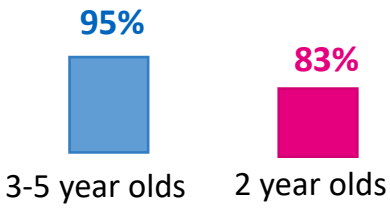
Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare Parent and Carer Research 2025: Key Findings

The Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen) was commissioned by the Scottish Government to provide information on parents' and carers' use, views and experiences of early learning and childcare (ELC), with an emphasis on funded ELC. The research took place in April to June 2025. It consisted of an online survey, which received 7,589 responses from parents and carers who have children yet to start school, and in-depth interviews with 33 parents and carers who completed the survey.

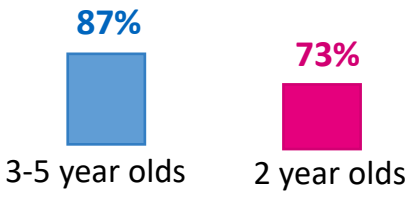
Use of funded ELC

There was high take-up of funded ELC for 3 to 5 year olds and eligible 2 year olds.



Local authority nurseries were the most common type of funded ELC used, followed by private nurseries, for both age groups.

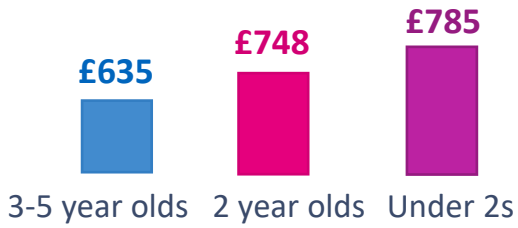
The majority of parents using funded ELC hours were using their full entitlement.



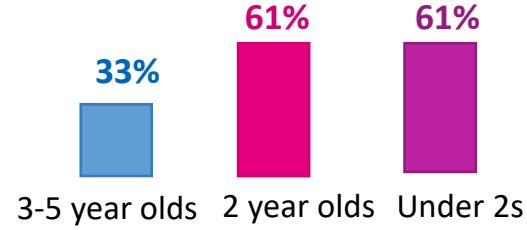
The main reasons parents did not use their full entitlement were related to personal choice. However, some did not use their full entitlement because the ELC settings did not provide enough flexibility in terms of the days or hours on offer to enable them to do so.

Affordability

47% of all parents paid for childcare and spent on average **£726** per month.



42% of parents who paid for childcare had experienced difficulty affording childcare costs in the last year. This was higher for parents with children aged under 3.



For the full report, see: The Expansion of ELC: Parent Research 2025

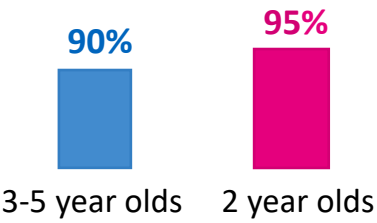
Accessibility

The majority of all parents experienced no problems accessing childcare.

The most commonly reported challenges were: not enough places available locally; a lack of flexibility in choice of opening hours or sessions; and a lack of provision in school holidays.

Flexibility

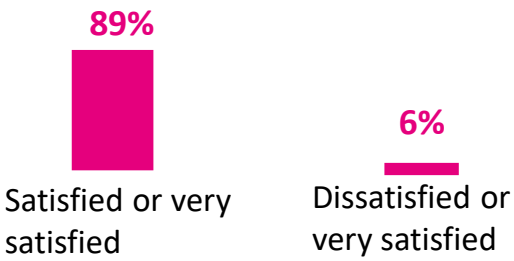
Most parents were satisfied that they had been offered the flexibility to use their funded ELC hours in a way that met their family's needs.



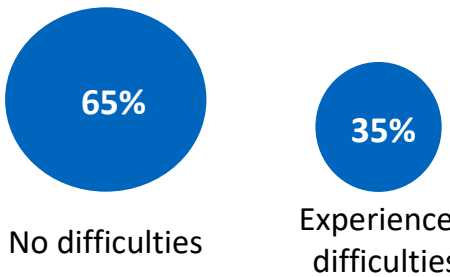
Reasons for dissatisfaction with flexibility included: limited or no choice in the ELC providers they could use locally and hours being insufficient to fit in with work schedules.

Supporting children with additional support needs (ASN)

The majority of parents with children with ASN were satisfied that funded ELC met their child's needs.



The majority of parents with children with ASN experienced no difficulties finding funded ELC that met their child's needs.



The most commonly reported difficulties were: a lack of information on what support was available or how they can access support; low confidence that staff had time to meet their child's needs; and a lack of information on how ELC settings support children with ASN.

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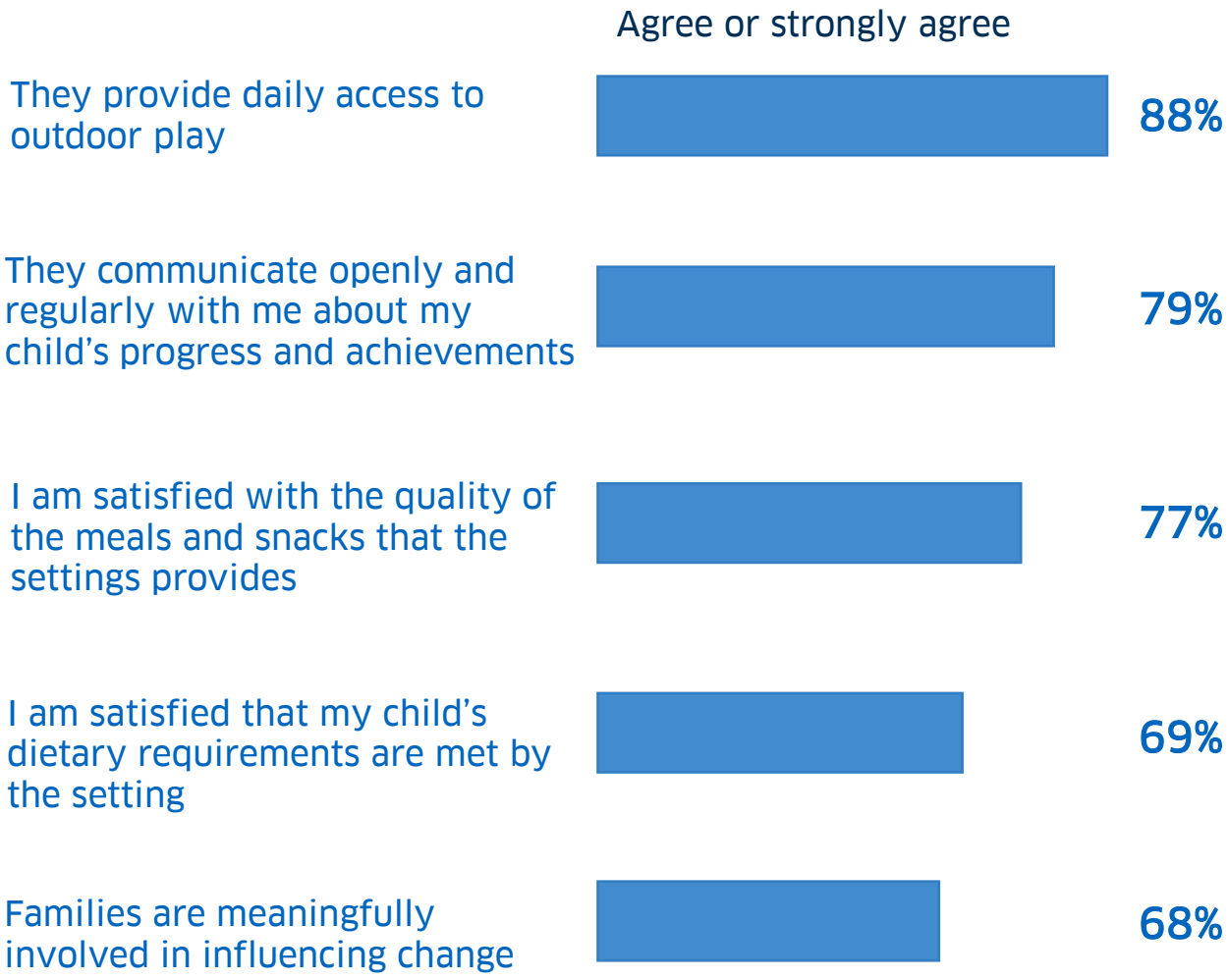
Quality of funded ELC provision

The majority of parents (88%) reported they were satisfied with the overall quality of their main funded ELC provider.

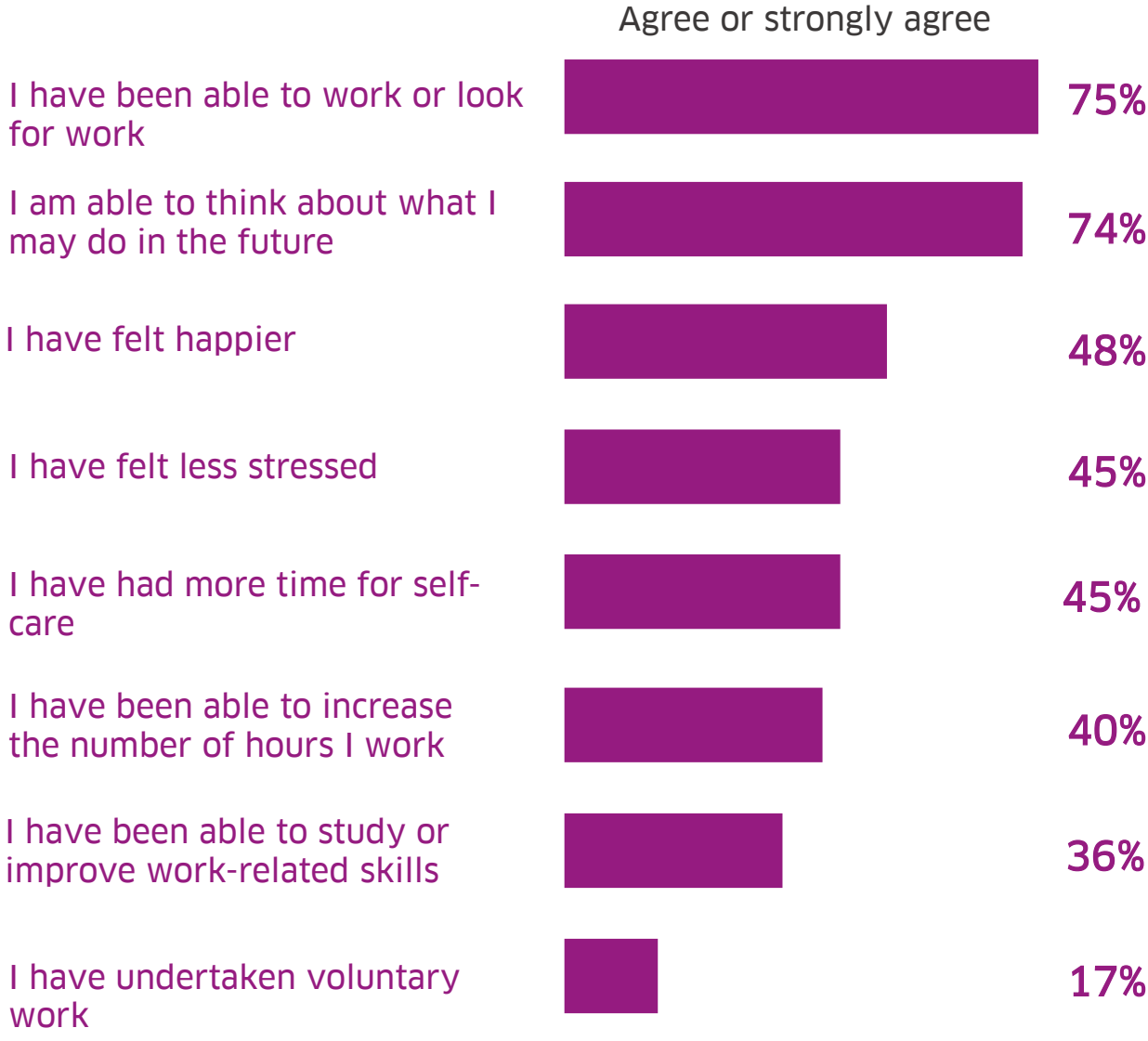


Reasons for being dissatisfied with the quality of their ELC provider included:

- poor quality outdoor facilities
- crowded indoor spaces
- limited staff capacity and facilities to meet children's ASN
- poor and infrequent staff communication
- unhealthy and small meal portion sizes, and minimal staff supervision during mealtimes

Impact of funded ELC provision

Positive impacts of funded ELC on parents:



In interviews parents said funded ELC increased opportunities for children to socialise with peers, learn social skills, develop communication abilities and support children's learning in ways that parents could not always replicate at home.

However, longer ELC hours were sometimes viewed as excessive for younger children or those with ASN, leading to fatigue and behavioural issues.