management and operation was undertaken by local pre-school providers and primary schools in different combinations.

Sustainability

The key issue for the future was sustainability. This depended on local demand, the supply of other local childcare, parent attitudes towards employment and childcare, job availability, and levels of unemployment and deprivation in the area. A continuing management structure at the centre, able to shape thinking about the future, was identified as crucial to support sustainability.

Conclusions

Extended provision 'wrapped around' a core early education place has been shown to offer high quality integrated provision in a way that meets the needs of many parents and their children. Not all approaches were equally successful, but each had positive elements which can be used to develop good practice for the future.

The lessons learned by the five pilots are highly relevant to any agency or provider planning to develop and extend their services for families and children, particularly when providers are to work in partnership to offer an integrated day.

Many of the pilot partnerships have involved primary schools working with pre-school providers. Schools are an important resource in developing integrated provision, and provide a good foundation on which to build. Other partnerships are developing a wider range of parent and family support and other community services.

This report is thus highly relevant to the development of services for children and families and the Extended Schools agendas both in terms of identifying good practice and as a source of practical solutions to the challenge of integrating services.

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Further information

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