



A 'Childcare Revolution' in Wales

Final report

Bevan Foundation Policy Paper 6



A 'CHILDCARE REVOLUTION' IN WALES

Final report

by

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PREFACE

Suddenly, childcare is a big political issue that is occupying a central place on the political agenda. After years in which childcare, if discussed at all, was seen to be of minor interest and a 'women's issue', it has become a topic of national importance. From the announcement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's 'childcare revolution' at the end of 2004 to the Welsh Assembly Government's three separate task forces and working groups on childcare, childcare is at the centre of governments' ambitions.

But what is the reality like in various parts of Wales? What are the experiences of parents in different communities and different circumstances in Wales? What are the links between childcare provision and poverty? And what needs to be done to ensure that there is a 'childcare revolution' that meets the needs of children, especially poor children, women and men in Wales?

The Bevan Foundation decided to investigate these questions further and we were delighted to secure the sponsorship of a number of public and private organisations towards research costs. The project is, given the limited funding available, inevitably modest in scale but the conclusions clearly set the agenda for childcare in Wales.

The research was undertaken by Anthea Symonds and Anne Kelly. This report sets out their findings. A separate bi-lingual summary, based on this report, is available free on request from the Bevan Foundation office.

We look forward to working with others to take this agenda forward in the coming months and years.

Victoria Winckler
Director
Bevan Foundation
January 2005

1. INTRODUCTION

Childcare from ‘dawn to dusk’

1.1 Suddenly childcare is THE big political issue that is occupying a central place on the political agenda. After years in which childcare, if discussed at all, was seen to be of minor interest and basically a ‘woman’s issue’, it has become a topic of national importance. In December 2004, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a ‘childcare revolution’, in which childcare from ‘dawn to dusk’ is promised for all children between three and fourteen years of age.

1.2 This prompts a series of questions:

- Why has this happened?
- What are the main interests centring on childcare?
- Childcare for whom and why?
- What is the provision of childcare in Wales?
- What do parents think of childcare?
- What are the main needs and challenges for a universal system of childcare?

Childcare and child poverty

1.3 The provision of childcare to enable both parents to access the labour market is an essential ingredient in the drive to eradicate child poverty and end dependence on benefits. Undoubtedly, this is the main driver of policies and strategies of the UK government. But for many families living in poverty with little or no prospect of work, childcare of a different kind and for a different more long-term purpose may also be required. Years of deprivation have led to a universe of poverty that encompasses the life chances of the next generation. Children of the poor suffer ill health, live in substandard housing, ‘fail’ in education and become isolated from the world of employment and ambition. Can a system of childcare in partnership with parents start to change this pattern?

Working women and the decline of the male breadwinner

1.3 Work for all has become the focus of government policies since 1997. ‘Work is the route out of poverty’ is the mantra accompanying policies on tax reform, welfare to work, and the reorganisation of benefits. Britain has always lagged behind the rest of Europe in the provision of publicly funded childcare, despite the fact that Britain has one of the highest rates of female employment in the EU, with around 69% of women of working age in employment in 2003. This increase in the labour market participation of women is set to continue with an estimated 82% of extra jobs created in the UK by 2011 being taken by women.

- 1.4 There is a cultural shift evident in the direction of policies: a move from the male breadwinner model of family life that was the foundation of the post-war welfare state as set out in the Beveridge Report of 1942, to the universal worker model of a restructured welfare state of the 21st century. New policies which centralise the importance of affordable and accessible childcare must be seen within the context of this significant shift in the reality of modern family life and of the central importance of employment as the gateway to tax benefits and admission to active citizenship.
- 1.5 Currently approximately 67% of women with dependent children are in the workforce. But the employment rate of women with dependent children has remained consistently below those of women without children. There has, however, been a rise in the rate of lone parent employment, rising in the UK from 46% in 1997 to 54% by 2002. But it is evident that responsibility for childcare is a barrier to employment faced mainly by women.

Wales – undergoing social and economic transition

- 1.6 What is the effect of this economic and cultural change on the economy and social life of Wales? Wales is, in many ways, a textbook example of a post-industrial society with an underdeveloped agricultural and tourist sector. Historically, Wales has maintained strong community and family networks, often as a means of support and protection for individuals in facing poverty and hardship. The heavy industrial base of South Wales also meant that, unlike some other areas in the UK, female employment was not a part of a strong tradition of male breadwinner family life. The figure of the home-based 'Welsh mam' was seen as pivotal to Welsh family life. To summarise, women as independent workers outside of family and home have not been seen as fully and unequivocally belonging to the employed workforce.
- 1.7 But the economic base and family structures have changed dramatically. The decimation of the coal industry, the closure of heavy industry and agricultural depression, have all contributed to the decline of once cohesive communities and the restructuring of family life. This has meant that in Wales, as elsewhere, women have entered into the labour market in increasing numbers. As a measure of this dramatic change in the workforce, in 2003 more women than men were engaged as employees in Wales (553,300 compared with 544,400) although a larger proportion of women were in part-time work. However, the average weekly earnings of women in Wales were significantly lower than that of men (£357.30 compared with to £448.30) and also of women in the UK as a whole (£357.30 compared with £394.80). Therefore, despite women's increased involvement in the labour market, poverty and low wages are endemic among women in Wales and poverty for women inevitably means poverty for children.

Barriers to accessing childcare

- 1.8 Despite the emphasis on universal adult employment evident in government policies, there is not a simple causal connection between provision of childcare and employment. The provision of childcare is often fragmented, unsuitable and in short supply.
- 1.9 For many parents, the type of childcare they wish for their child may be inaccessible or prohibitively expensive. Ironically, childcare may seem expensive to the purchaser but jobs in childcare are very low paid. Many mothers are reluctant to leave their children with anybody other than family members and feel guilt at leaving them with 'strangers'. Many do not wish to endure the constant stress of rushing children from one place to another, in order to work for low wages. Others wish to stay at home with their children at least for the first few years.
- 1.10 What of those whose lives are so restricted by generational poverty and isolation that the ideal of work as the route out of poverty simply does not apply but who need support in order to improve the life chances of their children?
- 1.11 There is therefore a diversity of needs, attitudes and beliefs to be addressed in providing adequate levels of childcare and ensuring it is instrumental in lifting all children out of poverty.

This report

- 1.11 This report seeks to acknowledge this diversity, and in doing so shows that the extent of childcare provision in Wales and barriers to access are currently limiting the potential of the strategy to alleviate child poverty.
- 1.12 The next section looks at why childcare is important for a variety of reasons; tackling child poverty, attainment of equal opportunities, business efficiency and economic growth and most importantly for the benefit of children. It then analyses the defining policies and strategies on childcare and the policy drivers in England and Wales including the recently announced 'childcare revolution'. We also describe some European models of childcare provision. Section three is a scoping exercise, which attempts to both review the extent of childcare facilities currently available in Wales and to track the perceived barriers to access experienced by families in Wales. Section four looks at 'what childcare means to people', through case studies focusing on groups of women in differing social and economic circumstances. We then summarise the main findings which show the inadequacy of current provision, and finally recommend the way forward for Wales in the implementation of the childcare revolution.

2 CHILDCARE – WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

Key issues

- The provision of childcare is central to the tackling of child poverty, attainment of equal opportunities, economic development and most importantly, the long-term interests of children.
- The effects of child poverty can be tackled by the provision of quality childcare and support.
- Help is needed by many women raising families in poverty to enter employment or training and end social exclusion.
- Childcare which is accessible and affordable is necessary to achieve economic development and business efficiency.

2.1 The connecting interests that focus on childcare provision are:

CHILD
POVERTY

EQUAL
OPPORTUNITIES

**PROVISION OF
CHILDCARE**

INTERESTS
OF
THE CHILD

BUSINESS
EFFICIENCY
AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH

Child poverty – a major issue

2.2 The government is famously credited with making the commitment to 'eradicate child poverty within a generation' and almost all policies since 1998 have been enacted with this objective in mind. At the root of some policies such as the reform of the tax system, the National Childcare Strategy, work-life balance and the New Deal for lone parents, is the encouragement of adult employment as a means of eradicating child poverty.

- 2.3 But there also exists a group of people living in poverty who, for a variety of reasons, suffer from isolation, low self-esteem, lack of social and literacy skills and confidence who realistically are incapable of taking the route of work to lift themselves and their children from poverty. At present, Sure Start programmes and the Cymorth-funded projects deliver a range of health and social services to the most disadvantaged people and areas. But work with many is necessarily of a long-term nature, including support and confidence building, bringing people together to end isolation and to give children access to community life.
- 2.4 In Wales, specific policies to tackle child poverty and social exclusion include the Communities First programme and action to tackle disadvantage amongst children and young people is currently funded through Cymorth. Despite these stated objectives and national strategies, however, child poverty remains a major problem throughout the UK, especially in Wales.
- 2.5 Whilst there has been progress made in some aspects of child poverty and social exclusion in Wales in recent years, notably school exclusions and under-age pregnancies (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2003), nevertheless child poverty in Wales is widespread. Importantly, the majority of children in poverty do not live in Communities First areas. This makes the importance of provision of mainstream services crucial.

Extent and significance of child poverty

- 2.6 In Wales, 38% of children live in households claiming benefits, with the most deprived households living in urban areas (Welsh Assembly Government 2001). Wales has a higher proportion of people (24%) on low incomes than most other areas and 30% of children live in low income families. Seventeen percent of dependent children live in workless households compared to 15.9% in UK and the number of children in workless households and in young offender institutions was lower than the national average (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2003).
- 2.7 We also know that families with three or more dependent children are still most likely to be in poverty, and that large families and poverty are particularly prevalent in some minority ethnic groups. A third of Pakistani, Bangladeshi (68% in the lowest fifth of earnings), and Indian families (35% in lowest fifth) have three or more children compared to 18% of 'white' families (24% in lowest fifth) (Land 2004).

Child poverty and health

- 2.8 The Report of the Child Poverty Task Group (Welsh Assembly Government 2004) recognised that poverty, especially in early childhood, can seriously damage the rest of a child's life. The European definition of poverty explicitly shows how both children's health and social wellbeing can be disrupted by poverty. Although the Welsh Assembly Government is currently carrying out a survey of the links between child poverty and health (Welsh Assembly Government 2004), there is already a great deal of research available on the subject.

2.9 Links between unemployment, poverty and health status have been recognised for a long time (Whitehead 1992). The children of families in which one or both parents are unemployed may therefore be doubly disadvantaged. Not only do they suffer the deprivations of low income, but also they may have parents whose health is impaired. We know that children from poorer homes have a lower life expectancy, are more likely to die in infancy or childhood, have a greater likelihood of infections and poor health, and girls have a higher incidence of teenage pregnancy. They are twice as likely to die before the age of fifteen as children from a higher social class (Welsh Assembly Government 2004). The incidence of low birth weight babies is slightly lower in Wales overall than in England (7.3% of births as opposed to 7.8%) but reaches 9.7% in areas of deprivation. A poor diet is one of the major causes of ill health and families on low income are vulnerable to 'food poverty', defined by the Report of the Child Poverty Task Group as 'the inability to afford or to have reasonable access to food which provides a healthy diet' (Welsh Assembly Government 2004).

Child poverty and poor housing

2.10 Housing is a critical element of child health and well being. Housing conditions affect a child in many ways: security, comfort, warmth, and help parents in parenting but overcrowding, poor conditions or homelessness may lessen the ability of parents to care for their children. Sub-standard housing conditions may cause respiratory problems, increase the risk of infection and cause emotional disorders. Accommodation that is damp, infested and overcrowded can also contribute to a low birth weight baby's failure to thrive, and chronic ear, nose and throat problems (National Assembly for Wales 2001).

2.11 At the end of June 2003 there were 1,863 households in temporary accommodation in Wales. Of these 35% (646) lived in hostels, refuges or bed and breakfast accommodation. Twelve percent of these households contained children: of the 389 households in bed and breakfast accommodation, 119 were families with children. Children of lone parents and those from minority ethnic families experience some of the worst housing conditions in Britain. Specifically, most ethnic minority groups are concentrated in the private rented sector in inner city areas which contain the poorest housing and a continuing history of racial prejudice and discrimination prevents access to better quality housing. In Wales, Black African and Pakistani people are more likely than others to be living in overcrowded conditions. Black minority ethnic communities are known to be concentrated in and there is also evidence that Chinese and Black African people are also dependant on the private rented sector. This is an issue of concern as Wales' worst housing stock is owned by private landlords (Welsh Assembly Government 2004).

Child poverty and education

2.12 The findings of the 'Report of the Child Poverty Task Group Consultation' (Welsh Assembly Government 2004) show strong links between poverty and educational disadvantage. OECD evidence shows that differentials in educational attainment are greater in the UK than many other European countries. As the Basic Skills Agency

concluded:

*Most [head teachers] felt that young children's talking and listening skills had declined over the past five years- particularly the ability to speak audibly and be understood (with nearly two thirds of teachers saying that fewer children can do this now). Head teachers also felt that young children's ability to recite rhymes and sing songs (61% of teachers) and their ability to listen and respond to instructions (56% of teachers) had declined.
(Basic Skills Agency 2002)*

- 2.13 Poorer children are especially disadvantaged by their lack of social skills and as a result are less likely to be successful in the formal atmosphere of school. Truancy can be correlated with deprivation, and school exclusions are liable to lead to wider social exclusion. Poor children feel stigmatised because their families cannot afford proper school uniform, because they have free school meals and cannot pay for books, school trips or other social activities, and this can often lead to bullying.
- 2.14 Failure in education may result in adults who have few or no qualifications and so the problem of 'inheritance of poverty' continues. In 1997, 22% of people of working age in Wales had no qualifications. In Blaenau Gwent the actual figure was 37% compared to 15% for the Vale of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire. In England the equivalent figure was 18%.
- 2.14 Many children suffer from racism, bullying and discrimination within the school system. Similarly, disabled children and young people report that schools and educational establishments vary in their willingness and capacity to remove barriers to their education. Teenage mothers are less likely to complete their education thereby beginning a cycle of poverty again.

Child poverty and exclusion

- 2.15 A sense of social cohesion and 'belonging' is essential to good health. In Wales, the effects of 'participation poverty' are recognized (Welsh Assembly Government 2004), especially the exclusion from leisure and sport, social activities and safe and creative play. Strategies for enhancing children's self-esteem are based upon promoting their quality of life for communities and individuals.
- 2.16 The provision of supportive services is essential for families and children. Low self-esteem and lack of confidence are both cause and effect of exclusion, as these comments from health workers at a Sure Start project commented in 2003:

'Some of the people we visit, they sit in the dark all day, the curtains are always drawn across and the TV is blaring all the time. They sit in front of it with their mates and smoke all day. The kids are sent out for chips sometime, I know of a family where a seven year old is sent regularly to the corner to buy chips'

'They have no sense of structure, a child can be offered something to eat about five times in a couple of hours and then get nothing at all for the rest of the day'

'Some of the kids start out as bright and lively but they're just told to shut up.'
(Health workers on a Sure Start project 2003, Kelly and Symonds 2002)

Child poverty and childcare

- 2.17 It is vital that children in poverty have access to mainstream services including childcare provision. Their already-felt 'difference' must not be accentuated by the targeting of special services. In Section five we introduce a case study of such a project which is enabling poorer families to access childcare in order to build confidence and end isolation.
- 2.18 Although paid work is seen by government as the route out of poverty, the number of families in 'in-work poverty' remains as it has since the first poverty studies of the 19th century, a major characteristic of child poverty. Unemployed and single earner families are more at risk of poverty than dual earners. Among the lowest 25% of income earners were 75% of unemployed parents, 56% of part-time workers and 20% of lone parents working full time. Between 1999 and 2002, 41% of families in poverty had one person in paid work. By 2000, 57% of mothers with a child under 5 were in paid work but only a third were in full time employment. Elsewhere in Europe, families depend on both parents earning but in Britain the pattern is for fathers to work full time (with the longest hours in Europe) and mothers to work part time. In other words, routes out of child poverty cannot be seen in isolation, they are inextricably and primarily linked with both parents working.

Women at work – equal in opportunity?

- 2.19 Across the UK and in Wales women are less likely to work full time, earn less, be concentrated in the low paid sector of the economy, and be disadvantaged by childcare responsibilities than men (Figure 1). Ironically, childcare is often seen as a 'convenient' area of employment for women with children, but it is invariably part-time and very low paid.

Figure 1

- 47% of female employees work part time compared to only 7% of males
- Women with a youngest child of fewer than 5 years have an employment rate of 51% compared to 70% for women with children aged over 5 years
- Overall, 63% of women with dependent children are in employment compared to 87% of men
- Fulltime female employees earn an average of 87% of average earnings of full time male workers
- Women's gross individual income, including wages, pensions, benefits and investments is on average 58% of men's income.

- Fathers in Wales worked longer hours than men without dependent children but were more likely to be employed, but a lower percentage of fathers were employed in Wales than in the rest of Britain
- 75% of women are employed in 5 sectors – these are in the services, retail, banking and finance, public administration. Female-dominated sectors are the lowest paid.

(EOC in Wales 2003)

2.20 But in terms of education and training another picture emerges: 55% of girls compared to 45% of boys gained 5 or more GCSE passes at grades A-C in 2003, and 29% of girls compared to 21% of boys gained 2 or more passes at A level. So where do the girls go? There are 20 women out of 1600 construction apprentices, 6 out of 685 electricians and 5 out of 420 apprentice plumbers but out of 1100 apprentices in childcare only 21 were men.

2.21 This picture of the progression from school to retirement in Wales today for many women can be summed up as girls starting out brightly by succeeding in education, gaining more qualifications than their male peers. They then 'disappear' into part-time jobs worked around their caring responsibilities and into low paid female dominated employment sectors such as, ironically, childcare. They finally 'reappear' in retirement, with fewer occupational pensions and lower entitlements because of reduced contributions, to dominate the ranks of the elderly poor.

A New Deal for lone parents?

2.22 For lone mothers, the picture has been even bleaker. It must be remembered that 'lone parents' are in the vast majority 'lone mothers' and consist of never-married mothers as well as older separated or divorced mothers. It is however, the image of the teenage mother that dominates the discourse on lone mothers and poverty. The rate of teenage pregnancy in Britain is the highest in Europe and in areas of Wales it is higher than the national average. Children born to young mothers are over-represented in poverty. Characteristics of teenage mothers are overwhelmingly low educational attainment, being the child of a teenage mother, living in deprived areas (Social Exclusion Unit 2000).

2.23 Two policies have been explicitly directed towards this group: the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) and the New Deal for Lone Parents. In Wales, between March 2003 and March 2004, 52,200 lone parents attended for the initial interview (of whom 92% were women). Over 23,000 of lone parents attending the Jobcentre plus scheme had children under 5 years of age. Only just over 1% were of a minority ethnic group. The region with the highest number of lone parents participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents was Wrexham and the North Wales coast and the lowest number was in South East Wales (Department for Work and Pensions 2004).

- 2.24 A recent evaluation of the scheme in the UK estimated that it has led to an average increase of 7% in the number of lone mothers who worked for 16 hours or more (Francesconi and Van der Klaauw 2004). The greatest effect of the incentive was the increase in employment for lone mothers with one pre-school child but was insignificant for mothers with multiple older children. This is an important factor in the availability and accessibility of childcare to which we return later.
- 2.25 Evaluations of the scheme have pinpointed some specific problems associated with those mothers who have great difficulty accessing reasonably paid employment with convenient hours. Lone fathers, teenage and older lone parents, those with ill health and disabilities and ethnic minorities all have below average employment outcomes (DWP 2003:xii). Those living in the most deprived areas or rural areas have difficulties in accessing employment and transport.
- 2.26 Another evaluation of the meetings with advisors on the NDLP scheme (Thomas and Griffiths 2002) points to the role that childcare plays in the ability of lone mothers to enter paid employment. Lack of suitable and affordable childcare was perceived as a barrier by some new claimants, but once engaged in job seeking, this was not seen as the overriding and determining factor in whether they would be able to work. Many, however, felt that their child was too young to be placed in formal childcare and would prefer to place the child with parents or friends. Longer-term claimants questioned whether it was 'worth' it financially. Moving into employment at a low wage contained the risk of losing other benefits such as housing benefit.

*'I'm not a material person, but I think most people would agree that it's not worth putting yourself through all that and being only £20 a week better off. I suppose that a majority of single parents would agree with that. What's the point? It's more hassle than it's worth, getting the kids organised, getting them out, getting yourself ready, getting yourself out, getting back, I mean on top of your work you're coming home, looking after these children, making the tea, bathing them, putting them to bed... You really have to make it worth your while. I know it's a bad attitude to take, but I really would need to get more than £20 a week extra'.
(Dawson et al 2000)*

- 2.27 Cost of childcare even if subsidised was frequently cited as reason for reluctance to take a lower paid job. Attitudinal change was needed to address the lack of confidence, low self esteem which often affected peoples' reluctance to 'come off' long term benefits and engage in the 'risky' strategy of employment. A study of Innovative Pilot schemes (IP) showed that problems exist with the type of childcare available to lone parents seeking work and suggested ways of addressing these (Yeandle and Pearson 2001). These included community-based childcare especially in areas where public transport is problematic, and that training centres need to provide on-site childcare and information and help in accessing childcare locally.
- 2.28 Childcare which is affordable, accessible and appropriate is fundamental to the achievement of equal opportunities in employment, and to the tackling of child poverty. But what of the benefit to the economy?

Childcare and business competitiveness

2.29 Although employers have been targeted as partners in the national Childcare Strategy, to date the UK and Welsh Assembly Government's have done little to encourage or reward family-friendly employers. Equally, the provision of childcare can be seen as a **business opportunity** rather than a social service. The demand for childcare is outstripping supply, and it is estimated that over 300,000 more childcare workers are needed across the UK in the next four years (Guardian Unlimited 2004).

2.30 Childcare is expensive and the cost is unequally borne by parents, who typically pay 93% of the costs. Unlike maternity benefit, a payroll tax on employers has not been a part of the national Childcare Strategy. But placing more responsibility on the shoulders of employers can be a double-edged strategy: women with children and even young women of childbearing age can become identified as 'expensive' and 'troublesome' to employ. Nevertheless, provision of childcare either by on-site facilities or by payment is seen by some employers for some employees, as a necessity in skills and staff retention. This applies generally to educated, qualified and skilled staff who are not easily replaceable but does not apply to the unskilled or unqualified:

'Organisations competing in the labour market need to be aware that 40% of the workforce are parents of school age or pre-school children'

*'While a high proportion of employers have some family-friendly policies, only 10% currently offer some form of childcare provision'.
(Chwarae Teg 2003)*

2.31 This is a problem that is being faced by government in its attempt to get employers 'on board' the childcare strategy. We look at some of the developments in the following section. We now turn from the social, egalitarian and economic arguments for a national system of childcare to focus upon children themselves.

The interests of the child – the quality of childcare

2.32 The benefits of affordable, accessible and appropriate childcare in addressing child poverty, attainment of equal opportunities for women, increasing business effectiveness and efficiency have been described, but what of the interests of the child?

2.33 The Daycare Trust (2004) detail a list of reasons why **quality** pre-school care will:

- Provide an environment for children to flourish;
- Support social development, including independence, concentration, cooperation and forming relationships with other children;
- Secure cognitive development (abilities relating to thinking, knowing and speaking);
- Lay a foundation for effective learning, and affect ability to learn and the attainment of new skills throughout life;

- Contribute to an increase in life time earnings and economic productivity;
- Help equalize the cultural and cognitive stimulus children receive.

2.34 Adults interviewed in a Mori Poll for National Childcare Week (2004) reported that childcare has a wide range of benefits for children including; helping develop social skills, preparing them for school and providing opportunities for play with children from a mix of backgrounds.

'Research has shown that high quality childcare services which are appropriate to children's needs are beneficial to young children. Investment is required to ensure that services are of the highest calibre and that staff are able to carry out their work effectively'
(Melhuish 2003)

Informal family-based childcare

2.35 Good quality formal childcare focusing on the gaining of skills for school has clear benefits for children after the age of two (EPPE 2002). But what of the value of family-based care for young children? The government has gone some way in recognizing this by the extension of maternity leave and the proposal that some of this be transferable to fathers. Undoubtedly many people look to families to provide the first stage of childcare. Some parents prefer family care as it is more affordable, flexible and convenient and also they feel, better for their child (Williams 2004). Parental interaction with babies and very young children (including talking, listening, responding and playing with them) was rated by teachers as being 'absolutely essential' (Basic Skills Agency 2002). The value of informal care for very young children provided by mothers and/or grandparents has been undervalued in the debate on childcare (Land 2004).

Conclusion

2.36 The issue of childcare provision involves four main strands of interests: addressing child poverty, equal opportunities, business efficiency and the interests of the child. The tackling of child poverty is crucial to address the effects on the health, lifetime opportunities and wellbeing of children. The attainment of equal opportunities including income for women and families is a crucial step in addressing poverty in Wales. Employers must be encouraged and rewarded for taking a more active provider role in childcare for benefits of their own staff and organizational efficiency. Appropriate and quality childcare is beneficial to children's development.

3. CHILDCARE POLICIES – NEW DIRECTIONS AND MODELS

Key Points

- The basis of welfare policy is shifting from the male breadwinner to the adult worker.
- The proposed childcare revolution announced by the Chancellor will have a great impact on the future of the wellbeing of families in the UK.
- In Wales, the emphasis has been firmly placed on putting children first.
- Childcare strategies are based upon partnerships and Wales has been an innovator in many schemes.
- Wales can learn from other European models in order to become a leader in the implementation of this revolution.

From the male breadwinner to the adult worker

- 3.1 From its creation in 1945, the welfare state has relied upon full employment in order to provide funding through taxation and National Insurance contributions. However the post-war Beveridge welfare state was based upon full male employment. Within the Beveridge model, women after marriage were not expected to work outside the home and the separate roles of male wage earner and female unpaid carer were set. As the Beveridge report (Beveridge 1942) said '*It is not envisaged that after marriage women will be gainfully employed*'. The responsibility for childcare was seen as the role of the mother and, until the start of school, childcare remained a home-based activity.
- 3.2 However, we now live in a changed world and economic reality. The necessity for full employment to fund a restructured welfare state remains but the emphasis now is on the dual earner adult worker model of employment. This is the new reality:

'A family-friendly system of support and choice for parents should be founded on the principles of Beveridge's 1942 report, but applied to the realities of modern life, ensuring parents are well placed to face the challenges of combining work and family in the 21st century'
(DTI 2003)

This is the new reality of social life being driven by the need to tackle child poverty by a range of strategies.

Interlinking policies to tackle child poverty

- 3.3 In 2001, the UK government identified four main strategies to tackle child poverty :
- Ensuring a decent family income;

- Delivering excellent public services;
 - Supporting parents;
 - Working in partnership with the voluntary and public sectors and the community.
- (HM Treasury 2001)

3.4 The focus on child poverty and the promise by the Prime Minister to ‘halve child poverty by 2010 and to eradicate it in a generation’ placed a moral purpose on the strategies. Policies to address poverty had also to be ‘joined-up’ and linked together so a successful strategy must involve a cross-sectoral collaboration between: Education, Health Service, Social Security, Community Regeneration, Employment and Transport. A strategy on childcare was essential to the policy advance on all these fronts.

Childcare strategy – the starting point

3.5 The UK government’s Meeting the Childcare Challenge (1998) was an early indication of the direction to be followed. This strategy centred on five main principles underpinning a national childcare service:

➤ **Quality**

The registration of day care and early years care was implemented. To raise standards £4 million was invested into training of childcare workers.

➤ **Affordability**

The cost of childcare was acknowledged to be high. The introduction of a Child Tax Credit with a childcare element was proposed.

➤ **Diversity**

Provision was needed to cover a range of needs and preferences.

➤ **Accessibility**

Information needed to be clear and available. Problems of travel in isolated areas, access for children with special needs, and the needs of parents who worked anti-social hours all posed problems.

➤ **Partnership**

Partnerships were set up between public, private and voluntary sector to meet the needs of children and young people in all areas of England and Wales.

The next stage – Balancing work and family life

3.6 In 2003, the launch of this strategy by the DTI and the Chancellor of the Exchequer indicated the central economic significance of the childcare strategy. Key measures were:

- Reform of the tax and benefit system to support families on low income through new tax credits;

- Maternity pay was increased and extended to 26 weeks; paternity leave paid for two weeks; parents of young and/or children with special needs had the right to request flexible working hours;
- Resources for childcare doubled: in England, childcare centres set up offering places for a million children;
- Businesses 'actively encouraged' to adopt best practice and offer work-life balance to employees.

3.7 These policies place the importance of paid work for parents at their centre. But there are other priorities as well.

The 'childcare revolution' – care from dawn to dusk

3.8 The Chancellor of the Exchequer has promised a childcare revolution. As the UK Minister for Children said:

*'This is nothing less than a childcare revolution. It brings us from a state where young children and families were barely on the fringes of provision to where they're right at the heart of the welfare state'.
(Margaret Hodge, UK Minister for Children, 2004)*

3.9 The proposals are for:

- A 10-year childcare plan with an extra £600 million pledged;
- Care for 3 to 14 year olds from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. based in school premises on weekdays all year round, to be implemented by 2010;
- 11-14 year olds to be offered a variety of activities ranging from sport, music clubs as well as homework support sessions;
- An increase in the numbers of Sure Start children's centres for 0-4 year olds, to reach 3,500 by 2010, that will offer education as well as health care;
- Extra nursery educational provision for 2 year olds in deprived areas to promote better standards of literacy and communication;
- Parents to be helped to stay at home longer with children during their first year;
- Rise in maternity leave from 6 months to 9 months by 2007. Three months of leave can be transferred to the father;
- Out-of-hours schools' clubs to be free, and some childcare provision to be paid for by parents.

3.9 Some groups have expressed some warnings about the proposals:

*'The Government's childcare strategy makes sense providing schools are given funding to make it work'
(David Hart, General Secretary of National Association of Headteachers 2004)*

*'The new deal will be a poor bargain unless staff are properly trained and paid'
(Dr.Mary Bousted, General Secretary of The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (Independent 2004))*

'We are pleased to see that maternity leave will be extended and transferable to partners but the rate at which maternity pay is paid is still far too low to allow some women to stay at home'

(Jenny North, Policy Officer Maternity Alliance, 2004)

- 3.10 There have also been criticisms of the funding of childcare by employer vouchers for the low paid:

'The interaction between tax credits and the vouchers means that for low income households on maximum tax credits, the vouchers bring no benefit to the recipients. They simply cancel out money the family would otherwise receive using tax credits.'

(Anne Redston, Accountants Ernst & Young (Telegraph 2004))

- 3.11 How will these proposals be implemented in Wales?

Wales – putting children first

- 3.12 The Childcare Action Plan for Wales, published in 2002, gave the new Welsh Assembly Government an opportunity to stamp a specific Welsh identity on a childcare strategy. The aim of the strategy was two-fold:

1. To provide child-centred support – Childcare is for children

Support for children was placed under one funding stream and unified grant: Cymorth, the Children and Youth Support Fund. All Local Authorities were required to organise support for a range of childcare within the framework of Children's Planning. Quality was to be ensured by the setting up of the Care Standards Inspectorate as the registration organisation.

2. To integrate childcare into the economic development agenda

As part of the strategy to engage employers in childcare provision, partnerships between agencies such as Local Authorities, WDA, and ELWA have been set up. Funding from a variety of sources was made available to encourage the setting up of childcare provision by employers.

- 3.13 Most of the actions in the strategy involved putting appropriate structures and frameworks in place.

Quality, access and partnerships

- 3.14 The Care Standards Inspectorate was set up to
- Ensure national minimum standards of quality across Wales;
 - Central to these standards is child protection and a ban on smacking in all provision.
- 3.15 The setting up of a Central Council for Playwork to:

- Coordinate training in the light of the necessity for trained and qualified staff, at present in limited supply;
 - Support Play Wales in the increase and coordination of playwork courses;
 - Implement regulations requiring Local Authorities to provide information advice and training for childcare;
 - Implement regulations and standards for childminders and day care providers for children under eight;
 - Work with providers to achieve consistency in the range of quality frameworks.
- 3.16 Access to information for parents is regarded as a priority and benchmarks for services have been set to achieve a balance between local flexibility and national consistency:
- A staffed and computerised childcare information service in every Local Authority in Wales;
 - To set minimum standards for childcare information services;
 - Ensure that every childcare information service has access to Care Standards Inspectorate data;
 - Work towards a Wales-wide information service with links to other regions of the UK.
- 3.17 Partnership working in a variety of forms is an essential part of policies and strategies in Wales. This ideal of inclusion and cooperation can be seen in the following:
- A permanent advisory panel for Cymorth funding that consists of representatives of childcare interests and providers;
 - Increase funding to childcare partnerships by 60% in 2002-3;
 - Increase funding to voluntary organisations to promote quality provision in both English and Welsh;
 - Restore the number of childminders to 1999 levels by providing newly-registered childminders with a start-up grant;
 - Allocate funds for school places for three year olds;
 - Set up guidance and evaluation arrangements for Children and Young People's Partnerships;
 - Access European funding to partnerships and childcare providers.
- 3.18 In 2003, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) set up the Child Poverty Task Group to produce an overall strategy for Wales. Their report was published in 2004 and was based on three key principles:
- The Welsh strategy, like that of the UK, focused on income poverty but had a wider range which included aspects of poverty such as social exclusion which undermines children and young people robbing them of life chances and fulfilment;
 - A commitment to a rights-based approach, consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to underpin strategies in Wales;
 - Action to support and enable children and young people living in poverty to live fulfilling lives and break out of social exclusion.

- 3.19 This widening of the definition and central issues of child poverty includes a 'joined-up' approach. Three dimensions of child poverty were identified, which all needed a diversity of strategies:
- Income poverty;
 - Participation poverty;
 - Service poverty.

The provision of appropriate and quality childcare cuts through all these dimensions.

- 3.20 The Welsh Assembly Government has established a working group to undertake a review of childcare. Chaired by Dr Brian Gibbons AM, then Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Transport, the group had not concluded its work at the time of undertaking this project.
- 3.21 Placing the child at the centre of policies and strategies on tackling child poverty and childcare has meant that Wales has been innovative and in many ways has shown the way forward.

Other models

- 3.22 Central to the childcare debate is the question of which **type** of childcare is favoured? Criticisms of the 'ten hour school day' point to the unsuitability of this type of care for parents who work shifts or unsocial hours and also cite the effects on children of being 'dumped' in school for ten hours. On the other hand, many will feel uneasy at state subsidies for the purchasing of private nannies by the wealthy and of payment to grandparents for providing care.
- 3.23 Organisations concerned with the provision of childcare are also preparing their manifestos for consideration. The National Childminders Association for example has recently detailed a 'manifesto for quality childcare' (NCMA 2004), that argues for childminding to be included in every children's centre. But all of these manifestos ignore the question of what type of childcare is wanted by parents?
- 3.24 Childcare and its connection to education is obvious and the 'new buzz word is pedagogy' (Riddell 2004). This is a model for the development of creativity, learning creating a social identity. It is structured on the educational model: advancement in formal learning is the objective. It is a model associated with the Nordic system of childcare but is widely adopted in Europe. However high quality childcare is expensive to fund.
- 3.25 Excluding parental leave, UK spending for 2004/5 is estimated at 0.8% of GDP. Compare this to Sweden and Denmark where spending is 2.0 – 2.5% of GDP. In France, pre-school childcare is intended as early education. Open to everyone, it is publicly funded and almost 100% of three year olds attend. Children under 3 attend state-financed nurseries and parents are offered three years of parental leave (Chwarae Teg 2003). In Denmark, the emphasis is on a 'non-school' model and is targeted at working parents. Eighty percent of children from six months to nine years have a place

in a public funded day care facility. Payment is means-tested, most pay 30% of the cost but a discount is granted to larger and low-income families (Chwarae Teg 2003). In Sweden, childcare has twin aims; to encourage child development and to enable parents to work. Childcare is part of the education system and lifelong learning. Public childcare is available to all, with pre-school care from the ages of one to six and school age care from the ages of six to twelve. Over 80% of children attend pre-school care and 75% attend school-age care. Appropriate childcare is provided for children with special needs and in their own language for children of minority ethnic groups. Costs are met by the state with a minimum contribution from parents. Each Local Authority has the flexibility to set the limits on parental contribution. Pre-school care is open to all parents whether in work, at home or unemployed.

- 3.26 The training of childcare workers is regarded as a priority and in both Denmark and Sweden: over half of all pre-school employees have teaching qualifications at University level. Pre-school centres have a national curriculum but are child-centred and based on play.
- 3.27 In its target of developing best practice in childcare, Wales could look at aspects of these European systems.

Conclusions

- 3.28 There has been a shift in the direction of policies in the UK and childcare has moved from the periphery of state responsibility to the centre. Childcare is now a public service central to economic development. Current and future UK childcare strategies are a central part of interlinking policies on employment, transport, education, health and community regeneration to address social exclusion and child poverty. The proposed childcare revolution announced by the Chancellor will have a great impact on the future of the wellbeing of families in the UK. In Wales, the emphasis has been firmly placed on putting children first. Childcare strategies are based upon partnerships and Wales has been an innovator in many schemes. Wales can learn from other European models in order to become a leader in the implementation of this revolution.

4. CHILDCARE PROVISION IN WALES – BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Key Points

- **There is great variation between Local Authorities in Wales in the provision of childcare for children under eight years old.**
- **Overall, the greater the need, the less the provision. Areas with above average provision are in rural or relatively affluent high employment areas. Areas of lowest provision are in areas of social deprivation and unemployment.**
- **The cost of childcare in Wales is too high for many. The present system of tax credits penalises larger families.**
- **Many prefer that family members such as grandparents fulfil childcare for very young children. But at present this role is not rewarded.**
- **There needs to be a diversity in provision: formal and structured childcare is not suitable for all, especially younger children.**

Childcare, partnerships and joined-up working

4.1 Good quality, affordable childcare is needed to make a vital contribution to the economy of Wales. This contribution is expected to close the existing opportunity gap by supporting parents into work or training, and ensuring that children have the best start in life. Good childcare is expected to:

- Make a key contribution to children's early development and build foundations for future learning;
- Build on existing good practices and facilitate childcare partnerships between statutory and voluntary agencies and the private sector.

Accessible, affordable and quality childcare in every neighbourhood is required as the means to impact upon social justice, child poverty, sustainable development, equal opportunities, rural development, child development and achievement.

4.2 In practice this means:

- The development of partnerships to achieve these aims, as they cannot be attained in isolation;
- The linking of expertise and knowledge of local authorities, childcare providers, enterprise strategies and employers as this is an essential element of progress;
- Recognition of the fact that, in the absence of good quality childcare, parents and in particular lone parents face difficult choices including giving up work or further education and training to care for their children.

Availability of childcare?

4.3 The type, availability and capacity of childcare provision for children up to eight years in Wales is based on data received from the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales 2004. Full data are given in Appendices 1 and 2. We also undertook a survey of all Local Authorities and health authorities in Wales. Fewer than half of them replied which means that the results are not comprehensive – a summary of responses received is given in Annex 4.

Childcare places

4.4 The following table compares the number of childcare places available in each area with the number of resident children between the ages of 0 and eight years.

Table 1: Registered childcare places (0- 8 years old) and number of children

Area	No. of registered places	No. of children aged 0-8
Ynys Mon	1,305	6,700
Blaenau Gwent	346	7,000
Bridgend	2,225	13,800
Caerphilly	2,076	19,100
Carmarthenshire	2,427	17,600
Cardiff	5,782	33,100
Ceredigion	1,217	6,000
Conwy	2,418	10,300
Denbighshire	2,520	9,400
Flintshire	3,278	16,000
Vale of Glamorgan	2,590	13,300
Gwynedd	2,320	12,100
Merthyr Tydfil	497	5,800
Monmouthshire	1,370	8,600
Neath Port Talbot	901	13,400
Newport	2,150	16,200
Pembrokeshire	1,865	12,100
Powys	1,744	12,600
Rhondda Cynon Taf	2,370	24,800
Swansea	2,917	22,000
Torfaen	1,343	9,600
Wrexham	3,048	13,600
Wales	46,709	303,400

- 4.5 Overall provision for 0-8 year olds is approximately one place for every seven children:
- In Wrexham and Denbighshire there is provision for approximately 1 in 4 children, in Flintshire for 1 in 5 children, all above the national average;
 - The more rural areas of Anglesey, Gwynedd and Conwy have slightly fewer places with approximately 1 per 5-6 children;
 - In South Wales, the best provision is in the Vale of Glamorgan with approximately 1 place for every 6 children, this is closely followed by Cardiff with similar provision;
 - Blaenau Gwent has the lowest provision for approximately 1 in 20 children, and Neath Port Talbot has only 1 in 15 places;
 - Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Swansea and Powys all have relatively low provision at approximately 1 place for every 11-12 places.
- 4.6 It is obvious that childcare provision is much weaker in socially deprived post-industrial areas of high unemployment than in either rural areas or those of higher employment in North and West Wales.

Childminders

- 4.7 Childminders are by far the most common form of childcare provision in all areas of Wales for under eight year olds. The numbers of childminders registered with the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (Appendix 1) show that:
- In Wales in 2004 there was a total of 2,165 of registered childminders;
 - In the south, the highest numbers of childminders are to be found in Cardiff (293), the lowest in Blaenau Gwent (27);
 - In North Wales, the highest numbers of childminders are found in Flintshire (128), the lowest in Ynys Mon (66).
- 4.8 These figures once again illustrate that the best provision is in areas of higher employment, reflecting higher demand.

School age care

- 4.9 Complete data on all school-age provision across Wales is unobtainable. However, data on the large numbers supported by Clybaiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs show a wide variation between areas (Appendix 3). Childcare clubs provide childcare directly before and after the school day and/or all day during the school holidays:
- North Wales had the highest overall provision (426);
 - Areas with the highest provision were Flintshire and Carmarthenshire (98) and Denbighshire with 86;
 - Blaenau Gwent had the lowest provision (14), Ynys Mon has a low of 24 with Neath and Port Talbot and Bridgend on a relatively low provision of 32.
- 4.10 A similar pattern emerges as regards to school-age provision: areas with the highest unemployment have the least and rural areas or those with relatively high employment have the most.

Other Barriers to the Take up of Childcare Places

Accessibility

4.11 A lack of childcare in or near the workplace may mean that parents cannot easily access both work and childcare. Those who are attempting to move out of poverty the possession of a car, or the cost and timing of public transport may be prohibitive; therefore they cannot access facilities that might benefit both them and their children. This is particularly the case for parents of a disabled child (Welsh Assembly Government 2004), as they are likely to incur more costs in terms of childcare in keeping hospital appointments, and they are less likely to own a car. In rural areas, 'travel to work or childcare' distances may be long and difficult.

Responsibilities

4.12 For many parents the responsibilities of balancing childcare and paid work may be onerous and stressful, especially when they are in a low paid job and faced with the high costs of childcare, or are unhappy about the quality of childcare available. This is especially the case for lone parents and the parents of disabled children, who may be unable to find childcare suitable for the complex needs of a disabled child (Welsh Assembly Government 2004, ChwaraeTeg 2003).

Cost

4.13 In Wales, the cost of childcare is too high for many families. Some families may qualify for Working Tax Credit, which is a payment to top up the earnings of working people on low incomes. There are extra amounts for working households in which someone has a disability. As part of Working Tax Credit, parents may qualify for extra help towards the cost of registered or approved childcare, but not informal family-based care. To qualify for the childcare element within Working Tax Credit, parents must work at least 16 hours per week. Up to 70% of childcare costs can be paid for each child, up to £135 a week and £200 a week for two or more children. The maximum childcare element that can be claimed is either:

- £94.50 a week (£135x70%) for one child
- £140 a week (£200 x 70%) total for two or more children.

The childcare element is added to the amount of Working Tax Credit that a family can claim and the final amount depends on the family income. This penalises large families with three or more children.

4.14 According to studies carried out in England (Daycare Trust 2004), the typical cost of a nursery place for a child under two is £134 per week, more than £6,900 a year. In 2002-3 the average weekly childcare tax credit was only £49.61, ie just £2,579.72 per year, and despite the fact that parents may be eligible for the childcare element of

working tax credit, they still have to pay 30% of the cost of each child place. Many parents find this cost an insurmountable barrier to accessing childcare.

- 4.15 In the main average pay awards in Wales fall considerably short of the costs charged by childcare providers. The lack of a co-ordinated and collaborative system of childcare provision may be driving up the cost (Welsh Assembly Government 2004)
- 4.16 Childcare facilities are also affected by cost, as there is a conflict between the provision of 'affordable' childcare and the running costs of a childcare establishment. Wages bills are often extremely high because of 1:3 and 1:4 staffing ratios required and yet childcare as a job is very low paid. Flexible working contracts may cause work stress for staff as they are contracted for very few hours and may be called into work only when they are needed. This pattern of work often results in staff shortages as staff seek more reliable, regular and better paid work

Flexibility

- 4.17 A lack of flexibility in childcare provision often means that it does not match the demands of local employment, for example shift patterns or late night work in supermarkets. Similarly local employment may not take heed of the type of childcare on offer (Chwarae Teg 2003). Although since The Employment Act of 2002 parents of children under six, or parents with a disabled child may request flexible working hours, employers are not bound by legislation to comply. As a result many parents, if they enter the workforce, may find themselves pushed into low paid and low quality employment. This may have a serious effect on career and skill development, and perpetuate the gender pay gap. There is likely to be a positive correlation between the gender pay gap and childcare provision.

Information

- 4.18 A lack of readily available information on childcare facilities, especially those that might be available to employees in the workplace, may be deterring parents from considering employment. Lack of information sharing between agencies may also result in a lack of awareness on the part of professionals of what childcare is available (Welsh Assembly Government 2004).

Childcare preferences

- 4.19 In Wales 70% of parents are said to prefer informal family care as it can be more affordable, flexible, convenient and, in their view, better for their child (Williams 2004). The National Audit Office also found that parents' most common reason for not using formal care was that they thought that their child was too young to benefit or that they preferred them to be cared for at home. Advantages of informal family care are:
- Family members are likely to love the child as much as the parents;
 - Carers are experienced in childcare;
 - It is available locally, flexible and available when a child is ill;
 - It supports the child's social routine and maintains social contacts;

- It is provided in a familiar environment and provides continuity.
(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/childcare>)

But there are some disadvantages:

- The homes of older people may not be child safe;
- Older people may get tired more easily;
- Ideas of control and discipline may not be acceptable to younger parents;
- Creation of friction within families.

4.20 Professor Hilary Land has pointed out ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womans hour](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womans%20hour)) that many family carers such as grandparents may be getting a raw deal on childcare. Although one in ten grandparents may be looking after their grandchildren, neither their status nor role is recognised nor are they paid.

The Guilt Factor

4.21 According to Jones (2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>) many mothers long for full time motherhood therefore even if they return to work they are torn with guilt, either about leaving their child or enjoying their work more than their baby. For this reason some parents may decide that one or other will stay at home, even though it means making a considerable financial sacrifice. The EOC recently calculated that a year off work on maternity leave can cost a mother upwards of a £10,000 (Observer 2004). But this financial cost must be balanced against feelings of dedication and responsibility. As a recent article stated:

The tension is playing itself out in the playgrounds around the country with stay-at-home mothers and working mothers both feeling they are being judged for getting it wrong and worrying that they are'
(Observer 2004)

Valuing care – the role of the public sector

4.22 According to Chwarae Teg (2003), care is not valued as part of the economy of Wales. Increase and improvement in care provision should markedly improve the economy; similarly carers should be highly valued as an integral part of the economy, as without their unpaid contribution social care would be virtually non-existent. To redress these barriers to improved childcare provision, both formal and informal carers should be recognised for the work that they do. Only if the role of carers in the economy is recognised and understood can the economy be developed to its full potential The Welsh Assembly Government is active in encouraging businesses to implement childcare provision and currently both private and public sector schemes throughout Wales are being evaluated by Chwarae Teg.

4.23 But what of the public sector? Surely public sector employers should be in the vanguard of childcare provision as the majority of employees in the Health Service, Education and Local Government are women. It is evident that both Health Trusts and Higher and

Further Education colleges and Universities have in many instances prioritised childcare provision. But it is worrying that Social Services departments appear to have done very little to provide childcare for employees. This is doubly surprising given that social work is a predominantly female occupation suffering from chronic staff shortages, absenteeism and lack of recruitment.

4.24 Barriers to accessing childcare must be removed and the leading public sector employers have an important leading role to play

Conclusions

4.25 There is great variation between Local Authorities in Wales in the provision of childcare for children under 8 years old. Areas with the highest provision (above national average) are in rural or relatively affluent high employment areas, whilst areas of lowest provision are in areas of social deprivation and unemployment. This pattern is repeated for school age care provision. The greater the need, the less the provision.

4.26 The cost of childcare in Wales is too high for many. The present system of tax credits penalises larger families. Many prefer that family members such as grandparents fulfil childcare for very young children. But at present this role is not rewarded. There needs to be diversity in provision: formal and structured childcare is not suitable for all, especially younger children.

5. PARENTS AND CHILDCARE

Key Points

- **Parents want childcare but require diversity and flexibility in provision. There are community and individual requirements and preferences. One size does not fit all.**
- **Childcare provision needs to be flexible in order to cover shift working and as well as pre-school and post-school needs.**
- **There is a lack of accessible information for parents. This is especially true for minority ethnic families who appear excluded from information agencies but it is also true for many living in deprived areas.**
- **The provision of suitable childcare as an essential part of a project to tackle social exclusion has yielded some success in building self-confidence among families.**

The case studies

- 5.1 Parents in four very different areas involved in different childcare provision were interviewed. The areas were:
- A deprived area with childcare provision for families experiencing poverty in Rhondda Cynon Taff;
 - A play scheme serving a rural area of mid Wales in Llandrindod Wells;
 - An on-site employer provision in Caerphilly;
 - A crèche in a project for minority ethnic mothers in Swansea.

Rhondda Cynon Taff – The Genesis Project

- 5.2 The Genesis project is a new initiative, the first of its kind in the UK, and was set up in Rhondda Cynon Taff, one of the most deprived areas in Wales. It is estimated that 67% of the 159,565 strong population are directly affected by poverty and disadvantage. The Local Authority's Early Years and Child Care section determined to ensure that all available funding was used to its maximum potential to break cycles of deprivation and child poverty. The aim of the project is to reduce the effects of child poverty. The project funds the formal or informal childcare costs of any parent accessing work or training. In some instances the project supports the childcare needs of parents returning to work by meeting the costs until their Tax Credit is received:

The project is about more than free childcare, it is working with people to help them explore long forgotten hopes and aspirations and supporting them in accessing training courses or work opportunities.

- 5.3 People who have lived in poverty all their lives require a great deal of confidence building before embarking on returning to work or accessing training. This can take time as some participants may have never worked, and were alienated from education at an early age. To overcome such drawbacks the project tries to match opportunities with people's preferences and individual needs, rather than the individual being 'slotted in' to an existing vacancy. The project has a primary concern for improving the lives of children affected by poverty, and to develop confidence hope and self-esteem in adults, which may ultimately lead to entry into work. Workers in the project are already convinced that children are the ultimate beneficiaries of the scheme, as it has already been observed that parent-child relationships are enhanced through improvements in parents' self confidence.
- 5.4 Demand for childcare was high and provision was purchased from private nurseries, childminders, holiday care schemes and playgroups. But four new nurseries have now opened and a mobile childcare team has been set up to provide community-based care for parents involved in local schemes and projects.

What has been achieved

- 5.5 To date more than 1,200 people have benefited from the scheme, many of whom have taken up work or training opportunities and/or received free or subsidised childcare support. Four new community day nurseries have been opened providing 120 childcare places and a 16-place holiday scheme has been established. £279,554 has been spent on purchasing childcare with existing providers. £53,359 with 31 private childminders and £181,851 with seventeen day nurseries. The mobile team has created in excess of 800 childcare places in a variety of venues, so enabling people to undertake training in their local communities. Forty-four jobs have been created directly by the project and in excess of 300 jobs have been indirectly created. Two hundred additional out-of-school childcare places have been created using New Opportunities Fund monies as match funding (104 Holiday Club places, 48 Breakfast Club places and 48 After School Club places). A development officer for childminding has been appointed and she has provided information to 127 potential new child minders, 29 of whom have qualified and 23 of whom are currently in training to become self-employed childminders.

Parents' views of the project

- 5.6 We visited three of the projects. They appeared well organised, in purpose-built premises, well equipped and child-centred. The existence of a persuasive and empathetic facilitator who worked alongside the women in order to encourage them to make 'choices' appeared to improve the likelihood of them taking up work. These quotes from parents illustrate some parents' views:

'There were no schemes before and we had no family help'

'It's a way of socialising – with children you don't get adult company'

'My sister was referred to the scheme but when I heard about it I went to listen to what they had to say and I thought this is just what I wanted, I joined straight away. I thought I wouldn't be able to go to work until the children went to school'

'They've come to us, she (the advisor) won't take no for an answer, once you tell her something she's on to it straightaway'

'Without her we would never have done it'.

- 5.7 Accessibility to both childcare and work or training had been facilitated by strong support. In all cases parents had been referred to the scheme. None of the parents had accessed the scheme directly, in all cases *they* had been referred to *it*, not *it* to *them*:

'In this area it wasn't easy to find out anything about working or childcare'

'You don't know what questions to ask'

'Around here people don't go in to libraries and things where they put up posters'

'It's marvellous when arrangements are made'

'The health visitor told me'.

- 5.8 Before becoming involved with the programme these mothers had found the cost of childcare prohibitive. The current arrangements for payment of Tax Credits are a very real barrier to families seeking employment or job training. This is especially the case when there are more than two children in a family or when there is a long delay between the commencement of work or training and the payment of the credit. High childcare costs during this period can very quickly destabilise the finances of families and place them in debt:

'The cost of childcare is disgusting, I couldn't afford it if it wasn't for the scheme'

'It would cost me over £500 a week for three children'

'[Tax credits] discriminate against people with more than two children'

'I didn't earn enough to afford childcare'

'You can't get [tax credits] until you've got a job, then they don't pay for weeks and then they don't pay all of it, there's still a lot to pay. I couldn't afford it'.

- 5.8 Prior to being involved with the project these women had found juggling work and childcare extremely difficult. Employers were unlikely to offer 'family friendly' hours. On

the contrary, refusal to even consider the needs of children and parents seemed to be the common experience.

'Employers don't ask men how many children they've got – men don't have the same reaction.'

'My husband had time off when I was in hospital, but his boss checked to see whether I was there or not!'

'Work is not flexible, I worked in a supermarket evenings, they wouldn't change my shift. I got fed up not seeing my daughter in the evenings'

'Now I've got childcare that's flexible. My child has been in the nursery for six months, they are wonderful, they'll arrange anything to suit. They even got him special nappies as he's allergic to ordinary ones.'

- 5.9 The mothers expressed a definite preference for formal childcare arrangements. It was their view that formal childcare was preferable to the informal care provided by family or friends.

'If it's not me caring for her I don't want someone telling me what they do for her, in such a way as I feel put down, or that they are martyrs for looking after my child.'

'My partner hated looking after her – he never knew where anything was.'

'Before I started on the scheme I did voluntary work and was on call at night, but if my husband couldn't baby sit I couldn't go. Now I can make plans.'

- 5.10 The provision of formal childcare had a liberating effect. Using it gave women the opportunity to show that they could derive their self-esteem from sources other than child rearing. In the past they had found that informal care provided by the family or friends caused them either to feel inferior, obligated or torn between different loyalties. Most oppressive was the fact that they had no alternative choice other than to rely on family for childcare. However, one of the women expressed a preference for caring for her children herself during the early years. It was her opinion that children cared for at home were at an intellectual advantage to those who went to nursery school.

On feelings of guilt

- 5.11 All of the women stated that they experienced feelings of guilt over leaving their children, but at the same time they believed that their children benefited.

'There was no flexibility in work, and the family couldn't cope with any changes in times arranged for them to provide care. This makes you feel guilty all around: in work because you can't go, with the family for asking them to change and with yourself for having to get others to care'

'It's a socialisation process for them isn't it?'

'Colleges can make you feel guilty too – they'll take you off courses if you're away for more than three weeks. I had to give my course up'

'My husband doesn't like it, but somebody's got to get up and do something. He won't do anything! His mother doesn't like it either'

'When my oldest was small there wasn't any childcare, the youngest have come on far quicker'.

On aspirations

5.12 It was obvious that for all of these women it was a struggle to undertake training and cope with their family responsibilities. In some instances they also had to battle with negativity from partners and family. However, despite the problems all appeared to gain tremendous self-esteem and were particularly proud of the way in which their children encouraged them:

'My children think it's brilliant, they tell all their friends their mother's going to college'

'My daughter tells everyone "my mummy is going to school". The main reason I went to college is so that I can help her when she's stuck on her maths'

'What I tell my daughter is if she works hard she can get a job straight away when she's young. Me – because I didn't work, now I have to go to school again to get a job. I want her to understand that she'll be better off if she doesn't follow my example. I am working towards doing an IT course'

'I want this so much; it's not a hassle when you want something so bad! I take two of my children to a childminder at 6.45 each morning then go to the station'

'It's worth making the effort to get back to work'.

Benefits for mothers and children

5.13 It was obvious that without assistance from the programme these mothers would not have been able to take advantage of training and job opportunities. The flexibility of childcare schemes within the project appeared to be liberating women to be able to widen their horizons:

'Childcare has give me opportunities. I know that I can be someone else other than 'Mammy'

'I want to have the opportunity to do what I want to do'

'It helps children, they won't be unemployed'

'At home I get desperate and start popping pills'

'Lots of women who don't know about it are sitting at home depressed'

'Before I wouldn't have sat in a group and talked, before I started doing voluntary work I wouldn't say a word. Now they can't shut me up!'

- 5.14 The success of this scheme is due to many factors: the hard work, dedication and personality of the coordinator being just one determining factor. But its success illustrates the reserve of talent and aspirations that people living in deprived circumstances are rarely given the opportunity to express. This scheme operates with the local community and is not imposed from the outside. Many of the women welcomed the childcare provision whilst at the same time felt that very young children benefited from being at home. The diversity of childcare provided was the greatest benefit.

Powys – Play Radnor

- 5.15 Play Radnor is a voluntary scheme, which is part of the Powys Sure Start Project. It started out as a mobile toy service, developed into a special needs project and then a play strategy. In 2002, this scheme was developed in Llandrindod Wells. It is located on an industrial site about a mile outside Llandrindod Wells. It provides a very valuable facility in an area that has a shortage of childcare provision, especially for children with special needs. The cost of accessing the scheme is high as many families live in outlying areas. In Powys, communities are scattered. A bus is available to the project from Llandrindod Wells, but can only be accessed by telephone request. As a result, families using the centre have to rely on cars or they have to walk a considerable distance and this is very difficult for mothers or childminders accompanied by small children, particularly if the weather is bad.
- 5.16 Private nurseries in the area are always full. They are mainly used by mothers who have gone back to work and are paid for with Tax Credits. The cost of such provision was said to be 'not extortionate', but on the other hand families had to be earning a reasonable amount to be able to afford it.
- 5.17 Within the area employment prospects are poor: the main employers of women are the local hospital, the local authority and some small firms. None of these have any childcare facilities. Training courses for women are available at a local college, but the college bus leaves at 7.30am, and it is not convenient for most women. The college does provide childcare vouchers for those going on courses. Women in the area may want to work, but there are few job opportunities for those without professional training. If they return to work the majority appear to rely on their families for the provision of childcare.

5.18 The aim of the project is to provide structured play opportunities for pre-school children with the objectives of developing children's imagination and teaching them to problem solve. The scheme works mainly on a 'drop-in' format, though the majority attend on a regular basis.

On availability

5.19 This facility provides a valuable contribution to existing inadequate service provision. In particular it caters for children with special needs. However, provision is limited to those children who are under school age, it does not provide any kind of flexible provision:

'There is a shortage of childcare'

'Childminders have to turn business away – there's a great demand'

'There is a great demand for childminders'.

5.20 The scheme is providing a valuable childcare opportunity in an area where there is little provision for pre-school children. Without the scheme children might have fewer developmental opportunities. This in turn would possibly result in children possessing fewer skills on school entry. Childminders themselves appear to be making good use of the project.

Accessibility

5.21 Activities provided by the scheme were valued quite highly by participants. These participants were in the main childminders rather than parents. However, both childminders and parents agreed that the scheme was worthwhile in spite of lack of accessibility:

'It is worth the effort to get here'

It provides an informal 'get-together' for childminders'

'Childminders get around to different play groups most mornings'

'I can only get here if my partner can get the car – I can't make it every week'.

Responsibilities

5.22 In this scheme parents and childminders appeared to enjoy taking an active part. Attendance at the project appeared to fit into their general responsibilities for childcare

'It allows the child to develop social skills'

'Work is not an attractive prospect'

'I enjoy being with my two, and I'm expecting another in six months, but we could do with the money if I worked. My partner doesn't get much'.

5.23 In contrast to other schemes in more urban areas, parents and childminders appeared to have a more relaxed life-style, and therefore childcare was not seen as a problem. There were fewer barriers to overcome in order to participate in the scheme. In contrast, the idea of work appeared to be seen as an intrusion into their child-centred life even though most experienced a lack of money.

Cost

5.24 In this area childcare costs were said to be comparatively low. The two private nurseries in the town charged a rate of £21 per child per day, and childminders charged £3 an hour per child. As one childminder commented, *'people pay more for their ironing'*. There was a general awareness of the existence of Tax Credits:

'We know that people who are going back to work are on board with Tax Credits'

'Citizen's Advice and Careers Wales, often attend 'drop-in' centres in town, and people can talk about their cases individually but the Benefit Office and Citizen's Advice are only open 2-3 days a week'

'Childminders mention to everyone that they can claim childcare costs'

'No employers provide childcare or childcare vouchers, though the college give vouchers for a crèche'

'You can get information from the Inland Revenue, they give out leaflets'

'People don't find it too costly, we have to turn business away. There is a great demand' (Childminder)

'None of the employers in the area even consider the need for childcare'.

5.25 In this area, in contrast to Rhondda Cynon Taf, there was less concern with the affordability of childcare, possibly because it was only sought after by those who had already returned to work in the professional field: teachers, nurses or staff of the Local Authority. This group of people were likely to be well informed about Tax Credits and capable of claiming in good time to coincide with their return to work.

5.26 Both childminders and parents expressed the view that childcare is seriously undervalued. What was a concern of those who had taken up childminding as an occupation was the low cost of their service. This necessitated childminders taking several children at a time in order to make their work financially viable. Childminding was one of the only flexible jobs available in the area. Two people, a husband and wife

team, described how the husband took up childcare to assist his wife who was a registered child minder:

'I'm often asked why don't I get a proper job but in this area there is so little work. I was a tractor driver. To make decent money I had to work all hours. I had no time to see my children. Childminding with my wife, I can make money and look after my own children at the same time. We get more money doing this and we are together. She's the one with the qualifications though'.

5.27 For these people, childminding was seen as a flexible form of occupation that fitted well with family life, and provided a valuable service to those who had the work opportunities.

Personal preferences

5.28 Whilst the childminders favoured the provision of more childcare facilities, mothers commented that:

'Mothers in this area won't use childcare, they use their own mothers'

'Children get one to one attention from your family, children don't miss out'

'I don't want to go back to work, I would worry about her if she was with someone else'

'Work is only an attractive proposition for teachers around here'

'If you introduce them to learning too early they lose opportunities to play. It puts pressure on the child – too much pressure on their brains'

'Helps them mix, it's handy to know that it's there'

'Mixing with children the same age helps them learn social skills'

'After seeing that programme on TV, I wouldn't use childcare'.

5.29 On the whole mothers appeared to prefer informal childcare. In their eyes, the provision of childcare was merely an adjunct to care provided by the family. This was a finding which coincided with that published in a report from a rural area of North Wales (Williams 2004). The Daycare Trust (2003) also noted that there is a heavy reliance on informal care in rural areas, not because of the absence of formal provision, but because it is preferred. In an area such as this where, for the majority, the prospect of work is not a reality it may not be surprising that cultural attitudes to the employment of women remain unchanged.

5.30 Whilst they appeared to value the socialisation opportunities provided by the project, they did not value the project as a learning opportunity for their children. These findings beg the question of whether in such circumstances Tax Credits should be extended to

cover informal care as this would be a means of supporting cultural ideals as well as stimulating the local economy and tackling child poverty.

Caerphilly – National Britannia on-site nursery

- 5.31 The National Britannia head office has been based in Caerphilly since 2000. Prior to its establishment, a survey was conducted into the needs of the predominantly female staff (150 out of a total of 200) for childcare provision. At this time, Caerphilly had no private nurseries and so demand was high. It was envisaged that attracting high quality staff might prove to be difficult and many were seeking employment in Cardiff and the suburbs because of easier access to childcare.
- 5.32 The nursery opened in January 2000. The first year's trading showed a loss of £42,000 but once the nursery was full, a full return on the investment was made by November 2001. The nursery is promoted by the local press and it features regularly in charity events.

The nursery facilities

- 5.33 The nursery has a separate 'baby room' and larger room which offers structured play and early learning based upon 'getting ready for school' skills. The premises are bright and spacious with an attractive garden. A small lodge is available for overnight stays for visiting staff attending training days in Caerphilly with provision for their children in the nursery during the day. In addition, a babysitting service in the evening is available provided by the nursery staff with whom the children and parents are familiar.
- 5.34 The company embarked upon this flagship provision for sound business reasons: the retention of highly trained staff, as part of an employment package to attract qualified people to work in Caerphilly and to maintain its reputation as an Investor in People employer.
- 5.35 There are approximately 65-70 places available in the nursery that covers ages 0-4 years plus some after-school cover. Around 20% of places are taken up by staff in Caerphilly with other places available to local firms on the Business Park, local social services and the local community. Staff receive a discount on fees ranging from 20% after two years of service to 40% after ten years of service. We met with eight members of staff (seven women and one man) who had children in the nursery.

On availability

- 5.36 The most important factor for staff was the fact that the nursery was on the premises, this allowed for them to visit children if they needed to and there was a 'one-stop' for both themselves and children during the working day.

'It's on the doorstep'

'It's there to cover all the working hours'

'It gives you peace of mind knowing that I can just pop down and see her if there was anything wrong'

'It gives you flexibility, if I happen to work over I don't have to worry'.

On affordability

5.37 The staff discount coupled with in some cases, the Childcare Tax Credit and for one member of staff, the payment by vouchers to his partner by her employer made the nursery very cost effective:

'There is a massive advantage being a staff member with the discount. My wife works for British Gas and they have a voucher scheme for childcare, but there is nothing around where she works in the centre of Cardiff so I bring my daughter in here and we pay with the vouchers and, with my discount, it works out really well. I couldn't consider looking for another job, there are too many advantages here.'

'It definitely keeps me here. If I left it would have to be a weekend or evening job, I couldn't think of leaving'.

5.38 Those with older children compared the ease of the nursery provision with after school provision. For some parents with children of a wide age range this was a potentially difficult area.

'Our after-school club does less hours in the school holidays! I ask you!'

'My son is in an after-school club but there are no facilities there like here, it's just a portacabin'

'Older kids are the most difficult at the age of eleven they don't want to go to a childminder'

'If I have to be at a meeting late, then the after-school club is a problem, it finishes at 5.30 but I can leave him here till later'.

5.39 They were all adamant that childcare should be better rewarded. They also raised the question of attracting older women into the job. They pointed to the high staff turnover in the nursery as young women left for other jobs or to have children themselves.

'I don't think childcare pays enough, it is a very responsible job for not much money'

'You notice all the nursery workers are very young girls who don't have children. Why don't they try to attract older women like my mother for instance? She has

looked after children all her life and now with my father retired would like to work a couple of days a week at something she's done all her life'.

Personal preferences

5.40 Most of the mothers were very positive about the value of work and combining work and family life, although they recognised the emotional pull of being with a young child.

'I need to work; it's not just the money. I'd go mad staying at home much as I love him'

'It does them good. My sister stays home with her two boys and they are very clingy. I couldn't cope with that'

'My wife is work orientated and couldn't stay at home. She is getting fed up now being at home with the baby and looking forward to going back'

'When I first came back to work after the baby I cried all day because I had to leave him. But now looking back I know that I'd go demented if I had to stay home all the time'

'I'd like to be able to afford not to work when the children are small but to have lots of playgroups'.

5.41 It was noticeable that the parents were very much in favour of the structured nature of the nursery activities. They spoke appreciatively of the 'getting ready for school' and educative and pedagogic emphasis on learning skills.

'My mother-in-law is a primary teacher and she comments on how advanced she is in speech for her age. She gets stimulation here but I wouldn't be happy with a childminder I would be concerned that she wasn't getting stimulation or attention'

'The only slight drawback is that there is not enough tuition in Welsh, we're both Welsh speakers and would like this to be done more'

'This is just what I want, the school emphasis – they can always play'.

5.42 This was a good example of employer provided and quality on site childcare. The highly structured form of provision suited the demands and preferences of this group of educated and qualified parents. The accessibility was faultless and the fact that employees from neighbouring businesses used the nursery was a testament to its effectiveness and demand for this type of facility.

Swansea Minority Ethnic Women's Network Crèche

- 5.43 MEWN was set up 10 years ago in Swansea to address the needs of women from many ethnic backgrounds living in the area. The largest groups are Pakistani and Bengali with an increasing number of women from Arab, African and Turkish communities attending regularly. It is housed in an old terraced house in the city centre with easy accessibility. It has cemented links with many other voluntary, statutory and business organisations in the area and offers a range of courses and support services to women.
- 5.44 Courses delivered by MEWN include sewing classes, English, Internet skills, childcare and a range of courses including Indian head massage, beauty therapy and interview and job skills. Last year there were approximately 200 students engaged on these courses. MEWN is an accredited OCN centre and many students go on to take up training places at local colleges. Support services include interpreting, help with benefits and asylum matters, as well as housing and job advice.
- 5.45 Staff include volunteers, visiting teachers from local Further Education Colleges as well as support workers including a Sure Start Development Officer. MEWN is open Monday to Friday at the Swansea premises and has an on-site crèche that is available from 8.30 to 5.00 every day. We met with twelve students on the childcare course to ask them about the availability of childcare and also on their own preferences and ambitions for themselves and their children.

On availability

- 5.46 It was noticeable that many of the mothers had little or no knowledge of other childcare provision in the area. They were unaware of any provision by local Colleges or workplaces:

'This crèche is good – if it wasn't there I couldn't come and do this course'

'I don't know of any nurseries which go with the job.'

'I do, my friend is a nurse and there is a nursery at the hospital where she works. She puts the kids in there before she starts work but it's expensive and she's not happy about the way the children are trained'

'I have problems with the after school club, it's difficult to get down and collect the children'

'You've got to put children in a nursery because there is no family. Maybe the mother is working and you can only rely on friends at the weekend'

'I wouldn't leave children before six months. They should play a bit and be children.'

On affordability

- 5.47 Not one of the group members had ever heard of Tax Credits. There were no leaflets available in the centre and neither had the visiting teacher on the childcare course given them information. None had any knowledge of how to obtain information, nor had any heard of the Sure Start provision even though all were in regular touch with the health visitor.

'It's very expensive. I couldn't afford the prices I know'

'My friend says it costs her around £300 a month and that's out of her nurse's wage. I couldn't pay that'.

Personal preferences

- 5.48 Some of the parents expressed a preference for a system of formal childcare, which contrasts with the stereotypical view that many mothers prefer a family-based system of childcare:

'I'd rather pay someone to look after children because when you pay you get a service'

'I'd want my children to be taught something not just allowed to play all the time'

'I'd not let me mother look after my children. She's too old fashioned and wouldn't look after them properly. She'd let them just go out and then she'd say 'Oh they're around somewhere' – in the middle of London!'

Aspirations

- 5.49 Most of the women in the group were intending to train for a job in childcare. Although they realised that it was not well paid they felt that it would fit in with their family and at least one perceived of it as a potentially good business opening. One however, expressed the determination to be a social worker.

'I want to be a social worker because I want to help people and support them'

'I'd prefer to work I don't like doing nothing at home'

'If I had the money I'd rather stay at home and not work'

'I want to work to get a good job'

'I could open a nursery – it's a good business'.

- 5.50 This was a very lively and interesting group of women who had made the decision to train in childcare and were also well aware of their potential. The provision of a crèche

was absolutely essential in an area where information about provision was very sparse. Local colleges have made a great effort to put on courses to encourage wider participation and they provide childcare for trainees but need to advertise this provision more widely in many languages.

Conclusions

- 5.51 The main conclusion which can be drawn from these meetings with a wide range of parents in various areas is the necessity for a diversity of provision and payments for childcare. It is evident that a diversity of types and forms of childcare provision is needed. One size will not fit all. Local cultures and individual preferences need to be accepted and respected.
- 5.52 On diversity, childcare provision to cover unsocial hours and irregular work patterns is needed as well as the formal pre-school and school provision. Assumptions about parents' preferences must not be made. Many of the women from minority ethnic groups stated strongly that they wanted formal childcare and were not in favour of family members providing the care. Conversely, women in a rural area with close family ties much preferred family-based home care for their children. Similarly, the 'school' format of day care in the on-site nursery was enthusiastically endorsed by parents who themselves had attained good academic qualifications. In contrast, some of the parents in other areas were keen for their children to engage in less formal play activities. Importantly, parents need to be active participants in the planning of childcare provision.
- 5.53 In terms of information and finance, both must be more accessible and widely publicised in a variety of places. At present, many parents are not being fully informed. The childcare element of the Working Tax Credit is often difficult to obtain and there is an unacceptable time delay in payment. This can have severe consequences for families living in poverty.
- 5.54 The provision of suitable childcare as an essential part of a project to tackle social exclusion has yielded some success in building self-confidence among families.

6. A WAY FORWARD FOR WALES

6.1 Wales should lead the way in the 'childcare revolution'. There are multiple gains for children, women, men and the economy and society as a whole by providing childcare that offers diversity, flexibility and is affordable, within an accessible and universal system. The following are our key recommendations.

Childcare – a new public service

6.2 A childcare revolution requires childcare that is available to all, irrespective of the ability to pay and local labour market conditions. The only way to achieve universal provision is for childcare to be provided as a public service, offering pre-school learning and care for all 0-4 year olds. This is particularly important in disadvantaged areas where provision is currently very low. The costs of providing childcare services should be offset by savings made in services later in children's lives.

6.3 We recommend:

- The Welsh Assembly Government should aim to exceed the UK Government's targets for childcare provision by ensuring **a childcare place for every child** whose parents want one, with the aim of one place for every four children under eight by 2010;
- The Welsh Assembly Government should take **immediate action to increase childcare availability in disadvantaged communities**, eg through the provision of an integrated children's centre in every Communities First area;
- The UK government should require large public and private sector employers to provide a minimum level of childcare provision for their employees;
- Local authorities should include childcare provision in their community plans and plans for sustainable development (as part of the new duty proposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for local authorities to secure sufficient supply of childcare).

Affordable childcare

6.4 The cost of formal childcare remains a formidable barrier to many parents, especially those with larger families, children with special needs and families on low incomes.

6.5 We recommend:

- The Welsh Assembly Government, working with the UK Government, should ensure that **childcare is free** for parents on low incomes;
- The childcare element of tax credits should be **paid in advance** and should be payable for **all children**.

Information about Childcare

6.6 Parents need to be able to make informed decisions about childcare.

6.7 We recommend:

- A step change in the profile, quality and scope of the childcare information service in Wales. It needs to be branded and promoted through the Internet, media advertisements, direct contact with parents, schools, playgroups, post offices etc.;
- Provision of information about tax credits for working parents alongside information about childcare.

Flexible childcare

6.7 'Dawn to dusk' provision may not meet the needs of all parents, e.g. those working shifts or with long travel-to-work times. We recommend:

- Local Children's Partnerships should investigate the demand for childcare outside 8am - 6pm provision and take active steps to meet it;
- The Welsh Assembly Government should provide financial support for out-of-hours care and develop models of care to demonstrate different ways in which needs might be met.

Quality care of different kinds

6.8 A key message is that parents have different preferences for the type of care their children receive – formal or informal, its cultural content – and the relative emphases on play and education. The bottom line is quality, and urgent action is needed to enhance the skills, qualifications, employment conditions and status of childcare workers.

6.9 We recommend:

- Parents should be consulted about their childcare preferences including support for informal carers, Welsh language provision, and different approaches within care settings;

- Local Children's Partnerships should undertake annual audits of provision, including the type of care offered, as well as number of places, hours etc., and encourage a range of providers and approaches;
 - Specific action should be taken to ensure that parents are able to choose a childcare setting where their child can be cared for through the medium of Welsh;
 - The UK and Welsh Assembly Government should collaborate to raise standards of childcare workers, through the Children's Workforce Development Council and action by ELWa.
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Appendix 1 Childcare Places in Wales for 0-8 year olds 2004

Registered child places by Local Authority	Number	Places
Ynys Mon	117	1,305
Childminder	57	291
Creche	7	78
Full Day Care	4	80
Sessional Day care	49	856
Blaenau Gwent	44	346
Childminder	29	105
Creche	3	40
Full Day Care	4	69
Sessional Day Care	8	132
Bridgend	167	2,225
Childminder	108	600
Creche	1	16
Full Day Care	23	818
Sessional Day Care	35	791
Caerphilly	202	2,076
Childminder	148	652
Creche	3	87
Full Day Care	14	406
Sessional Day Care	37	932
Carmarthenshire	169	2,427
Childminder	79	425
Creche	4	121
Full Day Care	21	672
Sessional Day Care	65	1209
Cardiff	427	5,782
Childminder	292	1698
Creche	21	470
Full Day Care	56	2174
Sessional Day Care	58	1440
Ceredigion	117	1,217
Childminder	65	298
Creche	0	0
Full Day Care	9	268
Sessional Day Care	43	651
Conwy	152	2,418
Childminder	73	431
Creche	2	28
Full Day Care	26	915
Sessional Day Care	51	1,044

Denbighshire		129	2,520
	Childminder	57	317
	Creche	0	0
	Full Day Care	29	1,244
	Sessional Day Care	43	959
Flintshire		217	3,278
	Childminder	126	669
	Creche	5	123
	Full Day Care	28	1,154
	Sessional Day Care	58	1,332
Vale of Glamorgan		237	2,590
	Childminder	175	1,001
	Creche	11	151
	Full Day Care	14	492
	Sessional Day Care	37	946
Gwynedd		204	2,320
	Childminder	111	545
	Creche	6	66
	Full Day Care	18	612
	Sessional Day Care	69	1,097
Merthyr Tydfil		32	497
	Childminder	14	59
	Creche	0	0
	Full Day Care	7	246
	Sessional Day Care	11	192
Monmouthshire		128	1,370
	Childminder	87	315
	Creche	1	8
	Full Day Care	10	390
	Sessional Day Care	30	657
Neath Port Talbot		85	901
	Childminder	57	337
	Creche	0	0
	Full Day Care	12	332
	Sessional Day Care	16	232
Newport		162	2,150
	Childminder	104	377
	Creche	3	72
	Full Day Care	22	950
	Sessional Day Care	33	751
Pembrokeshire		341	1,865
	Childminder	71	420
	Creche	2	33
	Full Day Care	12	407
	Sessional Day Care	49	1,005

Powys		161	1,744
	Childminder	87	328
	Creche	0	0
	Full Day Care	26	560
	Sessional Day Care	48	856
Rhondda Cynon Taf		219	2,370
	Childminder	149	771
	Creche	6	65
	Full Day Care	22	655
	Sessional Day Care	42	879
Swansea		210	2,917
	Childminder	137	722
	Creche	2	16
	Full Day Care	34	1,379
	Sessional Day Care	37	800
Torfaen		113	1,343
	Childminder	69	263
	Creche	10	143
	Full Day Care	14	484
	Sessional Day Care	20	453
Wrexham		168	3,048
	Childminder	70	349
	Creche	5	68
	Full Day Care	32	1,181
	Sessional Day Care	61	1,450
Wales Total		3,594	46,709

(Source: Care Standards Inspectorate Wales)

Appendix 2 Population of 0-8 year olds in Wales by Unitary Authority 2003

Unitary Authority	Children aged 0-8 years
Ynys Mon	6,700
Gwynedd	12,100
Conwy	10,300
Denbighshire	9,400
Flintshire	16,000
Wrexham	13,600
Powys	12,600
Ceredigion	6,400
Pembrokeshire	12,100
Carmarthenshire	17,600
Swansea	22,000
Neath Port Talbot	13,400
Bridgend	13,800
Vale of Glamorgan	13,300
Cardiff	33,100
Rhondda Cynon Taf	24,800
Merthyr Tydfil	5,800
Caerphilly	19,100
Blaenau Gwent	7,000
Torfaen	9,600
Monmouthshire	8,600
Newport	16,200
WALES	303,400

(Source: Office of National Statistics Mid Year 2003 (released 09/09/2004)

Note: Figures rounded up to nearest 100)

Appendix 3 Numbers of Out-of-school Childcare Clubs in Wales

Unitary Authority	Before school	After School	Holiday	Weekend	Wrap-around	Total
Ynys Mon	3	14	7	0	0	24
Conwy	14	32	29	2	0	77
Denbighshire	23	38	24	1	0	86
Flintshire	35	49	14	0	0	98
Gwynedd	6	20	12	0	2	40
Wrexham	29	45	20	0	7	101
Ceredigion	4	14	15	0	0	33
Powys	27	28	25	2	0	82
Carmarthenshire	23	58	17	0	0	98
Neath Port Talbot	5	17	6	0	4	32
Pembrokeshire	18	20	18	3	0	59
Swansea	14	36	13	1	9	73
Bridgend	8	15	9	0	0	32
Blaenau Gwent	4	7	3	0	0	14
Caerphilly	8	20	8	0	6	42
Cardiff	14	43	16	0	0	73
Merthyr Tydfil	7	14	7	0	2	30
Monmouthshire	11	12	3	0	0	26
Newport	10	16	8	0	0	34
Rhondda Cynon Taf	9	20	8	0	0	37
Torfaen	4	13	7	0	7	31
Vale of Glamorgan	9	18	10	0	0	37
WALES	285	549	269	9	37	1149

(Source: *Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs 2004*)

Appendix 4: A survey of Local Authorities and Health Trusts

Because of issues about the reliability of the data from the Care Standards Inspectorate, contact was made with the 'Children First' contacts of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales, asking them to detail the childcare provision for all children in the area. There were ten responses. Overall the responses received were in line with the overall figures of the Care Standards Inspectorate, allowing for adjustments during the time period and provision across the age range.

Two important factors emerged from this exercise. First, almost half of the Local Authority areas either have already established or have planned integrated child centres for 4-16 year olds. Second, there is a lack of information regarding employer provision. Responses show that knowledge of employers who provide childcare, childcare allowances or childcare vouchers was based upon the public sector only. According to responses received, only one social services department, two educational establishments, two other public sector organisations, two manufacturing services and twelve higher educational establishments currently provide childcare facilities for their employees, in the ten areas. Possibly employer schemes are poorly advertised or go unrecognised by Local Authorities. This was certainly the case in respect of one of our case studies, the National Britannia nursery, about which the Local Authority had no information.

The NHS Childcare Strategy for England and Wales stated the Government's aim to provide a further 150 childcare places by 2004 (114 places were available in 2001). To this end, £70 million was made available, and 60 childcare places were funded in 2002 and 30 funded for 2003. It was stated that all new build hospitals should have an on-site nursery in their plans and that all staff should have access to a childcare co-ordinator by 2003. Funding to pump-prime the provision of Childcare co-ordinators was provided.

All Health Trusts in Wales were contacted for information regarding their provision for employees. A total of 6 NHS Trusts responded with details of their provision:

- On-site crèche and nurseries were provided by Bro Morgannwg, Carmarthenshire, Conwy and Denbighshire and North West Wales Trust on one or more of their sites;
- In addition four out of the six Trusts which responded had put in place a work-life balance and childcare survey;
- In addition, three of the Trusts were consulting staff on the salary deduction scheme to pay towards childcare provision.

This is of course, only a 'snapshot' of some of the provision at present implemented by the Health Trusts in Wales and the information held by Local Authorities. It is evident that provision of childcare in Wales follows the Inverse Care Ratio – areas with the greatest need have the least provision.

Sites of childcare provision for 0-4 year olds in 10 Local Authorities in Wales 2004

Local Authority	Creches	Child-minders	Day Nurseries	Play groups	Mother & Toddler	Cylch-oedd Meithrin	Cymorth Projects
Ynys Mon (Pop.2000)	0	58	5 (3 private)	11	30	35	N/A
Bridgend (Pop. 5924)	0	118	22	25	23	8	7
Caerphilly (Pop.10,679)	9	155	12	45	83	(346 places)	40
Ceridigion (Pop. 3348)	0	63	7	6	5	49	10
Flintshire (Pop. 8,712)	3	117	23	59	N/A	N/A	4
Merthyr Tydfil (Pop. 3,261)	0	15	6	8	13	11	N/A
Neath and Port Talbot(Pop.N/A)	0	74	16	20	45	8	21
Newport (Pop. 4,900)	7 (1 mobile)	116	18	33	N/A	4	37
Torfaen (Pop. 3,000)	1	65	10	24	11	3	22
Wrexham (Pop.5,847)	5	61	25	79	64	14	46
Total	25	842	144	310	274	132	187

(Source: Figures supplied by the Local Authorities. Population is that of 0-4 year olds)

School-age provision for 4-16 year olds in 10 Local Authorities in Wales 2004

Local Authority	Population 4-16 year olds	Breakfast Clubs	Holiday Schemes	Open Play	Out of School Clubs	After School Clubs	Respite Care	Integrated Centres
Ynys Mon	N/A	2	4	0	6	18	1	0
Bridgend	22,095	5	34	0	87	12	0	1 Planned
Caerphilly	25,936	16	43	N/A	N/A	23	0	1
Ceridigion	12,230	34	12	0	4	12	0	3
Flintshire	19,661	N/A	12	1	53	N/A	Foster Carers	1
Merthyr Tydfil	7,944	10	21	0	N/A	12	0	0
Neath & Port Talbot	N/A	11	17	38	28	2	N/A	1
Newport	23,854	2	26	11	0	0	0	1 Planned
Torfaen	15,300	4	23	0	15	12	0	0
Wrexham	21,153	24	19	7	68	44	0	3 Planned
Total		108	211	57	261	135	1	6 and 5 Planned

Source: Figures supplied by the Local Authorities 2004)

Recorded availability of employer provision of childcare by 10 Local Authorities in Wales 2004

Local Authority	Hospitals	Social Services	Education	Public Sector	Multiple Retailers	Manufacturing/ Service Industries	Higher Education
Ynys Mon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bridgend	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Caerphilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Ceredigion	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Flintshire	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Neath & Port Talbot	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newport	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Merthyr Tydfil	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Torfaen	1	1	1	1	0	0	2
Wrexham	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	5	1	2	2	0	2	12

(Source: Figures supplied by Local Authorities)

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