

Pilot evaluation report on access to funded Early Learning and Childcare for eligible children who defer entry to Primary 1



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Pilot evaluation report on access to funded Early Learning and Childcare for eligible children who defer entry to Primary 1

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All responsibility for this report lies with the authors.

Note on terminology:

Deferral – deferring or delaying the start of primary school by one year.

The new entitlement / policy – the additional year of funded ELC provided to children born mid-August-December.

Where this report refers to ‘eligible children’ or ‘August-December born children’, it technically refers to those who will turn five years old between the start of the academic year, which is mid-August, and the 31 December.

The pilot areas – the ten local authority areas which piloted the new entitlement.

Executive summary

Background

In February 2021, new Scottish Parliament legislation laid out plans for the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) funding for children whose parents or carers choose to defer their entry to primary school. The expansion automatically entitled children born between mid-August (the start of the academic year) and December to an additional year of ELC funding, something only guaranteed for children with January and February birthdays until this point. Previously, mid-August-December born children were only granted funding at the discretion of their local authority.

In anticipation of full implementation in August 2023, the Scottish Government and the Convention Of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) published a Joint Implementation Plan, setting out the approach to implementing and evaluating a pilot programme of funded deferrals during 2021-22 and 2022-23. The new policy was piloted in ten local authorities with five 'Year 1' areas starting in 2021 and an additional five 'Year 2' areas added in 2022. The Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos Scotland to undertake an evaluation of the 10 pilots. The overall aim was to evaluate the implementation of the new automatic entitlement in Year 1 and 2 pilot areas to inform the national roll-out of the additional year of ELC funding across Scotland from August 2023. The evaluation was primarily qualitative in nature, exploring the experiences of staff delivering the new policy and those of parents of children who became eligible for the funding under the pilot. It also used uptake data from the pilot areas and national School Census data to examine any impact of the change on the uptake of deferral.

In order to provide structure to the evaluation, a logic model was developed to map the theory of change behind expanding the entitlement. The intended impact outcomes for parents and children were:

- a more consistent approach to deferral across Scotland
- increase in child-centred decision making
- increase in parental choice
- parents feel supported by ELC/LA staff in their decision making
- financial barrier of additional year of ELC removed or reduced
- reduced stress and concern for parents over their child starting school
- deferral rates become more uniform across Scotland including by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

When considering the findings (summarised below), it is important to keep in mind that this project used a qualitative research design to address its research aims. This means that estimates of the prevalence of particular views or experiences are inappropriate and that findings from the 10 participating local authorities may not be representative of all local authorities in Scotland.

Impact on the uptake of deferral

The deferral rate for children with mid-August-December birthdays was higher in pilot areas compared to the average across Scotland, and more so in the Year 2 pilot areas. However, it was not so great that it caused widespread capacity issues in ELC settings. It is difficult to disentangle various drivers of increases, particularly given the Covid-19 pandemic appears to have driven increases nationally, and the pilot areas had different 'pre-pilot' policies to funding mid-August-December deferral requests. There is a slight indication that the less deprived pilot areas were more likely to see a sharper increase. January-February deferral rates did not appear to be affected by the pilot.

Implementation and processes

Overall, the pilot was implemented broadly as intended, and did not have a major impact on local authority and ELC resources. Both pilot leads and ELC staff felt the implementation had gone smoothly. It had reduced workloads in local authorities where previously a panel would review each application and professionals may gather information and/or observe a child. The planning of the pilot involved developing communications to ensure all settings were informed and staff felt supported. ELC heads and practitioners felt that the communications they had received were sufficient to enable them to inform and support parents around the pilot and what it could mean for their child.

The main changes in practice for frontline ELC staff were: additional time talking to more parents about the entitlement and whether it could be beneficial to their child; and adjusting pedagogical approaches to ensure older children who have been deferred are challenged. Staff generally felt confident about these changes, although there were examples of staff feeling unclear about whether they should raise the subject of deferral with parents. Handling conversations with parents sensitively was emphasised by ELC practitioners as vital but also as something they were doing before the pilot.

Capacity was only an issue in a small number of "hotspots" where spaces for younger children starting nursery were limited. There were concerns among local authority and ELC staff that capacity could be a problem in the future. A further challenge was the timing of deferral decisions balanced with the need to plan Primary 1 (P1) teacher numbers.

Parents' experiences of the new processes

Parents' experiences of finding out about the entitlement were mixed. They ranged from those who felt well informed, having received written communications from their ELC setting, to those who did not know the funding was guaranteed until after their child's place was confirmed. This highlighted the need for a more consistent approach across all settings as some asked staff to speak to all eligible parents, and others relied on written communication being read (which did not always happen). The deferral process itself was found to be straightforward, although those who had to apply for both a P1 place and an ELC place felt this could be streamlined.

Parents highly valued conversations with ELC staff, feeling their professional opinion and knowledge of their child was useful in deciding whether to take up the funding. There were, however, those who felt upset and/or shocked when staff initially raised the possibility. To them it felt 'scary' because they worried there was something wrong with their child. This highlighted the importance of a sensitive approach to conversations with parents, particularly given there continues to be a stigma around deferral in some communities. The qualitative research indicated that this negative perception of deferral as 'holding them back' was more apparent among parents from more deprived areas.

Overall, parents found staff approachable, supportive and able to answer questions regarding their child's progress and developmental needs, as well as deferral processes. Staff saw their role as providing supporting information if they felt deferral would be beneficial, but also emphasising that the decision lies with the parent. There were parents who appreciated this position while others found it frustrating that ELC practitioners took a "neutral" position. Where parents were not happy with support provided by ELC staff, this tended to be when they disagreed with the advice offered. ELC staff spoke positively about the pilot enabling more informal conversations about deferral. They also provided a range of approaches which they felt best support child-centred decision making. These included approaching the topic in an open way and making time and private space for what can be an emotional conversation.

Impacts for parents and children

The funding has largely removed, or at least reduced, financial barriers to deferral. Some parents did not feel they could have afforded to defer their child without the funding, and may not have applied to defer them without this guarantee. The pilot increased parental choice by: enabling parents who were not aware that deferring was an option for their child to consider it and by increasing the choice available for parents who wanted to defer their child but may not have for financial reasons, or because they felt their application would be unsuccessful.

The evidence also indicates that the pilot has increased child-centred decision making – parents reported concentrating on what they felt was best for their child, rather than any practical considerations, with ELC staff in agreement that this reflected their experience. In addition, whether their child was 'ready' (including: emotionally, socially, academically, physically) for school consistently emerged as the main factor informing decisions, with the main influences on parents' decisions being others who were well positioned to comment on what would be best for the child. ELC staff felt that the automatic funding had led to an increase in child-centred decision making.

Remaining barriers to child-centred decision making included: stigma around deferral (although there was a suggestion this was lessening); peer group considerations (wanting children to remain with friends or be separated from another child); and the timing of deferral decisions (considered to be too early). Having the guarantee of an additional funded year has helped to reduce parental stress by simplifying the deferral process/removing the need to gather supporting

evidence for deferral and by giving parents full control of the decision. Parents were generally happy with the decision they had made for their child, making the process of starting school feel less stressful.

Conclusions and lessons for roll-out

The pilot has been implemented broadly as intended and the findings are positive in relation to the short- and medium-term intended outcomes. The signs are also encouraging in relation to longer-term outcomes of more consistent approaches and more uniform deferral rates across Scotland.

Areas for consideration which would improve parents' experiences include: producing standard written communications for settings to send to all eligible parents and clearer guidance for settings around communication to avoid instances of parents not receiving any official communications about the entitlement. This would ensure all eligible parents benefit from the opportunity to consider deferral, thereby increasing choice and child-centred decision making. The full report provides further recommendations on communication. Greater information provided earlier in the preschool year about what P1 is like in their school and on what an additional year in ELC would comprise, would also help parents make a more informed decision.

Further points to consider for ELC staff include: training and/or resources to ensure they are aware and feel confident raising the subject of deferral; and clarifying their role in relation to parents' decisions on deferral. Settings may benefit from support so they can provide additional training and resources for staff on pedagogical approaches for older children. Areas that could improve the deferral process itself are: reviewing the timing of when deferral decisions need to be made, keeping in mind the need for flexibility for parents and local authorities' requirements for planning teacher numbers; and looking at whether the process can be simplified further by not requiring parents to apply for a P1 space when deferring.

While ELC capacity was not a major issue across the pilot areas, it was flagged as a potential future issue. It will be important to continue to review capacity issues across ELC settings as the entitlement is rolled out alongside other policies which require more spaces. Increasing the analysis by local authorities on children who defer would also aid future evaluation of the expanded entitlement. This would ideally include monitoring: Additional Support Needs (ASN), disabilities, households on low-income benefits, ethnic group, and SIMD quintile of children who defer.

1. Introduction and methods

Policy background

All parents and carers in Scotland have the legal right to defer their child's entry to primary school if they are not yet five years old at the start of the school year. Deferral rates in Scotland have been steadily increasing since 2014. They vary considerably across local authorities, however, and, overall, are higher among boys, children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) or with a disability, and children living in the least deprived areas (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintile 5)¹.

Since 1 August 2021, all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds in Scotland have had a statutory entitlement to 1,140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) a year. Currently, children born in January or February are automatically entitled to an extra year of ELC funding in either a nursery or childminding setting, should their parent/s or carer/s choose to defer the start of Primary 1 (P1). However, children born between mid-August (the start of the academic year) and December are only granted funding at the discretion of their local authority.²

During a debate in the Scottish Parliament in October 2019, the Minister for Children and Young People announced that the Scottish Government “intend[ed] to introduce legislation to entitle all children whose school start is deferred to access funded ELC in their deferred year.” Legislation was introduced on 7 December 2020 that would create this automatic entitlement to funding from 1 August 2023 and this was approved by Parliament on 3 February 2021. The aim of amending the eligibility criteria was to ensure that parents' decisions about whether to defer their child's P1 entry can be based on the best interests of the child and not whether they automatically qualify for access to funded ELC. Child-centred decision making is central to Scottish Government policy affecting children and families and is supported by the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) approach. GIRFEC is the Scottish Government's commitment to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time. This is so that every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential.³

Piloting the entitlement

To monitor the impact of the policy and to inform full implementation from August 2023, five local authorities piloted the automatic entitlement of funded ELC for August-December⁴ born children during the school year 2021-2022 (August 2021

¹ [Deferred entry to primary school statistics, Scottish Government. 2018 \(updated 2020\)](#)

² Children born from March to beginning of the academic year (mid August) are not currently entitled to defer or receive an additional year of ELC funding as they will turn five before starting school.

³ [Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\), Scottish Government website.](#)

⁴ Technically, those born mid-August-December but 'August-December' has been used for brevity throughout the report.

being the point at which children eligible under the pilot would begin either P1 or their additional year in ELC). These Year 1 pilot local authorities volunteered to be the first areas to trial the change. They were: Angus, Argyll and Bute, Falkirk, Scottish Borders and Shetland Islands. The Scottish Government then invited further local authorities to apply to take part in the second year of the pilot. Five were selected, taking into consideration the demographic profile of each (aiming to increase coverage in urban and more deprived areas). The Year 2 pilot areas were: Aberdeen City, Clackmannanshire, Fife, Glasgow City and Stirling.

Working in partnership with COSLA and local authorities, a Joint Implementation Plan⁵ was developed which set out the approach to implementing and evaluating these pilots as progress towards full implementation in August 2023 is made.

When interpreting the findings of the evaluation, it should be kept in mind that the ten pilot local authorities were not intended to be representative of all 32 local authorities across Scotland in terms of demographic profile, local authority resources / ELC capacity, and pre-pilot deferral policies. Furthermore, because of the way they opted in or applied to take part, they may be skewed towards local authorities that felt well positioned to deliver the pilot in terms of both administering it and having capacity in ELC settings. Some of these local authorities approved a high proportion of applications for funding prior to the pilot, and this may have allowed them to feel confident that it would create minimal change. This may mean that the national roll-out could be more challenging for some local authorities for reasons that have not come to light in this study.

Research aims and objectives

Ipsos Scotland was commissioned to carry out an evaluation on behalf of the Scottish Government. The overall aim was to evaluate the implementation of the new automatic entitlement in Year 1 and 2 pilot areas to inform the roll-out of the automatic entitlement across Scotland from August 2023. In particular, it was intended to:

1. **Provide information about implementation of the pilot in order to inform the full roll-out of the policy**, including implications for advertising and communications, admissions processes, overall capacity and parental choice in the pilot LAs (process).
2. **Explore the impact of the pilot on parental awareness and perceptions of the entitlement** (early impact; short- medium-term outcomes).

See Appendix 1 for more detailed objectives.

Methods

The evaluation was primarily qualitative in nature. This was felt to be the most appropriate design to meet the objectives of the research as it provides an in-depth

⁵ [Early learning and childcare access in a deferred year: joint implementation plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/early-learning-and-childcare-access-in-a-deferred-year-joint-implementation-plan)

understanding of attitudes towards, and experiences of, the pilot. The aim in qualitative research is to identify as much diversity of experience rather than attempting to achieve a sample that is statistically representative of the wider population. Estimates of prevalence based on qualitative data are therefore inappropriate and this report avoids quantifying language, such as ‘most’ or ‘a few’ when discussing findings from qualitative interviews. Furthermore, the evaluation was relatively small scale, particularly in terms of the number of staff spoken to, which should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

The evaluation involved three phases:

- **Phase 1** - development of a logic model to map out the theory of change and intended impacts.
- **Phase 2** - in-depth interviews with local authority pilot leads; review of local authority written communications aimed at parents.
- **Phase 3** - online mini focus groups with heads and practitioners working in local authority ELC settings; in-depth interviews with parents/carers of eligible children; and analysis of deferral uptake data from local authorities.

The logic model created in Phase 1 was designed to map out intended activities and outcomes, and thereby provide a framework for the evaluation. The aim of Phase 2 was to gain an understanding of how local authorities delivered the expanded entitlement, and how they felt implementation had gone. It also examined the impact of the pilot on deferral uptake. The aim of Phase 3 was twofold. Firstly, it examined the views of ELC staff on the impact of the new policy on settings and on their roles, and their perceptions of impacts for children and families. Secondly, it involved speaking to parents to understand their experiences of the new entitlement and what that had meant for their children.

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

Logic model development

In order to provide structure to the evaluation, a logic model was developed with the Scottish Government and the Deferral Working Group (at the beginning of the project). Logic models illustrate a ‘theory of change’ – that is, how an intervention or policy is expected to lead to the outcomes it is ultimately intended to create. Approaches to logic models vary, but they typically include:

- **Inputs** – the components and resources needed to actually deliver an intervention.
- **Outputs** – what the programme/intervention actually delivers.
- **Outcomes** – sometimes split into short, medium and longer-term – what the intervention is actually meant to achieve in terms of impact.

- **External / contextual factors** – things outside the intervention that might impact on how it works / its success in delivering its outcomes in practice.

The logic model content is detailed below. A diagram of the model has also been included in Appendix 5 of this report. It lays out the aims and intention for the new entitlement and has been used as a framework for this evaluation.

Inputs

- Scottish Government Funding
- Local authority staff team - time and training
- IT systems & other resources for applications

Outputs – activities

- Communication to local authority/ELC staff of the availability of ELC funding to parents/carers considering deferral
- Communication of the availability of ELC funding to parents / carers considering deferral
- Processing of requests to defer
- Provision of support and information for parents requesting deferral
- Provision of support for parents in decision making around deferral (from ELC professionals, teachers, local authority staff, other professionals supporting the child)
- Effective communications with families
- Provision of additional ELC funding (for use in ELC funded provider setting)
- Provision of additional funded spaces within local authority run settings

Outputs – participation/reach

- Children with August-December birthdays
- And their parents/carers and families
- Particular groups where an increased impact may be seen: children with ASN, children born prematurely, families that struggle to pay childcare costs

Outcomes – Process

- Deferral request process more straightforward
- Awareness of the availability of ELC funding to parents/carers considering deferral increases
- Local authority/ELC staff are well informed about the availability of ELC funding
- Local authority /ELC staff feel able to support parents in their decision making
- Parents are able to choose a funded ELC space in a suitable setting

Outcomes – Impact

- A more consistent approach to deferral across Scotland
- Increase in child-centred decision making
- Increase in parental choice
- Parents feel supported by ELC/local authority staff in their decision making
- Financial barrier of additional year of ELC removed or reduced
- Reduced stress and concern for parents over their child starting school
- Deferral rates become more uniform across Scotland (including by SIMD)

Assumptions of the model were: that parents / carers of children who are eligible hear about it and are able to apply; local authorities have capacity to provide additional spaces. Risks and external factors considered were: further policy developments leading to pressure on spaces in local authorities settings (e.g. expansion of funded spaces for more one and two year olds); increased publicity or promotion leads to an increase larger than local authorities have capacity for; the challenge of having a broader age range in those settings.

Interviews with local authority pilot leads

Pilot leads were invited by email to take part in in-depth interviews. These took place with all ten pilot local authorities between May and July 2022. In total, 14 members of staff took part in this phase of the evaluation (including four paired interviews). The paired in-depth interviews enabled staff involved in the administration of the funding to provide details on how that worked operationally whereas the pilot leads provided the overarching management perspective.

Mini focus groups with ELC setting heads and practitioners

Three Year 1 pilot local authorities were selected for the research with staff. These included a mix of areas in terms of rurality. Ideally a mix of deprivation levels would have been included too. However, most Year 1 local authorities have fewer very highly deprived areas. Year 1 pilot areas only were selected because they had been piloting the new entitlement for longer. Pilot leads emailed local authority ELC settings to invite both ELC setting heads and practitioners to opt in to take part in three mini focus groups. One focus group contained heads of ELC settings (five participants) to enable exploration of implementation from a managerial perspective. The two other groups were with ELC practitioners (four and three participants respectively), and these explored the impact of the pilot on the practice of frontline staff. Participants were offered a £30 Amazon voucher or bank transfer to thank them for taking part.

Although both childminders and private settings can provide funded spaces under the expanded entitlement, the sample of ELC staff did not include these providers. This was due to the staff sample size being fairly modest (three mini groups) and the fact that staff from local authority settings were felt more likely to be able to comment on the transition of children into P1, given the majority are part of a primary school.

It should be noted that the opt-in approach to the recruitment of ELC staff may have skewed the sample towards those with a particular interest in this area, or who were more experienced and confident about supporting parents with ELC policies, and what they might mean for their child. This has been somewhat mitigated through the parent interviews, as they provide insight into how different settings delivered communication and support around the entitlement.

Interviews with parents

Parents of eligible children in ELC settings were recruited via emails sent by six pilot local authorities. These were selected to provide a more in-depth picture of how implementation had gone in these areas while providing a mix of deprivation and rurality. The emails included information sheets (Appendix 2) explaining the purpose of the research, and inviting parents who were aware of the new entitlement to opt in by contacting Ipsos. A short screening phone call was then undertaken by the research team to ascertain whether the potential participant had heard about the pilot, and to record some information about their child and household. Although all invited participants were from pilot areas, there were a small number who had not heard about the pilot. These parents were screened out as it was more valuable to gather the views of those with some experience of the pilot, whether they had deferred or not.

Table 1.1 shows the sample profile of parents who took part. There was low uptake of the invitation to participate, meaning that it was not possible to meet all the target quotas set at the outset. These targets included: an equal number of parents in each local authority; at least half of the interviews with parents in the most deprived areas (SIMD quintiles 1 and 2) and around a third of parents who did not defer. The unequal split by local authority was kept in mind during analysis of the qualitative data to ensure that experiences in one particular area were not overly represented in the report. This has been mitigated by the fact that experiences tended to differ at a setting level rather than by local authority area.

Table 1.1. Parent sample

	Number of interviewees
Total	30
Year 1 areas	
Scottish Borders	1
Aberdeen City	8
Shetland Islands	2
Year 2 areas	
Fife	5
Glasgow City	10
Stirling	4
SIMD	
1 or 2	9
3, 4 or 5	17
Rurality	

1, 2, 3 (Large urban to accessible small towns)	21 ⁶
4, 5, 6 (Remote small towns to remote rural)	7
Deferral	
Parents who did defer	23
Parents who did not defer	7
Family characteristics	
Parents/carers with children with a disability or ASN	11
Parents/carers from an ethnic minority background	3
Male parent/carer	2
Female parent/carer	28

The opt-in approach to recruiting parents may have biased the sample towards those who wished to share experiences of the entitlement that were particularly positive or negative. The provision of information sheets, outlining the purpose of the research and the appeal to hear from a wide range of people whatever their experience, was intended to mitigate this risk. Because the sample of parents included more parents who did take up the additional funded year in ELC (in order to gather enough data on the experience of the new process), it may be somewhat skewed toward those with positive views of deferral (although both positive and negative views were captured among both those who deferred and those who decided not to defer).

Analysis of uptake data

One of the detailed research objectives of the evaluation (included in Appendix 1) was to draw together information from local authorities about uptake of the automatic entitlement, in relation to previous trends and the wider national context. Analysis of deferral rates across the 10 pilot areas over the past six years (2017/18 to 2022/23) was therefore conducted using data provided by each local authority.

The percentage of children who deferred was calculated by using National Records of Scotland birth records to establish how many children were actually eligible in each of the pilot local authority areas. This was done for children with mid-August-December birthdays and for those with January-February birthdays to ascertain how the pilot had impacted deferral rates for both. Given the start date for eligibility is the start of term, which falls in mid-August, a best estimate was created by dividing the births in August by two (and adding that to the number of births in September-December).⁷ School census data was then used to calculate national deferral rates for the past six years, to compare with average deferral rates for Year 1 and Year 2 pilot areas.⁸

⁶ Two postcodes were not found in urban-rural or SIMD classifications

⁷ These figures also do not account for the number of eligible children who have left or moved to Scotland between birth and the point at which they would be informed about the funding.

⁸ It should be noted that school census data provides the age of children in P1 and no details on whether the child had been in an ELC setting the year before, nor whether they had received ELC funding in that year. This is a further limitation of data analysis undertaken. However the deferral rates calculated are still useful 'best estimates' for investigating differences between pilot areas and the national picture.

Pilot local authorities returned monitoring data to the Scottish Government detailing the number of children who had deferred once the new entitlement came in. This did not contain comprehensive data on household and child characteristics (for example, ethnicity or SIMD quintile). However, most pilot areas provided deferral numbers by sex so it was possible to explore trends by sex in pilot areas and nationally. National data on deferral by SIMD was also available.

Data collection and analysis

Discussion guides were created to ensure all relevant topic areas and relevant research objectives were covered in the interviews and focus groups (see Appendix 3). In-depth interviews were conducted either by telephone or video call and lasted 45-60 minutes. The focus groups were conducted online and lasted 60 minutes. Participants were asked at the screening stage whether they would like any support to participate. This included the offer of an interpreter, which one participant took up. All interviews/mini groups were facilitated by members of the research team and were recorded for subsequent analysis.

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

Case studies have been included at relevant points throughout to bring parents' experiences to life (names and some details have been changed to protect anonymity of participants).

The Covid-19 pandemic context

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is thought by ELC staff and parents to have caused an upturn in deferral rates because children had missed out on time in nursery, and/or because they felt the restrictions may have contributed to developmental delays. It is not possible to ascertain exactly how much of the upturn in deferral in pilot areas is due to the pandemic and how much is due to the expanded entitlement. Tracking deferral rates over the next few years should provide further clarity around the impact of the change in policy.

Because the pilot overlapped with Covid-19 restrictions, settings were not always operating in a 'standard' way in terms of how they communicated with and supported parents generally. However, both parent and staff interviews provided data on how things have been since restrictions were removed. Further detail on this is provided in Chapter 4.

Report structure and conventions

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2: **Impact on deferral rates**

Chapter 3: **Implementation and processes**

Chapter 4: **Parents' experiences of the new process**

Chapter 5: **Impacts for parents and children**

Chapter 6: **Conclusions and lessons for roll-out**

Boxed points for consideration as the pilot is rolled out nationally are included at relevant points within chapters. These are based on the researchers' reflections on the findings and are intended to highlight questions that the Scottish Government and its partners, particularly local authorities, may wish to consider.

2. Impact on deferral rates

Summary

- There were **increases in August-December deferrals** in pilot areas. Increases were sharper in Year 2 areas.
- It is not possible to fully disentangle the impact of the pilot and the impact of **wider contextual factors** such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the influence of campaigns to raise the school starting age on deferral rates. Differing levels of deprivation across local authorities (which has historically influenced deferrals rates) should also be considered.
- There are indications in the data, however, that **the new entitlement led to a slightly sharper increase in the uptake of August-December deferral, when compared with the figure for Scotland overall.**
- There was no clear pattern to suggest the pilot had impacted January-February deferral rates.
- There will be a clearer picture when data is available for next few academic years.

This section examines deferral rates in the pilot areas and compares them with national data. The ten local authority areas piloting the funded entitlement provided data on the number of deferrals by birth month, for the past six years. The charts in this section show the average deferral rates across the pilot areas. However, the deferral rates for each pilot local authority are provided in Appendix 4.

National deferral rates and pilot areas

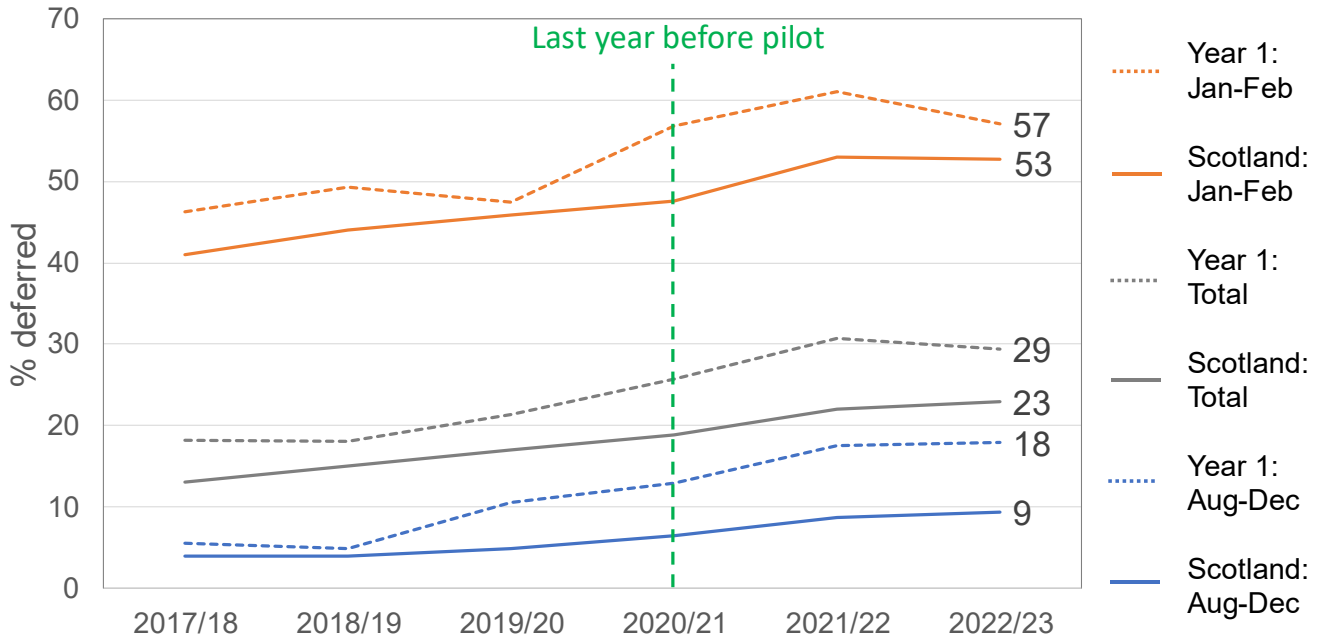
Figure 2.1 shows that there has been a general, gradual, increase in rates of deferral (for both January-February and August-December born children) in Scotland over the past five years, which includes the period before the pilots were introduced. The dotted lines show the average deferral rates of the Year 1 pilot areas, illustrating that Year 1 areas tended to have deferral rates that were higher than the national average prior to the pilot.

In the year after the pilot began, August-December deferrals increased by two percentage points nationally, from 7% to 9%. However, in Year 1 pilot areas, this increase was slightly steeper – four percentage points (from 13% in 2020/21 to 17% in 2021/22). While it is difficult to disentangle the impact of the wider contextual factors on uptake from the impact of the pilot (discussed later in this section), this suggests the pilot may be behind part of the moderate increase in uptake in Year 1 areas. However, given the number of children deferring in pilot areas is relatively small, this is an indicative finding.

In contrast, the rate of increase in January-February deferrals is almost identical when comparing the national rate to the Year 1 pilot areas (5 and 4 percentage point increases respectively in the year after the pilot began). The 2022/23 data shows the gap between Year 1 pilot areas and Scotland narrowing for January-

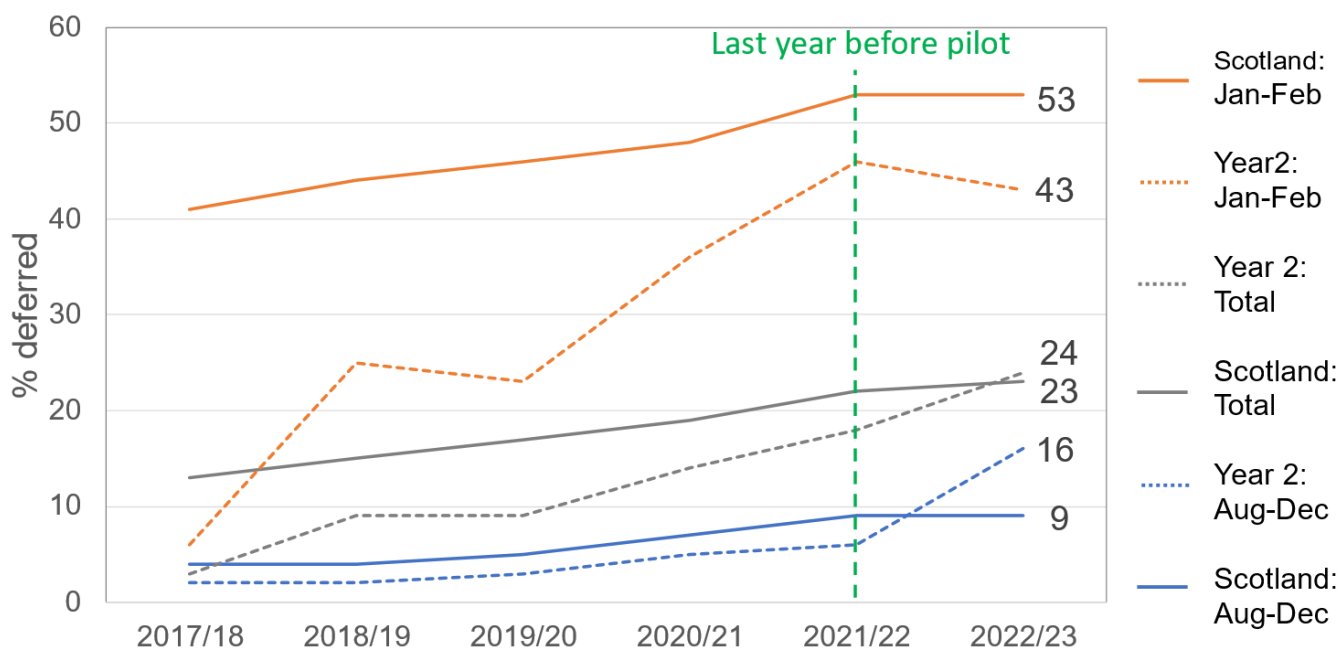
February deferrals. It is too early to say whether January-February deferral rates will now remain stable, as we move further away from the pandemic. Figure 2.1 also illustrates that January-February rates have been much higher than August-December ones since 2017/18.

Figure 2.1: Deferral rates across Scotland compared with Year 1 pilot areas (%)



Year 2 uptake data suggests the pilot has also had an impact on uptake in these areas (Figure 2.2). Pilot areas closely followed national rates for August-December deferral from 2017/18 to 2021/22. However, a 10 percentage point increase took place after the pilot began (from 6% in 2021/22 to 16% in 2022/23), making Year 2 deferral rates since the pilot implementation seven percentage points higher than the national average.

Figure 2.2: Deferral rates across Scotland compared with Year 2 pilot areas (%)



In terms of January-February deferral rates, the average deferral rate for Year 2 areas was comparatively low in 2017/8 and then increased sharply up until 2021/22, the last year before the pilot. It then decreased slightly following the introduction of the pilot. This pattern contrasts with Year 1 data (Figure 2.1) in which January-February deferral rates had been high for a number of years before the pilot. The difference may relate to levels of deprivation in the pilot areas, a point which will be discussed further below. Overall, there were no clear trends within the pilot local authorities to suggest that the pilot had influenced January-February deferral rates.

There is no clear connection between the size of the increase in August-December deferrals post pilot and the local authority’s approach pre-pilot. This is more apparent in Year 2 areas. Clackmannanshire and Fife both saw steep increases but previously approved most requests, while Stirling saw a comparable increase post-pilot, but previously approved less than half of requests. This further suggests that the pilot itself has driven an increase in uptake.

Charts illustrating the breakdown of deferral rates for each pilot area (for January-February deferral and for August-December deferral) are in Appendix 4. These illustrate that there was variation in August-December deferral uptake across the pilot areas. Tracking this data over the next few years will provide a clearer picture of the impact the new entitlement has had. Nevertheless, current data suggests the pilot did drive the increase in August-December deferrals.

Deferral rates and child/household characteristics

The evaluation sought to explore any differences in uptake of the additional funded year in ELC by child/household characteristics. However, pilot local authorities were not able to provide comprehensive data on household characteristics (such as

household income or SIMD quintile) of the children who had deferred since the introduction of the pilot).

To explore any patterns by SIMD, the analysis instead considered the deprivation profiles of local authorities, and what happened to deferral rates in each post pilot. Table 2.1 shows that, overall, Year 2 areas were more deprived, and some saw steeper increases in their deferral rates than Year 1 areas. However, in Year 1 and Year 2 areas, there appears to be a trend for the less deprived local authorities to have experienced the larger increases in their deferral rates (Aberdeen City and Shetland are exceptions to this). This suggests that the pilot may have had more of an impact in areas that are less deprived. This is a fairly rudimentary analysis using local authority rankings, and can therefore be only taken as indicative. It will be useful to track deferral rates by local authority, taking into account their overall rank according to SIMD, to explore any patterns by SIMD as the roll-out progresses.⁹

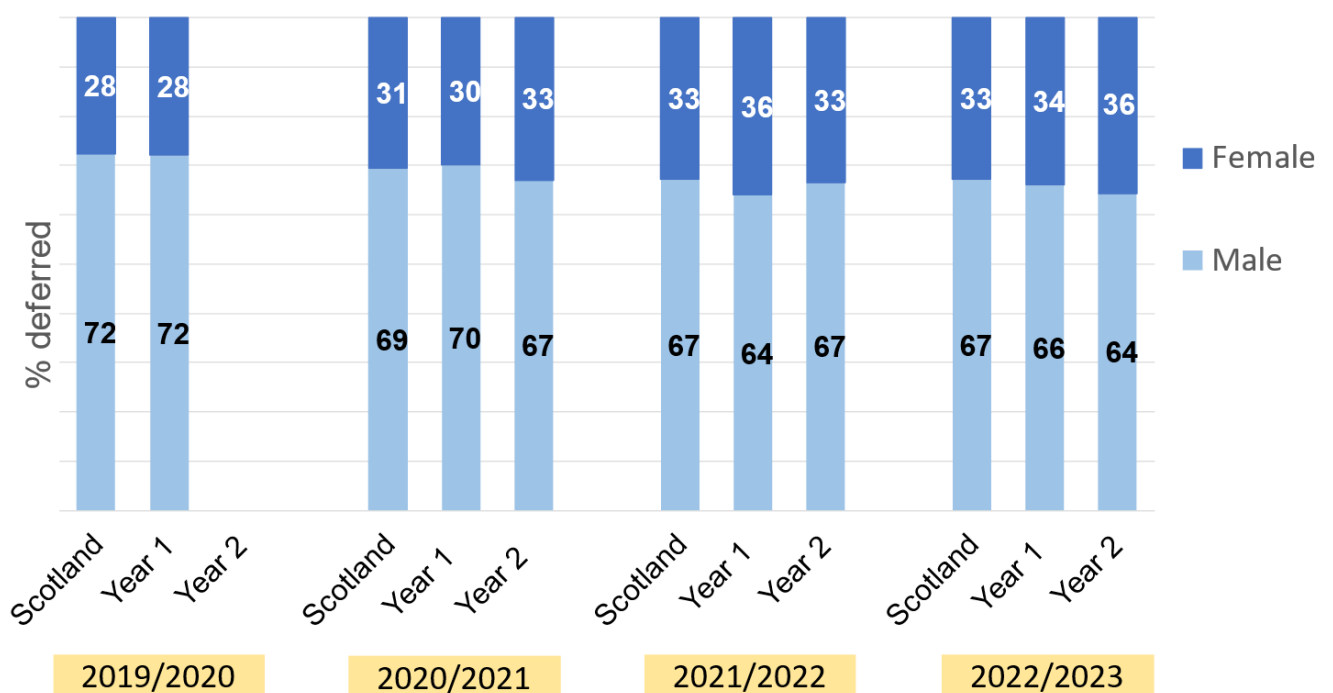
Table 2.1: Pilot areas listed with 2020 SIMD ranking in Scotland and increase in August-December deferral rate

	Rank (1 = most deprived in Scotland, 32 = least deprived)	% point increase in year after pilot began
Year 1	2020/21	2021/22
Falkirk	14	1
Argyll	18	4
Angus	21	9
Scottish Borders	27	6
Shetland	32	-6
Average % point increase		4
Year 2	2021/22	2022/23
Glasgow	1	4
Clackmannanshire	8	10
Fife	12	15
Aberdeen	18	3
Stirling	20	16
Average % point increase		10

⁹ [Distribution of deprivation by council area, using 2020 SIMD data.](#)

It has been possible to look at deferral by sex using data provided by pilot local authorities. Figure 2.3 compares national data with Year 1 and Year 2 pilot areas over three years. There is no clear trend suggesting the pilot has had an impact on the proportion of girls and boys deferring. Figure 2.3 shows the proportion of girls deferring has increased across Scotland slightly since 2019/20. While this increase is a little more pronounced in 2021/22 for Year 1 areas and in 2022/23 for Year 2 areas (the years immediately following the introduction of the pilot), the numbers involved are small and it is too early to draw any firm conclusions. Again, monitoring this over the next few years may make it clearer whether the expansion of the entitlement has any impact of differences by sex.

Figure 2.3: August-December deferral by sex - Scotland compared with Year 1 pilot areas (%)



*Not all local authorities were able to provide data on deferral by sex for every year. 2021/22 'Year 1' data is from four pilot areas (instead of five). 2020/21 and 2021/22 'Year 2' data is also from four pilot areas (instead of five). Data was not available for Year 2 areas for 2019/20.

Contextual factors

When looking at the uptake data above, it is worth keeping in mind wider contextual factors which may have also influenced increases or stability in uptake levels. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Covid-19 pandemic is perhaps the most obvious factor that may be driving deferral rates. Further contextual factors to consider include:

- **national campaigns to increase the school starting age:**¹⁰ It is not clear how much of an influence these have had on increasing deferral rates. These campaigns were mentioned in some parent interviews (mainly as a source of

¹⁰ The campaigns include [Give Them Time](#) and [Upstart Scotland](#).

information for those who already had an interest in deferral). Pilot leads perceived an increase in awareness of deferral generally and some felt the activities of organisations like Give Them Time and Upstart Scotland were contributing to this.

- **pre-pilot policies on August-December deferrals:** as mentioned above, while the uptake data did not show a clear connection between the size of the increase in August-December deferrals post pilot and the local authority's approach pre-pilot, it is still useful context.
- **the historic variation in deferral rates according to levels of deprivation:** January-February deferral rates have tended to have been higher in the least deprived areas of Scotland. This trend differs for August-December deferrals, where children in SIMD quintile 5 (the least deprived areas) have been less likely to be deferred than those in SIMD 1 (the most deprived areas).¹¹ Due to insufficient data, it has not been possible to explore whether the pilot has caused any changes in deferral rate trends relating to levels of deprivation.

Area for consideration:

Support local authorities to ensure they are able to gather data about household and child characteristics.

Track deferral rates by local authority, taking into account their overall rank according to SIMD, as the roll-out progresses.

¹¹ [Deferred entry to primary school statistics, 2018. Scottish Government.](#)

3. Implementation and processes

Summary

- Overall, **the pilot was implemented broadly as intended**, and did not have a major impact on local authority and ELC resources (in terms of staff or finances).
- Both pilot leads and ELC staff felt the implementation had gone smoothly.
- At local authority level, it **reduced workloads** in areas where previously a panel would review each application and professionals may gather information and/or observe a child.
- The main **changes in practice** for frontline ELC staff were: spending more time talking to parents about the entitlement and whether it could be beneficial to their child; and adjusting pedagogical approaches to ensure older children who have been deferred are challenged.
- **Capacity was only an issue in a small number of “hotspots”** where spaces for younger children starting nursery were limited. There were concerns among local authority and ELC staff that capacity could be a problem in the future.
- Local authority and ELC staff raised other **concerns about the implications of future increases in deferral numbers**. These included: recruitment of ELC staff (especially in rural areas); the investment needed in infrastructure to create more ELC spaces; and planning teacher numbers when deferrals may not be decided on until the spring.

This section will cover the process elements of the evaluation. In particular, it looks at: whether the planned activities detailed in the logic model happened; whether they led to the intended short-medium term process outcomes; and the impact implementation had on local authority resources. It draws on interviews from pilot leads, focus groups with ELC heads and staff and interviews with parents.

Planning and set-up

The planning and set-up of the pilots was undertaken by local authority staff (pilot leads). Pilot leads were enthusiastic about the introduction of the pilot, feeling that it would, as intended, make the process less stressful for parents and support child-centred decision making.

Local authorities already agreeing all or most August-December deferrals pre-pilot noted that the pilot did not represent a great change in practice and felt confident about implementing it:

“Being part of the pilot really was just a logical step I suppose for us... because, for several years, we had been approaching deferral into P1 very much on a

developmental basis for children and that was the approach that we had taken, so it wasn't a massive change.”

(Year 1 pilot lead)

Others felt somewhat nervous because the impact on uptake was difficult to predict and they had little leeway on ELC capacity. They had found it helpful to liaise with other pilot areas in the planning stages, especially Year 2 areas who were able to find out how Year 1 pilots had gone.

The initial planning that took place focused on adjusting policies and procedures and planning new communications for both staff in ELC settings and parents. It included:

- application forms being updated to become shorter request forms.
- neighbouring pilot areas collaborating to create consistency in communications for parents and, in some cases, reach agreements on how the funding would work when families live in one local authority and use an ELC setting in another.¹²

Pilot areas with larger populations, in particular, had also considered ELC resourcing and capacity at the planning stages, with one having attempted to model the impact on capacity.

Communicating with ELC staff

Effectively communicating the entitlement to ELC settings was considered an important stage of the process by pilot leads, given their role in supporting parents in decision making. Ways this was done included: emails to heads of ELC settings; briefing meetings with heads and other ELC staff (aimed at them cascading information to colleagues in their settings); and, in one case, a ‘crib sheet’ designed to ensure staff were aware of key information.

ELC heads recalled receiving such communications and felt they were provided with sufficient information on the practical elements of the pilots. The experiences of ELC staff were more varied. While they typically reported having information cascaded from senior staff within their team, and were clear about what the pilot entailed, there were examples of this not happening. This tended to be when there had been senior leadership team changes at their setting during implementation.

Furthermore, there were staff who felt they had not been given sufficient advance notice of the pilot.

¹² At least one pilot area agreed to fund such places in this scenario (another said they were still in discussions with neighbouring LAs).

Efforts were also made by pilot leads to ensure other professionals who might have contact with families were aware of the change (health visitors, family nurses, third sector organisations working with families and children, social work).

Pilot leads identified messages they felt were important to communicate with staff. Firstly, that ELC staff still have an important role to play in supporting parents' choices and helping them to weigh up the pros and cons for the child. This was to address specific concerns raised by staff who were used to playing an active role in providing evidence for deferral applications, and who were initially unsure what the pilot meant for their role. Secondly, that the pilot was not about promoting deferral, or debating its benefits or disadvantages generally – it was about supporting child-centred decision making:

“It was about saying, ‘here is how this process is now going to work’ [...] We were saying, for that number [of children], we are going to remove the tension that is around the funding question. I don't really think we want this to become a different argument, which is an argument about how young children should receive their education.”

(Year 2 pilot lead)

The communications appear to have successfully conveyed these messages, with ELC heads and staff being clear on these points. There was, however, an instance of a staff member being unclear that the intention was for this to be an ongoing change in practice, assuming instead that it was a temporary measure linked to Covid-19 recovery. Furthermore, while heads and staff who participated in the evaluation were well informed, there were parents who perceived that there was not a high level of awareness among staff in their settings.

Support for ELC staff

ELC heads and staff felt that the communications they had received were sufficient to enable them to support parents in their decision making. They did not view the pilot as being a significant change in practice that necessitated specific training. Where they needed any advice or support, staff were able to get this from their team at their setting. Once again, the exception to this was where there had been senior leadership team changes:

“I think really supported. I've got [...] a fab headteacher and we've got our early years team that works with [local authority] and they're on the end of a phone, which really helps. That's been really beneficial for me, just to know I can pick up that phone and somebody is there to either listen to me have a little moan or actually answer that question.”

(ELC practitioner)

“I'm in a slightly different position in that we've just got a new head and I don't know that she's even aware [of the pilot] because she's come from a different authority. So, it's pretty much myself that leads that.”

(ELC practitioner)

Changes in practice and training for ELC staff

While the pilot was not seen by staff as requiring major changes in practice, there were two areas they felt the pilot had had an impact. The first was the increase in the number of deferral related conversations with parents, reflecting that many more were now entitled to an additional funded year.

The fact that the pilot was implemented at a time when there is a focus on play-based learning helped in terms of staff confidence to support parents' decision making as they felt they had the knowledge required to provide an informed view. Staff emphasised the need to take a careful and sensitive approach to these conversations.

One head said they had run some internal training to ensure the team were using appropriate language and were prepared for parents potentially being taken aback by the suggestion of deferral:

“I think trying to step away from the words, 'They're not ready yet,' or... having parents become alarmed that you're asking them to stay for another year. I knew that we'd have to have that conversation with staff, so that they were managing those dialogues with parents really carefully.”

(ELC head)

The support provided to parents by ELC staff, is covered in more detail in Chapter 4.

The second area of practice that changed was pedagogical. In settings where staff had seen an increase in deferrals, they introduced aspects of the P1 curriculum to ensure older children were stimulated and challenged.

“I think what we're doing as a team is we're quickly identifying our children who need challenging or children who need support... so different practitioners then go and learn how to challenge in literacy and numeracy. Then you would take the targeted groups. That [way] everybody gets their needs met.”

(ELC practitioner)

Staff spoke about these pedagogical changes as presenting new opportunities for their professional development, and as supporting transitions into P1.

“It's extra training for us but actually, it's really good for our CPD, we've learnt so much because we're having to do different things, that we think, 'Well, yes, I'm actually going to learn how in P1 they do X because we could bring that back to some of the children in nursery'. Then it helps the transition from nursery to P1 when they do.”

(ELC practitioner)

Area for consideration:

Support settings to provide training, resources and new development opportunities for staff on pedagogical approaches for older children.

Impacts on local authority resources

This section covers the impact delivering the new entitlement had for local authorities and ELC settings, including the effect it had on capacity, planning and staff development. It will also discuss the way in which the changes worked alongside other parts of ELC policy. In summary, the overall delivery of the pilot was not seen as requiring significant additional resources (at setting or local authority level).

Capacity

As mentioned above, pilot leads were worried about a spike in uptake resulting in a shortage of ELC spaces. However, this did not transpire to be a significant, widespread issue. Deferral “hotspots” were mentioned by pilot leads. These were described as being in affluent locations, where January-February deferral rates were higher than average already:

“Our kind of hotspot area has always been [town] which is more affluent families generally, but that has always been the case, and I don't think anything has changed because of the pilot.”

(Year 1 pilot lead)

While staff who took part in this study did not experience capacity issues at their settings, they reported being aware of other settings which had struggled to provide the spaces required for younger children starting nursery. This had resulted in a small number of parents being dissatisfied because they did not get a place in their first choice setting for their three year old children. This was considered more problematic for parents when older siblings were already at a setting or school:

“It does impact them on the waiting list and we've got parents who have children with us and younger children who are having to then access other establishments [...] Again, not ideal for drop off and pick up and things like that.”

(ELC head)

One parent participant had first-hand experience of this issue at her child's nursery, and questioned the logic of enabling more children to stay in ELC longer:

"Yes, because my son's two and he's meant to be going in January, but he's not been able to get a place. So, we've had to reapply. So, if they're already under pressure, why are you deferring quite a lot of the kids?"

(Parent, did defer)

Heads also mentioned that younger children who do not attend their parents' first choice of setting may have a different transition experience into P1 if they are in a setting that is not part of the school they will go to.

Whether they had experienced capacity related challenges as part of the pilot or not, pilot leads had some concerns about capacity in the future. The issue of the pilot funding covering places on the basis that there are enough ELC settings was raised. It was suggested that investment is needed in infrastructure as well as increasing capacity across all types of ELC providers:

“However you organise your nursery admissions process [capacity is an issue] [...] The extra funding we got from central government, would not go any way to building anything, but that's the issue, and so therefore you are reliant in that instance on maximising capacity within partner services, either in the private voluntary sector service or childminders as well.”

(Year 2 pilot lead)

ELC staff agreed that capacity may become an issue in the future but, having experienced the first two years of implementation, were not overly concerned. They expected parents to continue to make informed decisions with support from ELC staff as long as messages were appropriate and did not 'promote' the funding as something all children in this age group should do.

Workloads for staff

The pilot had reduced workloads for local authority and ELC staff who were involved in assessments and decisions. In pilot areas where the policy had previously been to put mid-August-December deferral requests to a panel of professionals, processes became much simpler. This was because there was no longer the need to undertake home visits, assessments, panel meetings and report writing. In areas where most August-December deferral requests were approved pre-pilot (and fewer people were involved in the decision), there was less of an impact on processes and workloads for local authority staff.

ELC practitioners did not feel the pilot had created much additional work. The only additional task mentioned was the time put into supporting a larger number of parents in deferral decisions, as noted above.

Recruitment

Recruiting and retaining ELC staff was flagged as an issue in pilot areas where there has been a shortage of spaces for children starting nursery. One pilot lead said they had purposefully over-staffed in the previous year, to mitigate absences caused by Covid-19, but still had difficulties finding enough staff:

“All local authorities are in exactly the same position that we are, we struggle [to recruit]. [...] Because of the deferral process and jobs, we offer positions to as many people as we can who we feel meet the criteria, but also that means there is a lack of supply staff coming through.”

(Year 2 pilot lead)

Recruitment and retention issues were felt more strongly in rural areas.

Planning

A further challenge mentioned by pilot leads was planning school teacher numbers. Deadlines for parents to submit deferral requests tended to be in the first three months of the year. Headteachers usually make their staffing requests around the same time. Given some parents may put in late requests and others may change their mind about deferral, pilot leads said predicting numbers for P1 pupils and teachers could be challenging. There was concern that this could become a greater issue over time, should deferral uptake continue to rise.

Interactions with other policies

When asked about the interaction of the pilot with other policies, pilot leads spoke of the pressure the sector has been under generally in recent years because of the expansion of ELC funding to 1,140 hours. The commitment to future expansion of ELC provision to more two year olds, and also one year olds, added to pilot leads' concerns about future capacity and staffing, should deferrals increase further. This point relates to the recruitment and retention issues mentioned above:

“That flexibility when somebody is off or got Covid or anything else, there is a lack of people to call on to come to plug up those gaps. That has been the case during the past few years [during] the expansion, and it is going to continue for the next couple of years along with the deferral process because it is having an added impact on the staffing requirements to facilitate service delivery.”

(Year 2 pilot lead)

Plans for funded school age childcare were also mentioned as being likely to further impact capacity and staffing issues.

At the setting level, staff also spoke about the expansion of funded spaces. The impact of this was the increasing need for them to cater for a wider age range overall (including older children who have deferred, but also more two years olds). This challenge was seen as being heightened by the number of children requiring extra support when starting nursery, because of lost time in ELC due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Area for consideration:

Continue to review capacity issues across ELC settings as the new entitlement is rolled out alongside other policies which may require additional spaces.

4. Parents' experiences of the new process

Summary

- Parents who read written communications from settings about the pilot generally felt they were **clear and straightforward**.
- There were, however, parents who did not recall reading any written communications or were unsure what they received was relevant to their child.
- **Conversations with ELC staff were valued by parents**, who felt their professional opinion and knowledge of their child was useful in deciding whether to defer their child. Little support from staff was needed with the deferral process itself.
- There were cases where parents were not contacted by staff (and did not recall any written communications), highlighting the **need for a more consistent approach across all settings**.
- A small number of parents were upset and/or shocked when staff raised the possibility of using the funding – highlighting the **importance of a careful and sensitive approach to conversations with parents** about the entitlement (particularly given the stigma around deferral which was more prevalent among those from more deprived areas).

This chapter will cover parents' experiences of finding out about the entitlement and the new deferral request process. It will examine how ELC settings informed parents about the change, and the type of support they offered. It will also explore parents' views on what worked well and what they felt could be improved.

Communicating with parents

The communication of the availability of the entitlement to parents is laid out in the logic model as an intended part of the process (see Appendix 5). This section looks at the extent to which this happened including whether parents were aware of the pilot; and what was most effective in terms of raising awareness and enabling understanding of the new entitlement.

Parents' awareness of, and attitudes towards, deferral generally

Before examining how the pilot was communicated, it is important to consider how familiar parents were with the idea of deferral more broadly, and what their views on it were. How much parents knew about how deferral works in Scotland prior to the pilot varied from no awareness to high levels of familiarity with the concept and recent policy developments. The latter included parents who worked in ELC or education and/or who had an interest in the subject more broadly. Pre-pilot, parents tended to associate deferral in Scotland more readily with children who were born in January and February, and not August-December born children.

Attitudes towards deferral as a concept varied among parents with some parents feeling as though deferral is about keeping children back because they are underperforming in some way. More positively, it could be viewed as an opportunity for more time to play. Although not a clearcut pattern, it appeared that parents with more negative views of deferral tended to live in more deprived areas. The impact of existing views on deferral is discussed further in Chapter 5.

A common phrase used by parents who felt deferral has negative connotations was “holding them back.” Others said the idea was ‘scary’ to them because they thought it might mean there something wrong with their child, or that deferral of this age group was only for children with Additional Support Needs (ASN). ELC staff had experienced this viewpoint, describing it as something that parents found difficult to accept, worrying that their child was behind in their development or not as intelligent as others.

“I think there are some parents who see deferral as, kind of, 'Well, it means that my child's maybe not quite as smart,' or something like that. [...] It's maybe a bit embarrassing or maybe ...something that they don't want for their child. They want them to be ready for P1, they want them to be able to succeed in school. So...for some, admitting that they can't or that they aren't at that point can be hard for some families.”

(ELC head)

A further negative connotation mentioned was the possible reaction of other children in the class, which tended to be based on what they remember from their own schooling.

“I remember being a child myself and, thinking back, there was that stigma of being deferred and, 'Oh, you got kept back a year.' [...] I know what children can be like and they can maybe say things like, 'Oh, you got kept back a year because you're not clever'.”

(Parent, did not defer)

Positive comments about deferral tended to come from those living in less deprived areas, although not exclusively. Phrases mentioned included “extra time”, “opportunity” and “choice.” Those who had the strongest positive views on deferral spoke about Scandinavian countries where children start formal schooling later and associated this with better educational outcomes. This group also tended to follow Upstart and Give Them Time on social media which are campaign groups seeking to increase the school start age.¹³ One parent felt that views are moving away from the stigma towards a more positive stance:

"There's still stigma lingering about what deferral used to be... only if you were not ready for school, the kid might have something extra in their brain so they needed the extra year. But, actually, the benefits are crazy, the stigma is going

¹³ [Give Them Time website.](#) [Upstart Scotland website.](#)

away... let them be young, let them have extra time of playing and developing at their own time. Building relationships with other children and adults.”

(Parent, did defer)

Staff in both local authorities and settings were clearly aware of the different levels of familiarity and broad range of views on deferral, particularly the stigma around it in more deprived communities. They recognised that the subject needed to be approached carefully in both written communications and conversations with parents.

Parent communications

Awareness

This evaluation did not assess awareness levels across the eligible population. Instead, we spoke to parents who were aware of the pilot taking place. However, there are some indications that communications did not reach all parents; some parents had to be screened out of the research due to being unaware of the pilot and others, who did take part, were unaware until they approached ELC staff to discuss deferral.

What parents received

Parent communication activities undertaken by local authorities included updating the information on their websites and posting on social media. Settings sent out a range of written communications including letters (sent in children’s bags or by email), emails, texts, leaflets, posters, notifications via the setting’s app, and social media posts.

Emails and letters sent by settings were the main channels by which parents said they found out about the pilot. There were, however, parents who did not recall receiving written communications or were unsure. This may relate to broader issues such as the volume of emails parents receive from nursery and school, and how busy they are. The experiences of staff supported this:

“When I spoke to some of the parents initially they seemed to be surprised that their child was eligible for that additional year, even though we had sent out a letter and we'd included it in our swathe, and it went out as a text message. So, we had sent it most different ways, and the people that I spoke to still thought it was a surprise.”

(ELC head)

Other ways in which parents became aware were through talking to other parents and by approaching ELC staff to let them know they were thinking about deferral:

“I can remember saying to a few people in the nursery queue waiting for pick-up about it and they didn't know about it. We definitely didn't get a letter home or anything like that... So, yes, I don't think people had that much awareness of it. There was a bit of confusion about it, I think.”

(Parent, did defer)

There were also examples of parents who were unaware that their child's place would be funded through the pilot until after the deferral was confirmed.

Where parents had read written communications they generally felt the information was clear:

"Everything that I read I understood. I didn't need to find out any more or look for any further information. As far as I'm aware, I understood it all. It was all quite straightforward, I would say."

(Parent, did defer)

There were some issues raised, however, including: some parents being unclear of its relevance to them; use of jargon; and emails going into spam folders. That said, email was still considered better than letters in children's bags, which can easily go unseen.

Further suggestions for increasing the reach of communications included making information available in other languages; posters in ELC settings; and promoting it alongside P1 enrolment information.

Area for consideration:

Producing standard written communications for all settings to send to all eligible parents. Emphasising the age group that the entitlement is for (clarifying it is an expansion of the entitlement January-February born children have); and to speak to staff at staff at the child's setting in the first instance.

Parents tended to be more interested in the practical information they read about the process of how to defer, rather than feeling they needed to look for written information about the wider pros and cons of deferral. This ties in with how useful parents found conversations with ELC staff about the entitlement (making written information less of a priority, which is discussed further below). There were also parents who wanted more detail on what would be offered if they did decide to defer:

"Would there be additional staff? Are lunches and things like that still covered and funded? And what they would do to further develop from where he was in that year, for an extra year, what would they do to bring him on, or bring him forward?' I asked all those questions, there was no information given about what to expect, I only know because I asked."

(Parent, did defer)

Area for consideration:

Include more information for parents on what an additional year in ELC would be like. This could cover hours, lunches, teaching and anything else might differ from their current year in the setting.

The Scottish Government and local authority websites were not key sources of information for parents (apart from for those who had a particular interest in deferral and/or the campaigns to raise the school start age). The Parent Club website was not referred to by any parent participants.

Verbal communications

Parents who first heard about the pilot verbally from ELC staff were generally positive about being told in this way and the way in which staff raised the subject. Conversations with ELC staff were seen as very useful (by all, not just those who first heard this way) to understand what the pilot meant for them, and to help them decide whether to defer. They were also well received by parents who initially had a negative view of deferral. There were some who described feeling more positive about deferral after having discussions with staff, covered in more detail in Chapter 5.

As indicated above, there were, however, parents who were shocked when staff raised the idea face-to-face (having not read about the pilot in advance), causing them to feel worried and upset that there was something wrong with their child.

Case study 1: Sara and Millie

Sara is 26 and works in the care sector. She has a daughter called Millie (born in December). She lives in Aberdeen with her partner, and both work full-time.

Sara was aware of deferral, but had negative views about it. She thought it would be only for children “really needing it” so she never imagined that her daughter could benefit from it. Sara had not seen any posters in the nursery or letters/emails about it the new entitlement. She remembered seeing something about it on social media but hadn’t read about it in any detail.

One day, while dropping Millie off at nursery, a staff member mentioned the entitlement to Sara and explained that they could defer her daughter: “I just burst into tears [...] I was like, ‘I think I have failed her’.”

On seeing her reaction, ELC staff offered to meet Sara later that day to speak more privately during a one-to-one meeting. The staff explained the entitlement and how they felt an additional year could help her daughter to gain the confidence to interact more with her peers. Sara felt well-informed as a result of her discussion with staff but would have liked to have a leaflet, an email, or a link to a website so she could share the information with her partner when discussing deferral at home.

Sara remembers that, although ELC staff advised them to defer, it was never imposed. She felt supported by ELC staff and thought that they had the best interests of her daughter in mind. Having deferred her daughter, Sara is grateful that ELC staff raised it with her and thinks that deferring was the best choice they could have made because it allowed her daughter to become more confident and make more friends: “I am 100% positive about deferring children now”.

Research with staff highlighted that not all ELC practitioners felt clear on whether they should raise the subject of deferral with parents:

“I don't know if it is just stigma from the old way, [the idea] that it's something that we are not overly meant to suggest, it has to come from the parent. So, we are not meant to give a full opinion on it, is the way we've been told. If it is brought up, we can give the pros and cons, but aren't meant to say to parents, 'We think your child needs a deferral.' It needs to be a parent decision. We are waiting for them to sometimes approach us, but do they actually fully know that the option's there?”

(ELC practitioner)

This highlights the possibility that some parents will remain unaware of the entitlement, having not received/read written communications and potentially missing out on verbal ones too, depending on the approach taken by staff. Staff approaches to supporting parents will be examined further later in this chapter.

Messaging

Pilot leads had initial concerns about parents being confused by messages saying schools will be ‘child-ready’ whatever stage they are at, but also more children can now stay in funded ELC for longer. However, interviews with parents did not suggest this was an issue. It was also clear that, once parents knew about the pilot and had discussed it with staff, they did not view it as something to do just because the funding was there (an initial concern of pilot leads). This (along with modest increases in uptake) suggests the messages about the pilot worked in terms of explaining the rationale for the pilot – and not giving parents the impression they should make the request just because they can.

Area for consideration:

Clearer instructions/guidance for settings around communication to avoid some parents not receiving any official communications about the entitlement. This could ask all settings write to all eligible parents, and do a verbal follow up.

The new deferral process

The deferral request process was received very positively by parents. Forms were typically very short as parents no longer had to provide reasons or supporting

information for deferral. ELC staff answered parents' questions and provided support with the process.

Whether they had to complete an online form, a paper based one, send an email to their local authority or just confirm verbally with their setting, they generally found the request process "easy", "straightforward" and quick to do:

"I just had to fill in a form to say that she was going to do an extra year in nursery, and that's as simple as it was, and just put in the hours that I wanted her to do, and that was it. It was really easy."

(Parent, did defer)

Other positive comments on the process were that a 'decision' was made quickly. Parents often used the terms 'decision' and 'application' and thought about the process as needing approval and sign off from the local authority even though they were guaranteed a funded place if they requested it.

While parents were generally satisfied with the new process, there were some who felt things could have been improved. Emails confirming spaces were not always received by parents, who said that would have helped make the process smoother.

Area for consideration:

Ensure parents receive an email confirming their child's place.

Other parents felt that the timings could have been improved (where they were informed about the funding late in the academic year). Staff also flagged this as a problem and one practitioner suggested May as a good time to ask parents to decide:

"There is a little bit of flexibility...you've got to make sure you've got that final decision. So, I think if they just moved it to May then... you're not feeling you're having to make a decision and parents, you know, rush that decision."

Area for consideration:

Review the timings of when deferral decisions need to be made, keeping in mind the need both for flexibility for parents and local authorities' requirements for planning teacher numbers (as mentioned in Chapter 2).

Further issues with the process mentioned were:

- confusion caused by an ELC form that asked parents for their top three choices of settings, which left one parent unsure about whether her child would have to move from her current nursery.
- asking parents to apply for a P1 space as well as a deferral, as this was seen as asking for the same information twice.

- online and offline methods should be made available, in case families are unable to make the request online (mentioned by head).

Area for consideration:

Whether the process can be simplified further by not requiring parents to: apply for a P1 space when deferring; or complete a form which asks for their top three choices of settings.

Support for parents

Parents needed little support with the deferral request process itself as written communications generally made the next steps clear. However, ELC staff played an important role in supporting parents in understanding what the entitlement meant for them and their child. Not all parents looked to settings for support around whether to take up the entitlement, as they felt able to decide themselves. Parents of children with ASN or possible developmental delays also received support from professionals such as health visitors and speech and language therapists. This section will primarily cover how support was delivered by ELC settings and what parents found most helpful.

Parents found staff approachable, supportive and able to answer questions regarding their child's progress and developmental needs, as well as deferral processes. Positive comments about conversations with staff included feeling that staff members knew their child well enough to help with the decision:

“The nursery were very supportive and, you know, you spend a lot of your time in work, they work with your kids, so they're the ones I trust.”

(Parent, did not defer)

Staff demonstrated different understandings of the extent to which they could communicate their professional opinion on whether taking up the entitlement would be beneficial to a child. As mentioned in the Communications section above, there were practitioners who were unsure whether they could raise the subject of deferral with parents. For the most part, staff saw their role as providing supporting information if they felt deferral would be beneficial, but also emphasising that the decision lies with the parent:

“I do sometimes think we're not always going to agree and I would never be telling them that this is what I think and you should do what I think. But I also won't say I agree when I don't. And I'll just put all the reasons why we think she's ready or he's ready or they're ready and then listen to what they have to say, and tell them that in the end it is up to them.”

(ELC practitioner)

There were parents who appreciated this position as non-prescriptive and “diplomatic”:

“I had actually initially spoken to [the child]’s key worker at nursery and she was very diplomatic, I would say. She was saying, ‘I can’t be seen to obviously influence your decision.’ but she did go through the pros and cons.”

(Parent, did defer)

Others, however, found it frustrating that ELC practitioners took a “neutral” position on whether an additional year would be beneficial:

“It’s as if they were scared to say we really think this [...]. There wasn’t a clear message of what their thoughts were. ‘We do feel he would benefit but feel he’d be fine as well.’ They’re in a difficult position, they don’t know what he would be like.”

(Parent, did not defer)

This issue was mentioned by staff as a challenge, because there were times when they felt parents were asking them to make the decision for them:

“We have parents that say, ‘Well, whatever you think. I’ll go with you.’ And I’m saying, ‘No. No, thank you, this is on you. Here’s the information, here’s where we’re at, you go away and have a think and come back and let us know where you’re at’.”

(ELC practitioner)

Area for consideration:

Provide training/resources for ELC practitioners to: ensure they are aware and feel confident raising the subject of the entitlement; and clarify their role in relation to parents’ decisions.

On the whole, parents were happy with the support and information staff provided. Those who were not satisfied tended to disagree with the advice offered. Chapter 5 will examine the impact for parents and children, including when parents felt that the advice from staff had not benefited their child.

Staff reflections on supporting parents

The significant value of conversations with parents was emphasised by staff. The pilot was viewed as enabling more of these conversations and as taking the pressure off parents, because the funding is guaranteed. It had also brought about more informal meetings, and avoided parents’ first meetings about deferral being a virtual ‘Team around the child’, which staff said was not ideal for putting parents at ease. They were also considered to facilitate child-centred decision making

(Chapter 5). Staff described a range of approaches to these conversations which they felt best supported parents and child-centred decision making:

- informing parents that both ELC settings and P1 follow a play-based approach to learning.
- approaching the topic in an open way – for example “What are you thinking about Primary 1?”
- mentioning the impacts of Covid-19 lockdowns as a factor – to prevent parents with a negative view of deferral feeling like their child is especially “behind” the others.
- explaining that, if a child is deferred it doesn’t necessarily mean they would not have coped with P1, it is more about the benefits they might gain.
- being clear on the reasons for deferral, particularly as there may be more “borderline” cases under the new approach.
- not directly telling parents what to do (as discussed above), but laying out what their work with the child suggests, and that ultimately the decision lies with them.
- making time and private space for what can be an emotional conversation.

Interviews with parents showed a shift in some parents’ attitudes after they had received support from ELC staff and deferred their child:

“I used to be, kind of, against them [deferrals]. [...] I now see that it's a case of... if you defer them they're going to be thriving instead of surviving through school.”

(Parent, did defer)

Area for consideration:

See list above of approaches to maximise the benefits of conversations with parents. Consider including in resources for all ELC staff.

5. Impacts for parents and children

Summary

- The **automatic entitlement for an additional funded year in ELC has largely removed, or at least reduced, financial barriers to deferral**. Some parents did not feel they could have afforded to defer their child without the funding, and may not have applied to defer them without this guarantee.
- **Parental choice has increased** by: enabling parents who were not aware that deferring was an option for their child to consider it; and by increasing the choice available for parents who wanted to defer their child but may not have for financial reasons, or because they felt their application would be unsuccessful.
- The evidence indicates that **the pilot has increased child-centred decision making**:
 - parents reported concentrating on what they felt was best for their child, rather than any practical considerations, with ELC staff in agreement that this reflected their experience;
 - whether their child was 'ready' (including: emotionally, socially, academically, physically) for school consistently emerged as the main factor informing decisions;
 - the main influences on parents' decisions were others who were well positioned to comment on what would be best for the child – ELC staff in particular;
 - ELC staff felt that the automatic funding, and the associated changes in processes, had led to an increase in child-centred decision making.
- Remaining barriers to child-centred decision making included: **stigma** around deferral (although there was a suggestion this was lessening); **peer group considerations** (wanting children to remain with friends or be separated from another child); and the **timing of deferral decisions** (considered to be too early).
- Parents were typically **not well informed about what P1 would be like** in the school their child would be going to. Greater awareness of this could also aid child-centred decision making.
- Having the guarantee of an additional funded year has helped to **reduce parental stress** by simplifying the deferral process/removing the need to gather supporting evidence for deferral and by giving parents full control of the decision.
- Parents were generally happy with decision they had made for their child, making the process of starting school feel less stressful.

The previous chapters have provided evidence that the pilot processes (outputs) have largely been undertaken as intended. This section considers whether these outputs have led to the intended impact outcomes for parents and children, detailed in the logic model (Appendix 5). These are: financial barrier of additional year of ELC removed or reduced; increased parental choice; increased child-centred decision making; and reduced stress for parents around their child starting school. There is crossover between the outcomes but each is now covered in turn, drawing on evidence from parents, as well as ELC heads and staff, on the extent to which it has been achieved.

Financial barrier of additional year of ELC removed or reduced

The automatic funding of an additional year of ELC for August-December born children is the main change in practice from pre-pilot. As intended, it has largely been successful in removing financial considerations from decision making on deferral. While financial barriers may not, in all cases, be completely removed, for example if wraparound ELC care is more expensive than wraparound school-aged childcare, they have certainly been reduced:

“If you are working 40 or 40+ hours a week that is only half your nursery bill that is getting paid [by the funding], whereas if you were sending them to school, they would be in 9 to 3 and then afterschool is not that expensive so it wouldn't be half as much money. [...] They need to look realistically at how much it is still costing parents to defer their children.”

(Parent, did defer)

The impact of the reduction of financial barriers varied. On the one hand were parents who would have financed an additional year had their child not been successful in receiving an additional funded year under the pre-pilot system. Indeed, one parent in the pilot who had applied to defer was unaware until late in the process that they would receive a funded place. For these parents, the funding was welcomed but did not change their decisions:

“I think it made it easier but ... I think I still would have deferred her, just because I think she's better starting a little bit older, and a little bit more confident, and a little bit more ready to learn.”

(Parent, did defer)

Other parents felt they would not have been able to afford an additional funded year. While some parents in this situation may have been successful in applying for funding for their child to defer, others may not have been aware of the option; may not have felt they had a strong enough case to apply; or have been unsuccessful in their deferral application. Parents were grateful that the funding had given them the option:

“I am very grateful for the extra funding for this extra year. Without this funding, I would not have been able to afford the fees to the nursery. We just went through

a pandemic, and the budget is tight everywhere, even under such circumstances they gave my child another year's funding. And we are on the lowest rung in society... and they haven't really forgotten us.”

(Parent, did defer, translated)

Increased parental choice

Where parents were aware of the pilot (varying levels of awareness are discussed in Chapter 3), it has served to increase their choice around deferral. It has done this in two main ways. Firstly, by enabling parents who were not aware that deferring was an option for their child to consider it; and secondly by increasing the choices available for parents who wanted to defer their child but may not have felt it was possible for financial reasons, or because they felt their application would not be successful. This increased level of choice facilitated decisions being made for other reasons (discussed below under child-centred decision making):

“I didn't think we had a strong case. Speaking amongst peer groups and from working within the school, [local authority] were quite notoriously bad at giving you a deferral. [...] It didn't even cross my mind that I should even apply, I didn't think him being an October birthday would qualify at all. And there wasn't a developmental cause, there was no diagnosis, he's not autistic, he's not dyslexic, there was no reason that I would have felt that I would have a strong case to request a deferral so, no, I was fully expecting to send him to school.”

(Parent, did defer)

“I had heard through parents, even parents who were teachers, that they had genuine concerns and that they were quite often knocked back and that's why I said [I felt] relief because I didn't want to have a fight on my hands to defer school.”

(Parent, did defer)

While parents were positive on the whole about having an increased level of choice, having more options available could make the decision difficult for parents who had not have previously considered deferring their child:

“All the parents, all of us, we'd just be outside in the car park, we'd be like 'oh my gosh, we can't decide, what if we do the wrong thing?' When you don't have the option it's easier, that is what you are doing. I think for two or three months it was all we talked about.”

(Parent, did not defer)

ELC staff were positive about the increased choice the pilot had afforded parents and felt it would open up the option of deferral to a greater number of parents. They also commented on a difference in parents' openness to consider all the options,

noting that they had begun to raise the possibility of deferral with parents when they started nursery, which they felt helped:

“I feel our parents are a lot more open to the conversations. They've taken more time to actually consider their options. I definitely think it's a positive...

...even when children first start nursery, 'Do you know their birthday falls on this time of the year? Do you know when it comes to time to go to school, do you know you can always consider taking them an extra year at nursery or sending them to school?' They're always aware of that and it's not something that we just spring on them.”

(ELC practitioners)

Increased child-centred decision making

The evidence indicates that the pilot has increased child-centred decision making. It was clear that parents were concentrating on what they felt was best for their child, rather than any practical (including financial) considerations, and whether their child was ready for school consistently emerged as the main factor informing decisions. Furthermore, the main influences on parents' decisions were others who were well positioned to comment on what would be best for the child – ELC staff in particular but also other professionals involved with the child (e.g. speech and language therapists) and wider family members, especially those who had a link to education.

Furthermore, as noted in Chapter 3, staff described the conversations they had with parents as being very much about the needs of the child rather than any practical considerations.

ELC staff, who were able to make comparisons with before the pilot, felt that the automatic funding, and the associated changes in processes, had led to an increase in child-centred decision making:

“This year has all been about the child. I can't say for years to come but this year has been fantastic and the parents have been very open and they have already seen the positive benefits for their children.”

(ELC practitioner)

“It makes the process easier because it involves less people. It involves less agency and it makes it much more about the dialogue between the setting and the family, and it actually really does help make it very much about the needs of that individual child as opposed to all the kind of machine processes that goes on around about what deferral used to sometimes involve.”

(ELC head)

To provide further understanding of the extent to which decisions were child-centred, the factors informing parents' decisions are now covered in turn including, where relevant, the input others had around each.

Main factors informing decisions

Child's readiness for P1

As noted above, parents consistently spoke about whether they felt their child was 'ready' for school or not. There were several elements to this 'readiness' including: emotional, social, academic and physical. For example, parents spoke about whether their child was emotionally mature enough, would be able to cope in a more structured setting, was confident enough, knew the alphabet or could write their name:

"I just thought if she went to P1 she would just be a shadow, like, she wouldn't blossom".

(Parent, did defer)

One parent also spoke about their child not being toilet trained. While these were particular considerations for parents of children with ASN or developmental delays (in some cases attributed, at least in part, to the Covid-19 pandemic), they were not exclusive to this group. For parents of children with ASN, however, their child's additional needs meant that they had typically been considering deferral before the introduction of the pilot. Their child's ASN tended to be the key factor in their decision:

"Well, his speech has been delayed, so that was definitely one. Probably his level of maturity and that would have been the two main things. But we were very sure for a long time that that's what we were going to do. There wasn't a point really where we were thinking, 'He'll be going to school when he is 4.5.' [...] Those were the things we considered and they were agreed by everyone.

(Parent, did defer)

Parents typically valued the opinions of ELC staff on their child's readiness for P1, putting trust in their opinion. The opinions of wider family members who knew the child well were also sought, particularly in cases where they had an education background:

"It was really talking with the nursery that helped me make the decision because they know my child better than my friends do ... they work with your kids so they're the ones I trust. [...] I guess I did speak with my family [...] I go to my mother-in law and ask her opinion and she used to work with children, she's like 'Is (child) ready?' 'Yes'. So that really helped as well."

(Parent, did not defer)

While decisions were typically based on what was considered best for the child, parents did not tend to involve their children in the decision making, feeling they were too young. Instead, they explained the decision to their child, if they were being deferred.

Case study 2: Karina and Max

Karina lives in a small town in a rural part of Scotland with her husband James and their son Max (age 5). She works full time as a teacher and James works part time.

Before learning about the new entitlement, Karina did not know much about deferral in Scotland, but she had heard years ago that there was a strict application process. She was not thinking about deferral for Max, whose birthday is in November. A member of staff from nursery raised the idea during a parents' evening and explained about the funding:

“They had said to me, 'Oh, obviously Max likes to play outside, socially he's got a nice group of friends, but then they said that they felt like he wasn't really wanting to pick up a pencil, or do any of the numeracy or literacy stuff', he was very much just wanting to play the whole time, and they had then said from there about there's an opportunity to defer, it might just give him that time just to look a bit more into literacy and numeracy and that kind of stuff.”

Karina and James were surprised by the suggestion and initially felt quite panicked because they knew it was two weeks until the P1 enrolment form was due to be submitted. Karina spoke to staff about feeling unsure about what to do and was invited into the nursery for a meeting. She said this helped her understand how an additional year in ELC could benefit Max, reassured her that he wouldn't be bored at nursery if he did stay for an extra year and that they would support him in forming new friendships. She also asked friends who were P1 teachers for their views and they had a positive take on the benefits of deferral for autumn born children.

James and other family members were initially less keen on the idea of Max taking up the entitlement, and some asked “what's wrong with him?” However, once Karina explained that it would give more time for him to practise and experience things, James and other family members supported her decision. Although they discussed it, James was happy to let Karina make the final decision, given her background in education.

Karina felt the process of requesting deferral could have been easier because she had to complete two online form (for P1 and the ELC space) and upload his birth certificate twice. Karina said without the funding they would not have deferred as they would not have been able to afford to fund an extra year themselves. She was very happy Max had the opportunity of a funded space for the extra year:

“Sometimes some of my friends have said, 'Do you regret it? Do you find it a benefit? How do you feel it?', and I just said, 'No', I don't regret it one bit, I think it's one of the best things that we've done. And I know it's still early, but he's just so much more keen, and is enjoying everything so much more.”

Parents' opinions of whether their child was ready for P1 were also influenced by their older children's recent experiences of starting school, particularly when they felt they would have benefitted from deferring.

The experience of ELC heads and staff reflected the accounts of parents. They noted that much of their conversations with parents are on this topic, with parents keen to hear their views:

"I think the line that I probably hear most often from parents when they're really supportive of it or wanting it, is that they feel that their child's not ready for school yet. So, whether it's developmentally or emotionally, they're just not ready for school."

(ELC head)

"Where we are at the moment with our families, they do really listen to us and take on board what we're saying as feedback. I know a lot of the parents have come in with an expectation of their child doing X and then left doing Y, purely because they've sat with us and they've had the conversation. They know we've gone through everything and we're looking at ... what suits the needs of your child best."

(ELC practitioner)

There was a perception that ELC staff, as a profession, were listened to more than they had been in the past, perhaps due to the fact children are in nursery for a greater number of hours than previously and staff really get to know them.

More exceptionally, there were reports of parents choosing to defer their child because the entitlement enabled them to do so rather than because they (or ELC staff) felt that the child would benefit from being deferred:

"That transition and that start in P1 was the best thing for that child in everybody's professional judgement, but because they were at the end of August, the parent was now able to say, 'No, I want them to have another year in early years,' and there was no comeback for that, because they were able to say, 'He's entitled,' and that was where the conversation ultimately ended. I think there will be single cases where it isn't always perhaps in the best interests of the child to defer."

(ELC head)

As touched on above, one factor felt to limit child-centred decision making was the timing of decisions. Parents noted feeling rushed in their decisions and, in some cases, reconsidering their decision as it got closer to the time their child was due to start school and changing their mind on whether their child was ready. They did not always feel it was possible to change their decision.

“It just felt like I did have to rush my decision because it frees up a place, which wasn't the best. It was just, kind of, 'You have to make a decision basically, because that will then free up his space,' which isn't nice to hear.”

(Parent, did not defer)

Stigma

Existing perceptions of deferral as a concept also have the potential to aid or hinder child-centred decision making. As noted in Chapter 4, evidence from both professionals and parents highlighted that there is some stigma attached to deferral, particularly among parents from more deprived areas.

There were indications, however, from both staff and parents to suggest that this stigma may be lessening:

“We've had a parent who's had two children with us previously that we had suggested that they maybe have an additional year with us. However, she was very much, 'No, they're going to school.' We now have her third child with us, and early on those conversations have started and she is looking to give him an additional year with us.”

(ELC practitioner)

While the extent to which this can be directly attributed to the pilot is unclear, as noted in Chapter 4, there were parents who had changed their mind and taken up the entitlement after discussing it with staff.

Both parents and ELC staff also reflected on the word 'deferral' specifically, suggesting that, if the concept was framed more positively, this could help with any associated stigma:

“Sometimes when I hear the word 'deferral', it makes me feel negative so I associate it with negative connotations...you're deferring them because they're not meeting goals, or they're maybe not achieving [...] instead of using the word 'deferral' maybe a more positive way to swing it would be appropriate.”

(Parent, did not defer)

“I think for our parents there was still a bit of stigma attached to being held back. So, we've had to change the terminology so when we're chatting about it – we talk about an additional year as opposed to deferred.”

(ELC practitioner)

Area for consideration:

Move away from use of the word 'deferral' in both written and verbal communications, instead using more positive language.

The following section covers factors that appeared to influence decision making. However, there was not a clear sense of whether the pilot itself shaped the extent to which these factors drove decisions. They have been included here as they are helpful in understanding decisions around deferral generally, and because these factors may become more important as more children become eligible for the ELC funding.

Peer group influences

Considerations around children going to school with their friends could also interfere with child-centred decision making.

Although not typically the main influence on their decisions, parents described factoring in their child's friendships. Where friends were all starting P1, they raised concerns about their child being separated from them if they chose to take up the funding for an additional year. As well as their child not seeing their friends as much, parents gave thought to their child's feelings around the reasons their friends were going to school and they were not:

"My biggest concern about not sending him to school was his peers, and his friends group, that he would miss them, but I just had to keep telling myself that he will make other friends, he's only four. We're a small town, so he still sees his friends."

(Parent, did defer)

"I didn't want him to see all his friends starting school and for him to feel like, 'Oh, I've been kept back. Why do they all start school and I'm not allowed to start school? [...] Is there something wrong with me that I'm not starting school with my friends?' There was that side of it as well that gave me the push not to defer."

(Parent, did not defer)

In some cases, parents were also thinking about their own friendships they had built up over time. An example was given of ELC staff being able to help with this concern and facilitate new friendships:

"I was quite worried because, all my mum friends, their wee ones were going to P1. So that was quite daunting. I was thinking, 'Oh my Gosh, who's going to be my pal, now?'. That seems quite sad but it was quite a big thing for me, too. The nursery were quite good at pointing out to my husband some of the parents of some of the kids that [child] played with, so he could ask them for play dates and stuff, and then we kind of got into another wee friendship group."

(Parent, did defer)

Staff concurred and described instances where they had seen peer group considerations override those of what was otherwise best for the individual child:

“A reason a parent wouldn't [defer] sometimes was because, in their head, this child was going to school with so and so's child. Because we're a small community they know mums of them, so they want them to be in the same primary class. So, that would more outweigh whether their child was ready or not sometimes, which was a shame, but obviously it is their decision.”

(ELC practitioner)

They had also recounted parents who specifically did not want their child to go through school with another child and were basing their decision on that:

“We've also had those conversations about they don't want to go to school with a certain person, or we've got cousins at the moment that they're thinking about deferring one and not the other. So we've been trying to have those deeper conversations with the parents and looking at things like our trackers in literacy and numeracy ... to try and help support decisions.”

(ELC practitioner)

While staff did not indicate that the pilot had any direct influence on the extent to which parents took peer group issues into account, it is worth being mindful of their potential influence as more children become eligible for an additional funded year.

Area for consideration:

Support ELC staff to provide reassurance to parents around children's friendships and to facilitate new friendships where possible.

The suitability of the P1/ELC settings to meet their child's needs

There was variation in the extent to which parents took into account the specific nursery or P1 setting or approach when deciding whether an additional funded year would best meet their child's needs.

Although there has been a move towards P1 pedagogy becoming more play-based over recent years, parents did not typically cite this as a specific reason not to defer. A lack of awareness may be one element of this, with parents feeling like they did not receive a great deal of information from their ELC setting or school on the extent to which P1 would be play-based.

Parents who decided not to defer, however, did seem to be more likely to have given thought to the benefits and drawbacks of the particular ELC or P1 environment their child would be in, and to seek out information on the P1 approach at their school.

Parents whose decisions were influenced by the specific settings had different views on which would be better for their child. Considerations were around the size of the setting (some felt nursery was too big and school would be better and vice versa) and staff ratios, with nursery being viewed as preferable in this respect.

Even in cases where parents did factor in the fact that P1 would be play-based, this did not always make it any easier to make a child-centred decision. They did not always know whether this would mean that their child would, in fact, benefit from starting P1. Staff described discussions with parents in this situation:

“One of our parents wanted their child to excel in Primary 1 and not come out just doing ‘all right’, thinking more along the lines of formal schooling. So, when I’d explained, ‘actually there’s lots of time to play in Primary 1 as well, they’re looking at play-based pedagogy’, that kind of helped. I may have confused them more than anything because they’re thinking, ‘Okay, I was thinking my child was going in there to sit with a jotter’ and actually that’s not what’s going to happen. Perhaps, maybe my child will be okay moving into Primary 1.”

(ELC practitioner)

Parents could see room for improvement in this regard, suggesting it would be helpful to see for themselves what P1 is like in their child’s school before making their decision:

“My understanding was that P1 was a lot more play-focused now but after doing a visit and seeing a literacy workshop, it is actually a lot more than I thought it would be. I thought it was going to be a lot more playful but ... they’re starting to put words together now, which is quite a lot further ahead than I thought they would be at this stage, which, again, worries me a little bit because I’m, like, ‘Oh, is he ready for that?’ I just thought it would be a lot more play in it.”

(Parent, did not defer)

Area for consideration:

Provide parents with more information about what P1 is like in their school earlier in the preschool year, perhaps offering a visit, to further support them to make an informed choice.

Long-term considerations

In considering whether deferral was in the best interests of their child, there were parents who considered the long-term implications as well as the more immediate ones. There were perceived pros and cons which, in some cases, reflected parents’ own experiences of school.

On the one hand was a view that being the one of the eldest in the year would mean their child would be more mature when sitting exams and potentially going to university:

“And I was even thinking much, much further into the future, if we didn’t defer, if he so chose to go off and go to university, things like that, he would potentially be 17 when he starts university, by the time he finished high school, or [if we

deferred] he would be 18, almost 19, by the time he starts university, and can do all the fun things, freshers week, things like that.”

(Parent, did defer)

On the other hand, there was some awareness deferred children could leave school at 16, having not sat any formal exams. However, this was not something parents gave a great deal of weight to, given it was so far in the future:

“So, in my daughter’s case...she could leave school before her exams because she is 16, and that’s probably the only negative is that you don’t have that barrier to keep them in. [...] that is such a long way off, and if she wants to leave before she has sat her exams, it is something, obviously, I think every parent will discourage, but you don’t know what kind of child your child is going to be.”

(Parent, did defer)

Parents also reflected on how being the oldest or youngest in the year had affected them, with some of those who were younger feeling like they had struggled to keep up throughout their schooling:

“I then stepped back and thought about myself going through school, and it was just a case of completely surviving. I was at that age where I could have been kept back, but my parents took me in when I was four, and it completely impacted my whole life. I feel like, if I had that extra year of that maturity, I might have paid more attention to school... instead of just struggling and just trying to catch up when everyone else in the class seems to be able to do what you can’t do.”

(Parent, did defer)

However, as noted above, parents had also been aware of the negative impact of children being bullied for being ‘held back’ when they were at school.

Practical considerations

Practical considerations (i.e. basing decisions on which option would best fit work or childcare arrangements) did not emerge as an important factor in decisions. While there were parents who discussed practical issues, they were able to work around them. ELC heads and staff noted that, while they had experienced some parents making decisions on this basis, it wasn’t as much of an issue since the implementation of 1,140 hours has meant that nursery and school days are a similar length:

“Because of the expansion of the hours in ELC, if you were going to defer the year before they would only be in 9:00 until 12:00 [and they might have chosen not to defer for that reason]. So, knowing that actually, they would be in there until three o’clock, just like school anyway, it made the decision more about what

the child needed, rather than what the family situation was like for childcare and financial.”

(ELC head)

Reduced stress for parents around their child starting school

A further intended outcome of the entitlement to an additional year of funded ELC was to reduce stress for parents around the start of their child’s schooling. Evidence from the evaluation suggests that it has been successful in doing this, and that there are two main elements to this.

Firstly, and as noted in Chapter 4, the process for requesting deferral were considered straightforward. Staff, in particular, contrasted this to previous processes in their authorities which involved making a case, pulling together supporting evidence and waiting for a decision. Parents described relief at not having to go through these processes:

“I actually didn't think it would be that difficult for us to defer him because we had the backing of Speech and Language, and from the nursery already. But there's always that, like, ‘what if?’ So, yes, it was a relief, an absolute relief, to know he was eligible for it.”

(Parent, did defer)

Secondly, and relatedly, parents had control over whether or not their child would go to school, relieving worry of their child having to go to school when they didn’t consider them ‘ready’. Furthermore, they knew in good time and did not have the pressure of trying to make sure their child was ‘ready’ for school should their deferral application be unsuccessful.

For the most part, parents felt that they had made the right decision for their child, making the experience of them starting school more positive and less stressful:

“No, I've no second thoughts, and obviously now that she is in nursery again, I'm still completely glad I made that decision. I fully think next year she will be properly ready for school [...], she will be a lot more ready without having that sort of fear of going across to the big school with all the big boys and girls.”

(Parent, did defer)

“It's been a positive experience. As I say, I didn't know what to expect but, from what I've seen, it's been positive and I'm glad we sent him when we did because he is enjoying it. He might be tired, but what kid isn't tired.”

(Parent, did defer)

More exceptionally, there were parents who felt that they had made the wrong decision for their child, which had caused them stress. They had typically followed

the advice of the nursery staff and felt that, on reflection, it hadn't been the right choice for their child:

"I felt really disappointed. I mean, I know my own child. Like, fair enough, I'm not with her when she's in nursery, but I had a few issues with the staff at her nursery not really listening to what I had to say about my daughter. So, I just felt like I was pressured into doing it anyway. [...] To this day, she still goes on about wanting to go to school."

(Parent, did defer)

6. Conclusions and lessons for roll-out

Conclusions

As highlighted in previous chapters, the accounts of local authority pilot leads, ELC heads and staff and parents indicate the pilot has been implemented broadly as intended. Providing funding for an additional year in ELC to children with August-December birthdays did not present any major challenges for the local authorities involved.

Uptake data on August-December deferrals, showed there have been some increases since the entitlement was introduced. Larger increases were seen in Year 2 pilot areas. However, it is difficult to disentangle how much increases were driven by the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (rather than the pilot), particularly in Year 1 pilot areas which began offering the entitlement in 2020. There appeared to be no clear trend showing the pilot had resulted in an increase in January-February deferrals.

The increases in uptake did not cause widespread capacity issues for the pilot areas. On the whole, local authorities were able to provide the additional spaces required, without it creating problems. That said, concerns were raised by pilot leads and ELC staff that this could change in the future if deferral uptake increases and/or other policies put pressure on ELC spaces. It should also be kept in mind that the ten pilot local authorities may not be representative of all 32 local authorities across Scotland in terms of resource, capacity and pre-pilot deferral policies. This is a limitation of the evaluation (as mentioned in Chapter 1) and may mean that the national roll-out could be more challenging for some local authorities for reasons that have not come to light in this study.

While eligible parents were usually informed about the entitlement and supported in their decision making, there were cases where this did not happen. Suggestions of ways to improve this aspect of delivery are included below. Similarly, while ELC staff felt confident in their role in supporting parents in deciding whether to use the funding, there were also some who were less clear on how to approach this (again, suggestions around this for the roll-out are included below). The process of taking up the funding was generally perceived as straightforward by parents, and even more so by ELC staff, who were able to compare with the pre-pilot process.

As the entitlement is rolled out nationally, it is also intended that it will lead to a more consistent approach to deferral across Scotland. While it is too early to comment fully on this outcome, given the small number of authorities involved to date, the early signs are encouraging. The variation in approaches taken between pilot authorities appears to have been reduced from pre-pilot times with little variation being described between authorities. Any variation that did exist appeared to be 'teething problems' which were administrative in nature (e.g. timing of communications) rather than any fundamental differences in approach. It is likely that, as the entitlement is bedded-in across Scotland, the approaches in different

local authorities will become largely consistent, and certainly more so than previously.

The new entitlement appears to support child-centred decision making by creating a process that centres on conversations between families and ELC staff, rather than an application and a final decision made by a panel of professionals. These conversations made parents feel well supported in their decision making. It was also clear that the entitlement increased choice, by raising awareness of the option to have an additional year funded and for those who would not have been able to fund another year of ELC themselves. Overall, the evaluation indicates that the funding reduced stress and concern for parents. The main factors that contributed to this were: the simplified process with no requirement to 'make a case' or wait for approval; knowing the funding is guaranteed; support received from ELC staff (when parents agreed with their suggestion). This point also relates to choice and parents feeling like they had made the best choice for their child.

As the pilot is rolled out, it is intended that deferral rates will become more uniform across Scotland (including by SIMD). This is in part linked to consistent processes but is also affected by cultural factors. As noted, deferral has historically been more common in more affluent areas with the stigma of being 'held back' being considered more of a concern in areas of multiple deprivation. While it might take longer for these cultural influences to change, there are promising indications that other, more child-centred, factors were influencing decisions in more deprived areas. There were examples where parents (particularly in the most deprived areas) felt negatively about deferral but once they discussed with staff and did defer, they felt they had made the best choice for their child and this influenced their overall views on deferral away from the stigma. ELC staff also commented on the stigma around deferral beginning to lessen and were very aware of the issues, reporting being mindful of the language used to discuss deferral with parents. Given one influencing factor in parents' decisions around deferral is the experience of others who have deferred, as more parents defer this may reduce the stigma over time.

Lessons for roll-out

The section below pulls together the 'areas for consideration' which are highlighted in the chapters above. These are suggestions which could further improve the delivery of the entitlement in pilot areas and in other local authorities during the national roll-out.

Communications for parents

- producing standard written communications for all settings to send to all eligible parents, emphasising:
 - the age group that the entitlement is for (clarifying it is not for January-February born children);
 - and to speak to staff at your child's setting in the first instance.

- clearer instructions/guidance for settings around communication to avoid some parents not receiving any official communications about the entitlement. This could ask all settings write to all eligible parents, and do a verbal follow up.
- ensure parents get an email confirming their child's place, or are aware that they will not receive one.
- move away from use of the word 'deferral' in both written and verbal communications, instead using more positive language.
- provide parents with more information about what P1 is like in their school earlier in the preschool year, perhaps offering a visit, to further support them to make an informed choice.
- include more information for parents on what an additional year in ELC would be like. This could cover hours, lunches, teaching and anything else might differ from their current year in the setting.

Training and development for ELC staff

- provide training/resources for ELC practitioners to: ensure they are aware and feel confident raising the subject of deferral; and clarify their role in relation to parents' decision on deferral (see page 41 for list of approaches aimed at maximising the benefits of conversations with parents).
- support settings to provide training, resources and new development opportunities for staff on pedagogical approaches for older children.
- support ELC staff to provide reassurance to parents around children's friendships and to facilitate new friendships where possible.

Deferral process

- review the timings of when deferral decisions need to be made, keeping in mind the need for flexibility for parents and local authorities' requirements for planning teacher numbers (as mentioned in Chapter 2).
- Consider whether the process can be simplified further by not requiring parents to: apply for a P1 space when deferring; or complete a form which asks for their top three choices of ELC settings.

Capacity

- continue to review capacity issues across ELC settings – as the new entitlement is rolled out alongside other policies which require more spaces.

Further issues to consider in the future include how staff approaches to conversations with parents may need to change as we move out of the pandemic. By 2025, four and five year olds will not have experienced the Covid-19 lockdowns and therefore staff will need to use other ways to broach the subject with parents.

Monitoring uptake data trends over next few years may provide a clearer picture of how far the entitlement had driven the increases in August-December deferral, versus the influence of the pandemic. Increasing the data gathered by local authorities on children who defer would also aid future evaluation of the expanded entitlement. This would ideally include monitoring: ASN, disabilities, households on low-income benefits, ethnic group, and SIMD quintile.

Data collection and analysis areas for consideration were:

- support local authorities to ensure they are able to gather data about household and child characteristics.
- track deferral rates by local authority taking into account their overall rank according to SIMD, as the roll-out progresses.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Detailed objectives

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

- 1. To draw together information from local authorities (LAs) about uptake of an additional year of funded ELC for children deferring entry to P1, in relation to previous trends and the wider national context:**
 - a. How many families enrolled their child for an additional year of funded ELC in the pilot LAs in 2021/22 and 2022/23? How did this compare to previous years and to non-pilot LAs?
 - b. How did take up vary by child/household characteristics?
- 2. To provide information about implementation of the policy in the pilot areas in order to help inform full roll-out:**
 - a. What methods for advertising and communicating about the automatic entitlement were used and which were considered most impactful?
 - b. How well did the process for requesting a deferred year / admissions work in the pilot LAs, and how could it be improved?
 - c. What challenges did LAs experience during the pilot and how did they manage them? What changes have they made during the pilot period? What worked well?
 - d. What are LAs' experiences of how the number of families taking up an additional year of funded ELC affected current capacity within their areas? How did this vary across the LAs? Did the pilot have any impact on placement of other (e.g. younger) children?
 - e. Consider how relevant and applicable information about implementation of the policy in the pilot areas are to the wider LA context.
- 3. To explore the impact of the pilots on parental awareness, decisions and perceptions of the entitlement, both for parents who decided to defer their child's school start and those who did not**
 - a. Were parents aware of the pilot and their options? What information did they base their decision on and where did they get information from / who were they influenced by? What were the key factors in making their decision? Did they have access to adequate information about deferral, ELC access, and the experience of education generally (e.g. transitions to P1, the experience of P1, impacts on school leaving)? Did this vary in different LAs / for different family types?
 - b. Did the decision have the outcome parents anticipated for their child? Perceptions of their child's experience of additional time spent in funded ELC / the transition to P1?

Appendix 2: Information sheets

Evaluation of pilots of funded ELC access for children who defer entry to P1

Information sheet for parents and carers

On behalf of the Scottish Government, Ipsos Scotland (an independent research organisation) is carrying out an evaluation of the pilots of funded ELC (Early Learning and Childcare) for children who defer entry to P1. If you have been passed this leaflet, it is because your child was eligible for an additional funded year of ELC if they deferred entry to P1.

This information leaflet provides information about the research and what taking part would involve. If you have any further questions after reading it, please get in touch using the contact details listed at the end.

The evaluation will look at what went well and what could be improved on in the process of offering parents the option to defer P1 entry, with access to funded ELC. It is being undertaken by Ipsos for the Scottish Government and will help with planning the expansion of the entitlement to funded ELC for children who defer entry into P1 to all local authorities in Scotland.

How can you help?

Ipsos would really like to hear from parents whose children were eligible to access a funded ELC place if they deferred entry to P1 – whether the parent decided to defer their child or not.

Taking part involves a short (around 45 minutes) one-to-one interview with a researcher from Ipsos. If you would like to have a partner or other family member/friend at the interview that is fine. The interview can be carried out by telephone or video call, if you prefer.

It would be at a time to suit you and would be informal and relaxed – you don't need to prepare or have any special knowledge to take part. We want to hear about your experiences and there are no right or wrong answers. We are hoping to speak to people before 15th November.

The researcher will ask about your experience of the P1 deferral pilot including what information you received about it, whether you decided to defer your child or not, and what helped you to decide.

We understand that decisions about your child(ren) can be a sensitive topic to discuss. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you will also be able to pause or stop the interview at any point.

Everyone who takes part in an interview will be given **£30 as a thank you** for giving up their time to speak to us (this can be cash via bank transfer or vouchers for Amazon or Love2Shop). Please note that receiving a bank transfer may sometimes impact on any benefit payments or tax positions, so it is worth checking this before choosing whether you would prefer a voucher or a bank transfer. Receiving an e-voucher will not impact on any benefit payments or tax positions.

Who can take part?

We want to speak to parents and carers who have a child who was born between mid-August and the end of December 2017 (that are now either in P1 or an ELC setting). We do need to make sure we speak to a mix of different types of people, so not everyone will be eligible to take part. If you are interested, we will have a quick chat with you on the phone first to find out a few things about you and give you the chance to ask us any questions you may have.

How will we use the information you provide?

Ipsos will use information from the interviews to write a report for the Scottish Government that will be published **but we will not include anything that could identify you/your child**. It will not be possible for your local authority or the Scottish Government to know who has taken part in the research or what they have said.

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

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

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

We have a privacy policy with more information about how we handle your data which you can see here: <https://ipsos.uk/p1deferral>

Getting in touch

If you have any questions or would like to take part, please contact Ipsos Scotland by:

- emailing UKP1Research@ipsos.com
- calling xxxxxxxxxxxx
- or texting xxxxxxxxxxxx

If you wish to take part, it would be helpful if you could tell us which local authority area you live in and what phone number we can reach you on. We will give you a quick call to explain more details about the research and answer any questions. We'll also ask you a few questions about yourself to check that you're eligible to take part.

Evaluation of pilots of funded ELC access for children who defer entry to P1

Information sheet for ELC Practitioners

On behalf of the Scottish Government, Ipsos Scotland (an independent research organisation) is carrying out an evaluation of the pilots of funded ELC for children who defer entry to P1. If you have been passed this leaflet, it is because you work in an ELC setting in a pilot LA.

This information leaflet provides information about the research and what taking part would involve. If you have any further questions after reading it, please get in touch using the contact details listed at the end.

The evaluation will look at what went well and what could be improved in the process of offering parents the option to defer P1 entry with access to funded ELC. It is being undertaken by Ipsos for the Scottish Government and will help with planning for when the entitlement to funded ELC for children who defer entry into P1 is expanded to include all local authorities in Scotland.

How can you help?

Ipsos would really like to hear from ELC practitioners working in local authority nurseries (in the pilot local authority areas) to understand how things have been working in practice.

Taking part in this research involves an online discussion with around four other ELC practitioners from pilot local authorities, facilitated by a member of the Ipsos research team. To allow practitioners from different local authorities to take part, we have decided to run the workshop virtually using the online platform Zoom, rather than face-to-face. **It will last approximately an hour and will be conducted during an evening in November.**

The discussion will cover your experience of the P1 deferral pilot: the information you received about the pilot; your role in communicating the pilot to parents and supporting their decision making; any other impacts on your practice/setting; and recommendations of what could be improved in the whole process.

You don't need to refer to any official data or figures during the online group; all we need from you is a willingness to share your opinions with us and your fellow participants about how the pilot has gone so far in your setting. We will ask all participants to respect the confidentiality of others and not share anything beyond the group.

Everyone who takes part in the session will be **given £30 (either as a bank transfer or as an Amazon or Love2Shop voucher) as a thank you for giving up their time to speak to us.**

How will we use the information I provide?

Ipsos will use information from the focus groups to write a report for the Scottish Government that will be published **but we will not include anything that could identify you or the setting you work in.** The report is likely to use quotes, but we will not name or identify anyone when we use quotes. If you do not want us to quote anything you say, please just let us know.

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

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

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

We have a privacy policy with more information about how we handle your data which you can see here: <https://ipsos.uk/p1deferral>

Getting in touch

If you would like to take part, please contact Ipsos Scotland at UKP1Research@ipsos.com by 21st October – please include:

- Your name
- Your local authority area
- The name of your setting
- Which date(s) you are available

Appendix 3: Discussion guides

P1 deferral pilots evaluation Topic guide for parents V6

P1 Deferral Evaluation Discussion Guide (Parents)

Space for initial notes e.g. on what info we had from LA staff interviews and uptake data; if their child has ASN or falls in any other socio-economic category we are interested in

Introduction (2 mins)

Aim: To remind participant of key details about the research and obtain informed consent

THANK PARTICIPANT FOR TAKING PART & INTRODUCE YOURSELF.

EXPLAIN:

The Scottish Government has asked Ipsos Scotland to get feedback from parents in local authorities who've been involved in piloting access to funded Early Learning and Childcare for children who defer Primary 1. We have already spoken to local authority staff and we're also going to speak to ELC staff about their experiences of the pilot. The aim of the research is to find out what went well and what could be improved in the future and to help when it is extended to include all local authorities. We are keen to hear from parents and carers to understand their perceptions of the new entitlement. Once we've spoken to everyone we'll write a report and that will be published by the Scottish Government. We are speaking to both parents who chose to defer their child and those who didn't.

- Remind participant that the interview will last about 45 minutes (to 1hr if paired)
- Remind participant that there are no right or wrong answers and they don't have to answer any questions they don't want to answer. They can decide to stop the interview at any point.
- Provide reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Explain that no identifying information about individuals or their families (e.g. names or contact details, or notes on their interview) will be passed on to anyone outwith the Ipsos research team. We won't be naming local authorities or individuals and any quotes we use will be anonymous.
- However, if participant is concerned that anything discussed in the interview will be identifiable, let us know – we will always respect requests to omit anything they'd rather wasn't shared.

- Check if participant has **any questions**. [If they want us to clarify what the new entitlement / pilot is: your local authority now provides ELC funding for an extra year – to any children with August-December birthdays. Previously, families with children born in those months had to apply and it was up to the local authority to assess the situation and decide whether they would fund the extra time at nursery – but now any parents or carers are automatically entitled to the funding, if they decide to defer.]
- [If they didn't defer and want to know if they should be taking part: as long as they knew there was ELC funding for Aug-Dec birthdays available, we want to speak to them. If they didn't defer, we will be asking them about how they became aware about the funding and any thoughts on it.]
- Request permission to record interview. Explain that this is for transcription and analysis purposes and that recordings will not be shared outside the research team at Ipsos.

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

Section 1 – Family background and general awareness of deferral (4 mins / 6 overall)

Aim: to understand family circumstances and general awareness of deferral

To begin with, it would be great to hear a bit more about your life generally. Could you tell me a bit about yourself?

- Who they live with
- What a typical day looks like for them

Thanks, that's helpful to know.

Can you tell me what words spring to mind when you think about deferral of the start of primary school? (PROBE FOR REASONS FOR THOSE)

We'll talk a lot more about your decision (not) to defer your child later, but I wanted to check what you knew about deferral of P1 in Scotland before you had to make the decision for your own child. Were you aware that deferral was possible in Scotland?

- What did you know about it? / Where have you heard about deferral in Scotland?
- What were your views about deferral in general?
- IF AWARE: when did you begin to think about it in relation to your child?

Section 2 – Communications and Awareness (10 mins / 16 overall)

Aim: To understand how the pilot was communicated to parents

When did you first become aware of the pilot? [clarify if needed: by pilot I mean your council agreeing to provide ELC funding for all Aug-Dec children if they defer P1]

- And how did you first hear about it?

And when did you become aware you would be eligible under the pilot [/for another funded year of ELC] if you chose to defer your child?

- And how did you first hear about it?

What other ways did you hear or read about it?

PROBES:

- from ELC staff
- from school/P1 staff
- websites (LA or national) (e.g. Parent Club)
- social media
- leaflets/flyers
- word of mouth / other parents

How clear was the information about the pilot?

How well informed did you feel about the following aspects?

- Whether your child was eligible for another funded ELC year if you chose to defer
- How you would go about requesting deferral
- When you needed to make the decision
 - And how this related to P1 transition activities
- The potential pros and cons of deferral
- What the P1 experience would be like in your child's school
- The experience they would have in a further ELC year
- The impact of deferral on school leaving age
- How to get support and advice in making the decision

What was the most useful information source/s about the pilot?

- Were some sources more useful for finding out about specific aspects of the new entitlement?

Is there anything you would have liked more information on regarding the pilot?

Do you think other families were aware of the pilot?

Was there any more that could have been done to make sure people knew about it?

Section 3 – Deciding about Deferral (10 mins / 26 overall)

Aim: to understand how they reached their decision

We'll now talk a bit about how you came to making the decision (not) to defer. What were the main things you were thinking about when making the decision? PROBE FULLY

I've got a few factors to ask you about now – please say what part these played (if any) in your decision to defer / not defer?

[ASK THOSE NOT COVERED ABOVE. CAPTURE SPONTANEOUS REACTION TO EACH QUESTION FIRST AND PROMPT AS NEEDED]

Your child and their potential experience of P1? – e.g:

- Social/emotional readiness for P1 / they seemed ready, emotionally / socially [SUGGESTED WORDING FOR THOSE THAT DID NOT DEFER]

- Readiness to learn
- Effects of Covid-19
- Child's peer group/friendships
- ASN [ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS]

Practical considerations? – e.g:

- **[IF DEFERRED]** That we could get the ELC funding
- Financial considerations
- Childcare considerations (e.g., childcare arrangements easier with child in ELC than in school, or easier if in school?)
- Any other practical considerations – e.g. pick up time of siblings
- Whether you would get a place at your first choice setting if you chose to defer

You views of the school / the approach in P1? - e.g:

- The approach to P1 at your child's school
- The curriculum for P1s nowadays (generally)

Possible impacts in the future? [DON'T ASK THOSE THAT DID NOT DEFER] - e.g:

- What being the oldest or youngest in the class may mean for your child when they are older?
- The impact on secondary school and beyond (deferred children will legally be able to leave school at 16 with no qualifications if they wish to)

Any other thoughts about deferral more generally? – e.g:

- Your own experience of starting school (could include cultural norms)
- What you normally do in your family
- Wanting them to have another year of play

And which of these would you say was the main factor influencing your decision?

Did you do any research around deferral?

Who else was involved in making the decision or influenced your decision?

- Professionals
- Friends/family
- Other parents
- Did you speak to your child about what they wanted to do / what the options were?

What were their views?

- **IF OPPOSING VIEWS:** Did they try to get you to change your mind?
- **Did you feel they had the best interests of your child in mind?**
- **How supported did you feel by ELC staff/other professionals in making the decision?**
- How much of an influence did they have on your decision?

How soon before your child was due to start school did you make the decision?

Overall, how easy or difficult was it to make the decision?

- How much choice do you feel you had?
- Would anything else have helped you to make it?

IF CHOSE TO DEFER: Would you have applied to defer your child had it not been guaranteed that you would receive funding for an extra year of ELC?

Section 3.1 – Process of Deferral and Support (5 mins)

ASK ONLY IF PARTICIPANT DID DEFER

Aim: to understand how the process worked

Thinking now about the practical side of things, what did you have to do to request the deferral and the ELC funding for that year?

PROBE

- Complete form (online or hard copy) or just communicate to ELC setting?
- Send the form to the LA / to the ELC setting?
- Apply for a P1 place as well as requesting deferral?

How straightforward was the process? Were there any issues?

- Did you have a main point of contact who could help you with any issues?
- How supported did you feel throughout the process?

After starting the process to defer, did you have any second thoughts or did any other questions arise?

- How did you address them?

Can you think of anything that would improve the process of deferring and securing ELC funding for that academic year?

Section 4 – Impact on children (10 mins / 36 overall)

Aim: explore how children have been impacted by the deferral/P1 transition

We'll now move on to reflect on your decision (not) to defer your child, now that some time has passed.

Overall, how do you feel today about the decision you took? PROBE FULLY:

- Do you see the outcomes you anticipated for your child? (e.g. doing well in P1 / benefitting from more time in ELC) / Have things gone as you expected?
- What, if anything, has been different from your initial expectations?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your child's experience of their further year in ELC/their experience of transitioning to P1.

- Can you think of anything that would have improved their experience?

Would you make the same decision again now, having seen how it's gone for your child?

Section 5 – Overall feelings and Recommendations (2 minutes, 38 overall)

Overall, how would you sum up your experience of the new entitlement (i.e. that funded ELC is available to August-December born children if their parents choose to defer them)?

Can you think of anything that could have improved your experience of this change?

Probe (if not covered)

- **Awareness / understanding**
- **Being able to make an informed decision**
- **IF DEFERRED: And the process of deferring and requesting the ELC funding?**

Wrap up (2 mins, 40 overall – 45 overall if deferred)

THANK PARTICIPANT & STOP RECORDING.

As I mentioned, we're offering you £30 to thank you for your time. Would you prefer to get it as:

- A BACS transfer? (ASK FOR ACCOUNT NUMBER AND SORT CODE)
- A Love2Shop e-code? (DOUBLE CHECK WE HAVE THEIR CORRECT EMAIL)
- An Amazon e-code? (DOUBLE CHECK WE HAVE THEIR CORRECT EMAIL)

[Please note that it is possible that thank you payments may impact on benefit payments or tax positions. If you are concerned about this please contact us or speak to your local Citizen's Advice Bureau for further advice.]

- **FOR BACS: Collect sort code, account number, name on account.**

Should arrive in their account within a couple of weeks.

- **FOR VOUCHER: Confirm email. Confirm Amazon or Love2Shop.**

Should be able to send it to them within a couple of weeks.

P1 deferral pilots evaluation Topic guide for ELC staff V5

P1 Deferral Evaluation Discussion Guide (ELC staff)

Space for initial notes e.g. LA, type of provider, number of deferrals

Introduction (2 mins)

Aim: To remind participant of key details about the research and obtain informed consent

THANK PARTICIPANTS FOR TAKING PART & INTRODUCE YOURSELF.

EXPLAIN:

The Scottish Government has asked Ipsos Scotland to get feedback from ELC staff in local authorities who've been involved in piloting access to funded Early Learning and Childcare access for children who defer Primary 1. We have already spoken to LA staff and parents about their experiences of the pilot. The aim of the research is to find out what went well and what could be improved in the future and to help inform national roll-out. Once we've spoken to everyone we'll write a report and that will be published by the Scottish Government.

- Remind participants that the session will last about 60 minutes (1 hr)
- Remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers and they don't have to answer any questions they don't want to answer. They can decide to leave at any point.
- Provide reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Explain that no identifying information about individuals or the ELC setting they work for (e.g. names or contact details) will be passed on to anyone outwith the Ipsos research team. We won't be naming ELC settings or individuals and any quotes we use will be anonymous.
- However, if participants are concerned that anything discussed in the session will be identifiable, let us know – we will always respect requests to omit anything they'd rather wasn't shared.
- Ask that participants respect this confidentiality and do not share any information that others bring up in the discussion group
- Check if participants have any questions.
- Request permission to record the session. Explain that this is for transcription and analysis purposes and that recordings will not be shared outside the research team at Ipsos.

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

Section 1 – Background (5 mins / 7 overall)

Aim: To build rapport and gain an understanding of their role

To start with, could we just go around the group and could you tell me your name, what local authority you work in and a bit about the setting you work in and what your role is?

How long have you worked in ELC? And in your current role?

We'll talk in much more detail about deferral in a moment but it would be helpful if you could give me a sense of whether, before the pilot, deferral was quite common in your setting/area or not?

Section 2 – Planning for implementation (7 mins / 14 overall)

Aim: To explore how the planning stage went, staff awareness and understanding of the pilot

Thinking back, can you remember when you first heard that the P1 deferral pilot would be happening in your LA?

- what information did you get and from whom?
- were you offered any training?
- what questions did you have about it?
- were they answered or was there anything you were still unclear about/needed any more info on?

What were your initial thoughts about it? PROBE FOR POSITIVES AND CONCERNS

Before the pilot actually started, what impact, if any, did you think it would have on your work?

Section 3 – Implementation: Supporting parents (20 mins / 34 overall)

Aim: to understand how ELC staff support parents in deciding about deferrals

As we go through the discussion, we will talk about any impacts of the pilot on different aspects of your practice. We'll start with communicating the change to parents and supporting them to make a decision on whether or not to defer their child.

What involvement, if any, did you have on communicating the change to parents?

- Was it publicised in your setting e.g. leaflets, posters?

What sense did you have of levels of awareness among parents at your setting?

- Any groups of parents where awareness was lower/higher?
- Do you think anything more need to be done to raise awareness among parents about the change?

What questions did parents have about it when they first heard?

- Were you able to answer them?

- Do you think parents are getting consistent messages about what the change means? (PROBE RE ANY INCONSISTENCIES / WHY)

Thinking now about how ELC settings support individual parents to make the decision as to whether or not to defer their child, how, if at all, has this changed since the implementation of the pilot?

- Do you still have the same discussions with parents about deferral?
- Has the advice you give parents changed at all now that you know they will be eligible for another year of funded ELC ?

How well equipped do you feel to support parents in making deferral decisions?

- Has this changed at all since the implementation of the pilot?
- Have you needed any support from management/other colleagues to do this?

Generally speaking, what considerations are driving parents' decisions on deferral? PROBE FULLY

- Has this changed at all since the implementation of the pilots?
- What impact does the guarantee of funding have?
- What about the fact there is no application process to go through?
- Have you seen any differences (in what is being considered regarding deferral) among different groups of parents?

LIST OF POTENTIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS DECISIONS [PROBE ON SOME]

Their child and their potential experience of P1? – e.g:

- Social/emotional readiness for P1
- Readiness to learn
- Effects of Covid-19
- Child's peer group/friendships
- ASN

Practical considerations? – e.g:

- **[IF DEFERRED]** That they could get the ELC funding
- Financial considerations
- Childcare considerations (e.g., childcare arrangements easier with child in ELC than in school, or easier if in school?)
- Any other practical considerations – e.g. pick up time of siblings
- Whether you would get a place at your first choice setting if you chose to defer

Parents' views of the school / the approach in P1? - e.g:

- The approach to P1 at your child's school
- The curriculum for P1s nowadays (generally)

Possible impacts in the future? - e.g:

- What being the oldest or youngest in the class may mean for their child when they are older?
- The impact on secondary school and beyond (deferred children will legally be able to leave school at 16 with no qualifications if they wish to)

Any other thoughts about deferral more generally? – e.g:

- Parents' own experience of starting school (could include cultural norms)

- What they normally do in their family
- Wanting them to have another year of play

How much of an influence do you feel ELC staff have on parents' decisions?

- Has this changed at all since the implementation of the pilots?

Are parents' decisions being influenced by others? For example, their wider family and friends, other parents?

One of the aims of the pilot is to ensure decision making is child-centred. To what extent do you feel this is the case?

- What, if anything, can get in the way of this?
- Would you say the pilot has increased or decreased child-centred decision making or has it had little impact?

Thinking now about the practical elements of the deferral process. How is the process for requesting deferral different to before the pilot in your LA area? PROBE FOR PROS AND CONS

What effect, if any, has this had on workloads for ELC staff?

What support, if any, do ELC staff provide to parents with the practical side of requesting deferral?

Section 4 – Implementation: impact on settings, capacity and on children (14 mins / 48 overall)

Aim: to understand how deferrals and the change in entitlement impact the capacity and operation of settings

We'll now move on to think about how, if at all, the pilot has changed your way of working.

First of all, in your setting, have you experienced an increase in deferrals since the pilot began?

IF YES: And what effect has this had on capacity?

- Were you able to accommodate all requests for places for deferred children?
- Have there been any knock-on effects for younger children applying for places?
- And have there been any staffing challenges?

And has having a greater number of older children in your setting resulted in any changes in practice?

- Any benefits to the setting?
- Any challenges for the setting?

And thinking specifically about the children who deferred, how would you say the extra time in ELC has been for them?

- Benefits?
- Any concerns?

Has there been any impact on your workload as a result of the pilot?

PROBE IF NOT COVERED ABOVE IN RELATION TO THEIR WORKLOAD: Impacts re:

- discussions with parents about deferral and ELC funding
- their practice (including having more older children)
- admin

How well supported have you felt in implementing the pilot?

- What other training, support or information would you like?
- Do you feel your learning and development opportunities are adequate given the change in policy?
- Do you feel they are adequate given you may be working with more older children?

Section 5 – Looking back / Looking forward: Overview and Suggestions (10 minutes, 58 overall)

Aim: to gauge how the general experience of the pilot was for ELC staff and get suggestions to inform the full roll-out

Overall, how do you think the implementation of the pilot has gone? What has gone well? And what have been the main challenges for you?

What, if anything, would you do differently next year?

And what advice would you give to ELC staff in LAs who will be implementing it in the future?

Thinking ahead, do you have any concerns for the future? In what ways you could be supported with this by the LA/Scottish Government?

Wrap up

THANK PARTICIPANTS & STOP RECORDING.

P1 deferral pilots evaluation Topic guide for ELC Heads V4

P1 Deferral Evaluation Discussion Guide (ELC heads)

Space for initial notes e.g. LA, type of provider, number of deferrals

Introduction (2 mins)

Aim: To remind participant of key details about the research and obtain informed consent

THANK PARTICIPANTS FOR TAKING PART & INTRODUCE YOURSELF.

EXPLAIN:

The Scottish Government has asked Ipsos Scotland to get feedback from ELC staff in local authorities who've been involved in piloting access to funded Early Learning and Childcare access for children who defer Primary 1. We have already spoken to LA staff and parents about their experiences of the pilot and are also speaking to ELC staff. The aim of the research is to find out what went well and what could be improved in the future and to help inform national roll-out. Once we've spoken to everyone we'll write a report and that will be published by the Scottish Government.

- Remind participants that the session will last about 60 minutes (1 hr)
- Remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers and they don't have to answer any questions they don't want to answer. They can decide to leave at any point.
- Provide reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Explain that no identifying information about individuals or the ELC setting they work for (e.g. names or contact details) will be passed on to anyone outwith the Ipsos research team. We won't be naming ELC settings or individuals and any quotes we use will be anonymous.
- However, if participants are concerned that anything discussed in the session will be identifiable, let us know – we will always respect requests to omit anything they'd rather wasn't shared.
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That's recording us now. Could I quickly ask you to confirm for the recording that you are all happy to take part based on the information we just discussed?

Section 1 – Background (5 mins / 7 overall)

Aim: To build rapport and gain an understanding of their role

To start with, could we just go around the group and could you tell me your name, what local authority you work in and a bit about the setting you work in and what your role is?

How long have you worked in ELC? And in your current role?

We'll talk in much more detail about deferral in a moment but it would be helpful if you could give me a sense of whether, before the pilot, deferral was quite common in your setting/area or not?

Section 2 – Planning for implementation (8 mins / 15 overall)

Aim: To explore challenges and opportunities around the preparation of the pilot for ELC leaders

Thinking back, can you remember when you first heard that the P1 deferral pilot would be happening in your LA?

- what information did you get and from whom?
- were you offered any training?
- what questions did you have about it?
- were they answered or was there anything you were still unclear about/needed any more info on?

What were your initial thoughts about it? PROBE FOR POSITIVES AND CONCERNS

Before the pilot actually started, what impact, if any, did you think it would have on your work?

How much time did you have to prepare yourselves, the staff and the setting before implementing the policy?

And what, if anything, did you need to put in place in the initial stages in order to implement it?

- PROBES: communications / resources for staff or parents / admin / changing systems/ staff training
- How much time / resource did it take to prepare for the pilot?

Section 3 – Informing and Supporting ELC staff (5 mins / 20 overall)

Aim: to understand how ELC Leaders supported parents in deciding about deferrals

How did you go about communicating the pilot to staff?

- What were the main points of information you focused on?
- How did they react?
- What kind of questions/concerns did they have?
- How well do you think this approach to communicating it worked?

Section 4 – Implementation: Supporting parents (20 mins / 40 overall)

Aim: to understand how ELC staff support parents in deciding about deferrals

As we go through the discussion, we will talk about any impacts of the pilot on different aspects of practice for both yourselves and those you manage. We'll start with communicating the change to parents and supporting them to make a decision on whether or not to defer their child.

What involvement, if any, did you have on communicating the change to parents at your setting?

- Was it publicised in your setting e.g. leaflets, posters?

What sense did you have of levels of awareness among parents?

- Any groups of parents where awareness was lower/higher?
- Do you think anything more need to be done to raise awareness among parents about the change?

What questions did parents have about it when they first heard?

- Were you able to answer them?

Thinking now about how ELC settings support individual parents to make the decision as to whether or not to defer their child.

Can I just check first of all - who is directly involved in conversations with parents or whether it's just the staff you manage who do this, or does that vary?

NOTE: ADAPT NEXT QUESTIONS ACCORDINGLY

How, if at all, has this changed since the implementation of the pilot?

- Do you/staff still have the same discussions with parents about deferral?
- Has the advice you give parents changed at all now that you know they will be eligible for another year of funded ELC ?

How well equipped do you feel to support parents in making deferral decisions?

- Has this changed at all since the implementation of the pilot?

And how about the staff you manage?

- Have they requested any additional support in order to do this since the implementation of the pilot? On what kind of things?

Generally speaking, what considerations are driving parents' decisions on deferral? PROBE FULLY

- Has this changed at all since the implementation of the pilot?
- What impact does the guarantee of funding have?
- What about the fact there is no application process to go through?
- Have you seen any differences (in what is being considered regarding deferral) among different groups of parents?

LIST OF POTENTIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS DECISIONS [PROBE ON SOME]

Their child and their potential experience of P1? – e.g:

- Social/emotional readiness for P1
- Readiness to learn
- Effects of Covid-19
- Child's peer group/friendships
- ASN

Practical considerations? – e.g:

- **[IF DEFERRED]** That they could get the ELC funding
- Financial considerations
- Childcare considerations (e.g., childcare arrangements easier with child in ELC than in school, or easier if in school?)
- Any other practical considerations – e.g. pick up time of siblings
- Whether you would get a place at your first choice setting if you chose to defer

Parents' views of the school / the approach in P1? - e.g:

- The approach to P1 at your child's school
- The curriculum for P1s nowadays (generally)

Possible impacts in the future? - e.g:

- What being the oldest or youngest in the class may mean for their child when they are older?
- The impact on secondary school and beyond (deferred children will legally be able to leave school at 16 with no qualifications if they wish to)

Any other thoughts about deferral more generally? – e.g:

- Parents' own experience of starting school (could include cultural norms)
- What they normally do in their family
- Wanting them to have another year of play

How much of an influence do you feel ELC staff and heads have on parents' decisions?

- Has this changed at all since the implementation of the pilots?

Are parents' decisions being influenced by others? For example, their wider family and friends, other parents?

One of the aims of the pilot is to ensure decision making is child-centred. To what extent do you feel this is the case?

- What, if anything, can get in the way of this?
- Would you say the pilot has increased or decreased child-centred decision making or has it had little impact?

Thinking now about the practical elements of the deferral process. How is the process for requesting deferral different to before the pilot in your LA area? PROBE FOR PROS AND CONS

- What support, if any, have you had to provide to your staff on process changes?

What effect, if any, has this had on workloads for ELC staff and heads?

What support, if any, do you or your staff provide to parents with the practical side of requesting deferral?

Section 5 – Impacts for their practice (10 mins / 50 overall)

Aim: to understand how deferrals and the change in entitlement impact the capacity and operation of settings

We'll now move on to think about how, if at all, the pilot has changed the way of working within your setting.

First of all, in your setting have you experienced an increase in deferrals since the pilot began?

IF YES: And what effect has this had on capacity?

- Were you able to accommodate all requests for places for deferred children?
- Have there been any knock-on effects for younger children applying for places?
- And have there been any staffing challenges?

And has having a greater number of older children in your setting resulted in any changes in practice?

- Any benefits to the setting?
- Any challenges for the setting?
- Have staff required any support around this?

And thinking specifically about the children who deferred, how would you say the extra time in ELC has been for them?

- Benefits?
- Any concerns?

Has there been any impact on your workload as a result of the pilot? (PROBES: Communications for parents & staff / supporting parents; staff training; admin)

How well supported have you felt in implementing the pilot?

- What other training, support or information would you like?

Section 6 – Looking back / Looking forward (10 minutes, 60 overall)

Overall, how do you think the implementation of the pilot has gone? What has gone well? And what have been the main challenges for you?

What, if anything, would you do differently next year?

And what advice would you give to ELC heads in LAs who will be implementing it in the future?

Thinking ahead, do you have any concerns for the future? In what ways you could be supported with this by the LA/Scottish Government?

Wrap up

THANK PARTICIPANTS & STOP RECORDING.

Appendix 4: Additional deferral uptake data

Deferral uptake by pilot local authority area

Figure i: Percentage of children deferred in Year 1 pilot areas (August-December birthdays)

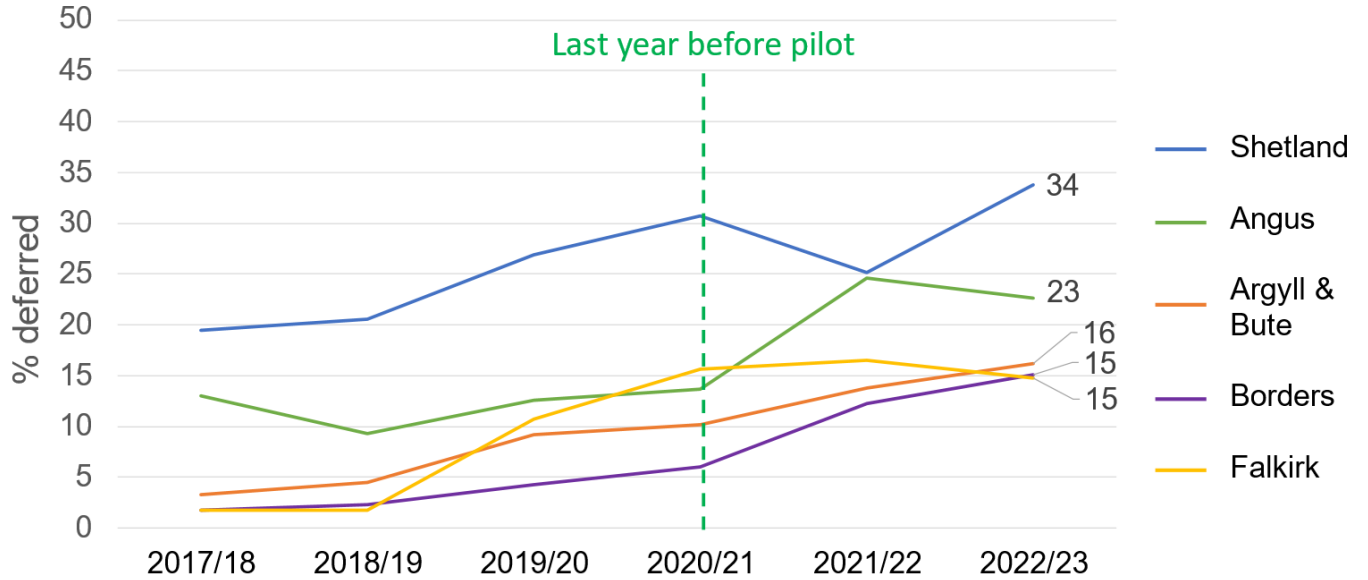


Figure ii: Percentage of children deferred in Year 2 pilot areas (August-December birthdays)

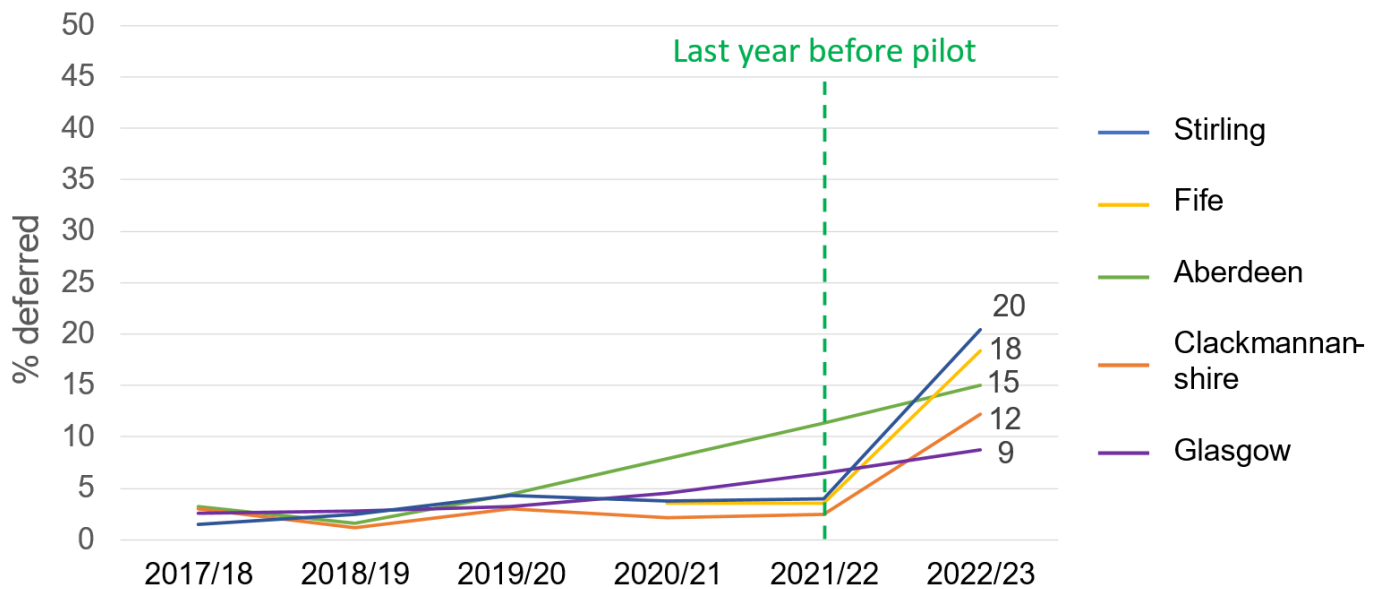


Figure iii: Percentage of children deferred in Year 1 pilot areas (January-February birthdays)

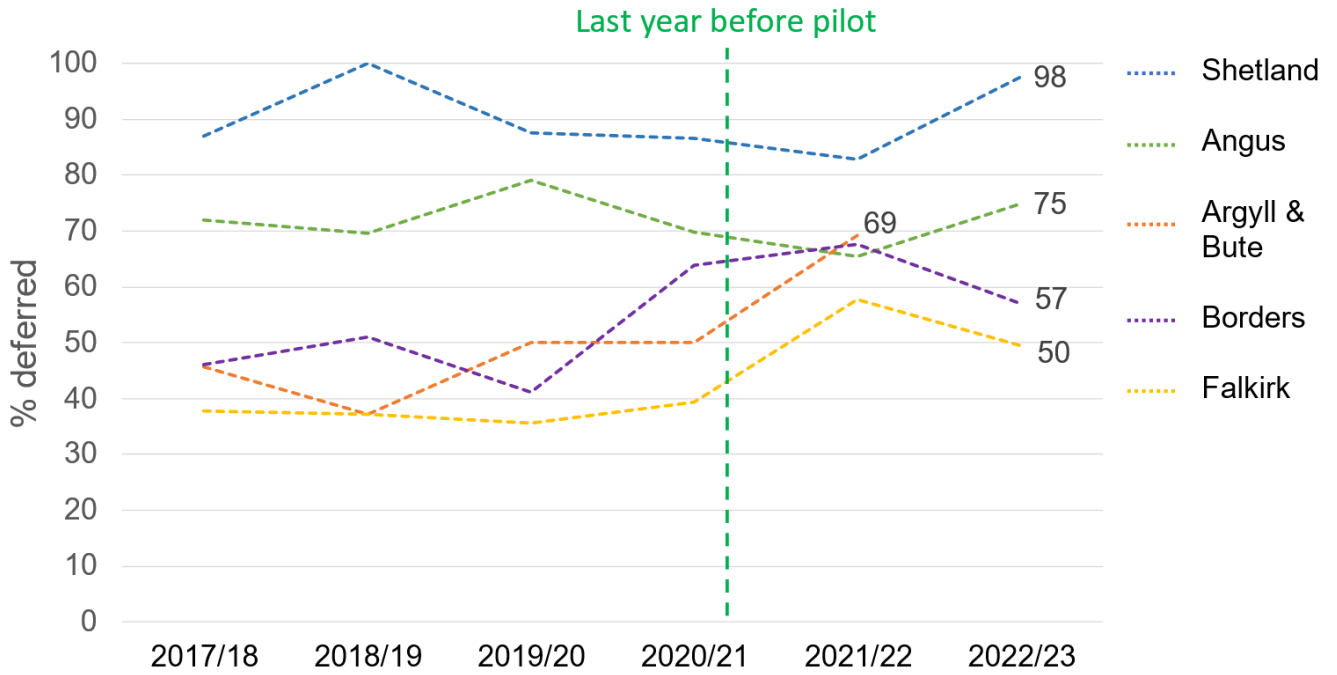
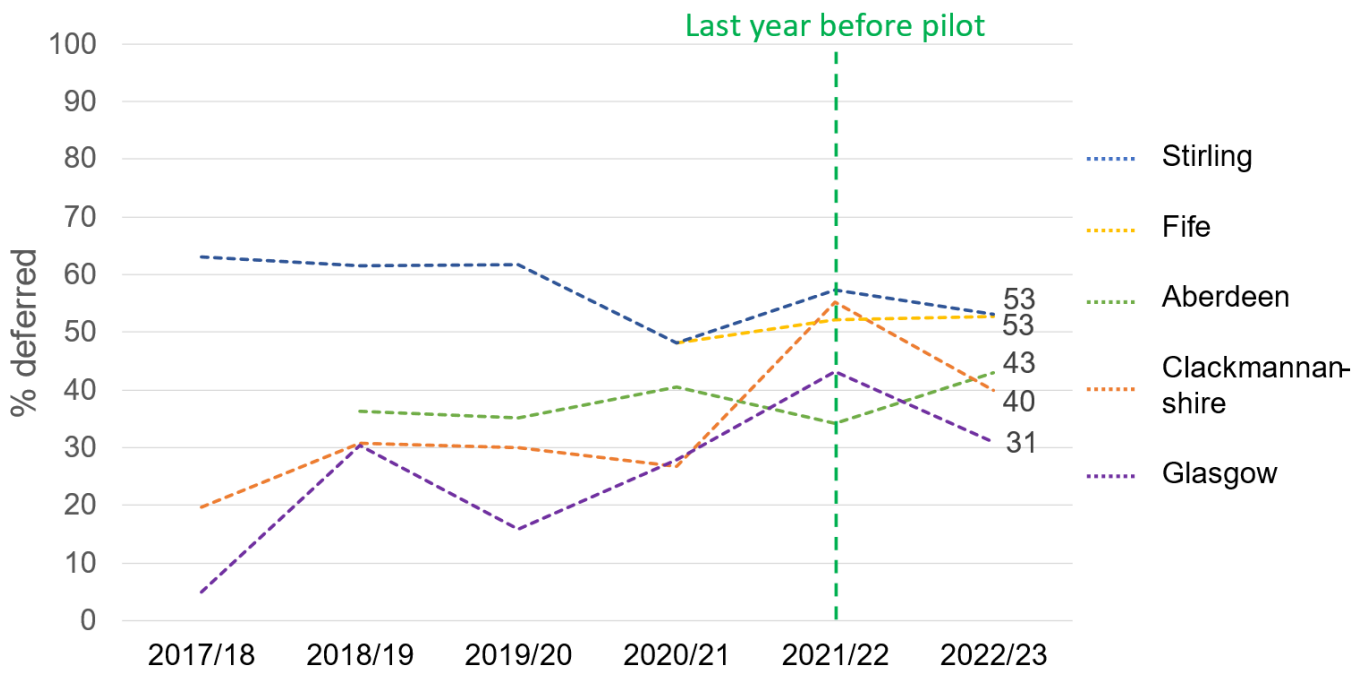


Figure iv: Percentage of children deferred in Year 2 pilot areas (January-February birthdays)



Deferral uptake by SIMD (Scotland wide data)

Figure v. August-December deferrals by deprivation (SIMD quintile) - Scotland (%)

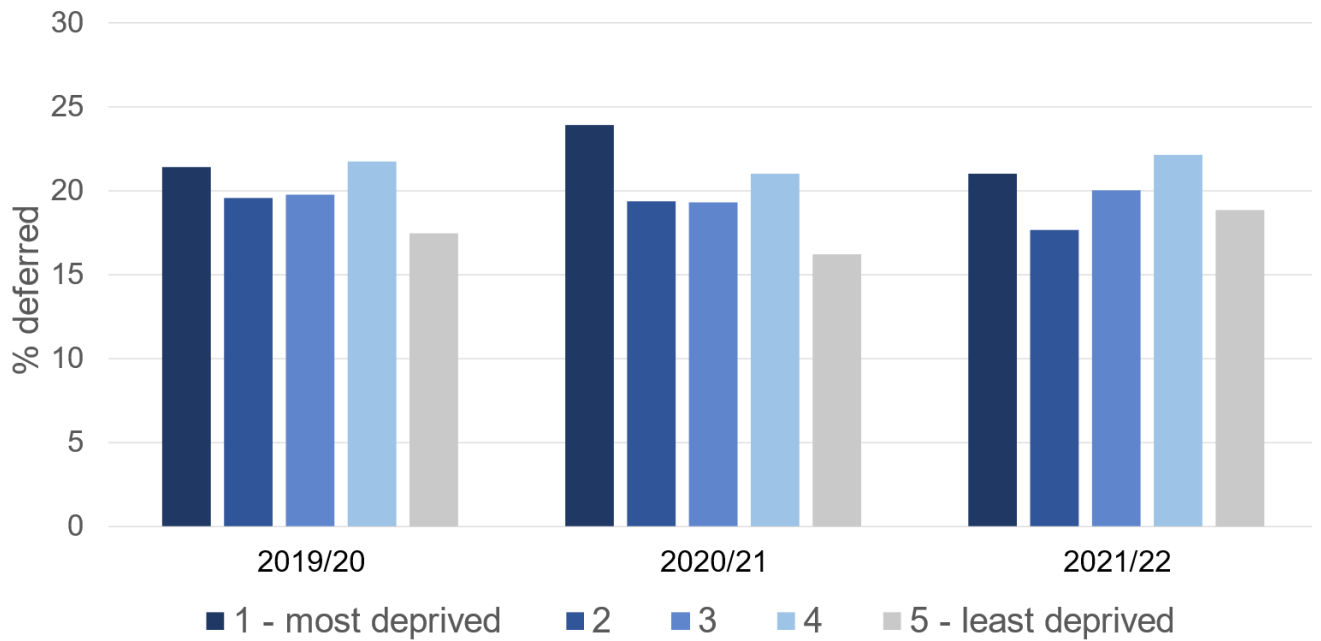
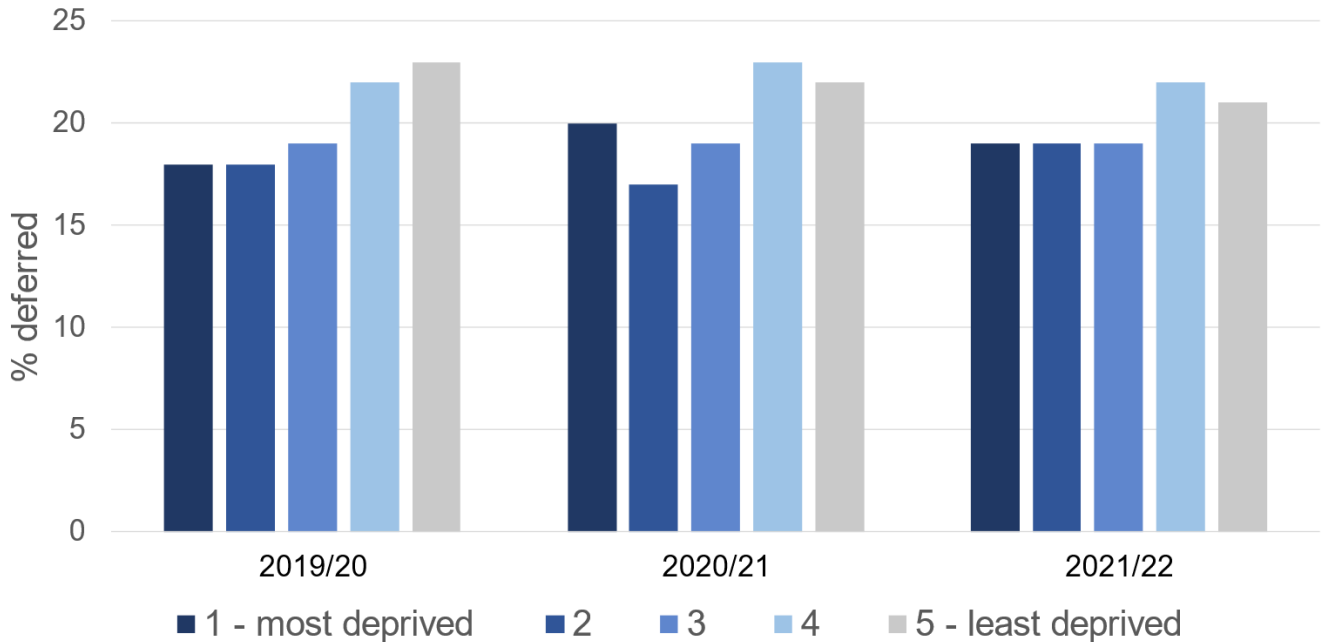


Figure vi. January-February deferrals by deprivation (SIMD quintile) - Scotland (%)



Appendix 5: Logic model

Figure vii: Logic model for the expansion of ELC funding to include children born mid-August-December

INPUTS	OUTPUTS Activities Participation/reach		OUTCOMES / IMPACTS Short-medium term outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scottish Government Funding • Local Authority (LA) staff team - time and training • IT systems & other resources for applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication to LA/ELC staff of the availability of ELC funding to parents / carers considering deferral • Communication of the availability of ELC funding to parents / carers considering deferral • Processing of requests to defer • Provision of support and information for parents requesting deferral • Provision of support for parents in decision making around deferral (from ELC professionals, teachers, LA staff, other professionals supporting the child) • Effective communications with families • Provision of additional ELC funding (for use in ELC funded provider setting) • Provision of additional funded spaces within LA run settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with August-December birthdays • And their parents / carers and families • Particular groups where an increased impact may be seen: children with ASN, children born prematurely, families that struggle to pay childcare costs 	<p>Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deferral request process more straightforward • Awareness of the availability of ELC funding to parents / carers considering deferral increases • LA/ELC staff are well informed about the availability of ELC funding • LA/ELC staff feel able to support parents in their decision making • Parents are able to choose a funded ELC space in a suitable setting <p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more consistent approach to deferral across Scotland • Increase in child-centred decision making • Increase in parental choice • Parents feel supported by ELC/LA staff in their decision making • Financial barrier of additional year of ELC removed or reduced • Reduced stress and concern for parents over their child starting school • Deferral rates become more uniform across Scotland (including by SIMD)
<p>Assumptions: Parents / carers of children who are eligible hear about it and are able to apply; LAs have capacity to provide additional spaces.</p>		<p>Risks/external factors: Further policy developments leading to pressure on spaces in LA settings (e.g. expansion of funded spaces for more 1 and 2 year olds). Increased publicity or promotion leads to an increase larger than LAs have capacity for. Challenge of broader age range in those settings.</p>	



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