

# Accessing School Age Childcare in Rural and Island Areas

This report outlines the findings of research into challenges accessing and providing school age childcare (for ages 4 to 14) in rural and island areas of Scotland.

## Challenges for Parents



The research points to key challenges for parents/carers around availability of services. Many struggle to access wraparound care in both term time and the school holidays, and these challenges are greater for parents of children with additional support needs.



Cost is a barrier to many parents accessing affordable school age childcare. Some rural and island parents find themselves financially worse off working.



The limitations of rural and island transport options also create challenges for parents, especially those who lack support from friends and family.



Challenges accessing consistent and affordable childcare negatively impact parents' employment opportunities.



Challenges accessing child care also cause many parents to rely on precarious informal arrangements with family and friends, which can create guilt and stress.

# Challenges for Providers



Many experience problems with fluctuating demand, recruitment and retention of staff, their facilities, and transport, which makes it difficult to run financially viable services.



Many providers also have challenges accessing consistent funding and support. This makes it harder to provide for children with additional support needs, and leaves many feeling undervalued.



To cope with these challenges, many providers in rural and island areas limit or adapt their services.



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## Recommendations

Many challenges parents and providers face are linked, and both groups feel guilt and frustration as a result of these challenges.

We recommend that the Scottish Government consider the following three opportunity areas when exploring future school age childcare initiatives:

1

Assist providers to offer greater flexibility in their services through financial support, guidance, and opportunities to learn from other providers.

2

Provide sustainable financial support for providers through subsidies from the local authority or subsidised arrangements with local businesses, and explore the expansion of funded places to include school age children and children under 3 years old.

3

Encourage community collaboration through blended offer models, partnerships with other community services (such as employability services), and by increasing opportunities to share community learnings.



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## About this Research

**977** The research was carried out between January and July 2022. It involved 977 participants.



We spoke to 27 participants through in-depth interviews. This included 12 parents/carers of school age children, and 15 providers of school age childcare.



We also heard the experiences of 950 participants through two surveys, for which we received 878 responses from parents/carers, and 72 responses from providers.



Parents and providers were recruited from 6 local authority areas:

- Argyll and Bute,
- Aberdeenshire,
- Dumfries and Galloway,
- Highland,
- Shetland Islands, and
- Na h-Eileanan Siar (Western Isles).