



Messages for Jersey from the UK and international evidence on optimising early childhood education and childcare (ECEC)

A brief review to inform early years education and childcare policy development.

Jodie Reed and Richard Batcheler
Isos Partnership

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Executive summary

This paper provides a brief overview of some key messages from UK and international evidence on what an optimal early childhood education and childcare (ECEC) offer looks like for children's wellbeing and development. It is intended as a background paper to help inform long-term strategic thinking about the direction of early education and childcare in Jersey, and ensure that short-term decisions and policies are consistent with this vision. It focuses on areas where 'big picture' questions and choices have been identified by Isos Partnership relating to the why, what, when, where, who, and how of ECEC in Jersey.

WHY? – key take-aways on why ECEC matters and navigating the evidence base:

- Participation in ECEC can have **transformative, positive effects** on young children.
- Countries that spend more on ECEC tend to have the highest performing systems and deliver better outcomes, although more **spending alone will not guarantee this**.
- The multiple factors that interact to shape ECEC systems, and children's experiences of ECEC, mean there is a lot of ambiguity in the messages from international evidence about what works, and **no single, replicable recipe for success**.
- Aspects of international evidence and experience of other ECEC systems nevertheless **can inform policy thinking in Jersey**, taking into account complexity and differences in context.
- It is also important to think about **ECEC reform in the context of a child's home environment (which has a powerful and consistent influence on children's outcomes) and the broader context**. It does not offer a 'silver bullet' – any reforms need to be considered as part of wider systems of support for families.

WHAT? – key take-aways on good-quality ECEC:

- The benefits to children's outcomes from **high-quality ECEC** are significant. Conversely, expanding ECEC without attending to quality could be detrimental to outcomes.
- The growing literature on what 'quality' looks like focuses on **children's experiences and interactions within settings**.
- This underlines the importance of all **ECEC professionals in Jersey having the skills, capacity and sensitivity required to, for example, scaffold child-led learning**. In Jersey, therefore, setting the conditions for this to be in place should be a key consideration in all ECEC training and curriculum policy, but also more widely in relation to ECEC funding and infrastructure reform.
- **Stable relationships with skilled and emotionally attuned adults for children under three** are particularly critical. So, in Jersey, reducing staff turnover and ensuring a non-stressful environment seem particularly vital in settings that cater to the youngest children.
- Assuming ECEC participation continues to be high (or grows) amongst younger children in Jersey, **a re-balance of funding to better support quality for under threes** could be considered, reflecting distribution in the highest performing systems.

WHEN? – key take-aways on ECEC entitlements and amount by age and hours:

- At 32 weeks, Jersey's paid parental allowance is longer than that of most other countries, with pay likely to be broadly in line with averages, although more generous than the UK.
- The decision to **extend job protected leave to 52 weeks in Jersey is in keeping with evidence** on child development, which suggests that, beyond six months, parents are likely to be best placed to judge when is best to return according to their child's and family's needs.
- Given this, there is also **a case for extending paid parental leave beyond the first 32 weeks for lower income families on an equity basis** – i.e. to ensure choices about when to return to work within the first year are less likely to be driven by financial need.
- Jersey's universal free entitlement offer is comparable to other European offers in terms of the focus on three- and four-year-olds, and a gap in entitlement to provision for younger children, although some countries provide a more significant offer (including for two-year-olds from low-income families in the UK).
- **Increasing ECEC entitlements/financial support for families with children aged from six months to two years old in Jersey would have the potential** to support positive child development, although **only if it is secured through age-appropriate good-quality provision**.
- The **clearest evidence of the beneficial impacts of formal ECEC are for three- and four-year-olds**, with greater benefits linked to an increase in exposure (until to very high usage). So Jersey's **decision to extend the entitlement for three- and four-year-olds from 20 to 30 hours is well supported** and is likely to deliver better future outcomes for children (although this may be mediated by other factors).
- From a child development perspective, there is a **strong argument for Jersey to aim to achieve 100% take-up amongst the three to four age group**. One option could be to explore making participation for this age group compulsory, as a number of other European countries have.
- Given some risks highlighted in the evidence, it would be **worth understanding the extent to which very long hours of participation in group care** (more than 35 per week) are a feature for Jersey families – and if so who uses this, where do they access it and what are its impacts.

WHO? – Key take-aways for Jersey on ECEC and disadvantage:

- Relatively low use of formal ECEC reported amongst economically disadvantaged families in Jersey is not surprising in light of similar trends in other countries in Europe and beyond.
- **Disadvantaged children tend to benefit more significantly from high-quality ECEC**, so from a child-development equity perspective, there is a strong case for addressing this, prioritising policies that seek to increase ECEC participation amongst economically disadvantaged groups.
- International experience suggests that **rolling out universal entitlements is likely to be the most effective means of achieving higher participation of economically disadvantaged groups**. On this basis, there is an argument for Jersey to continue to pursue the previously proposed extension of the universal free entitlement to all two-year-olds if this is practicable.
- The experience of the targeted offer for two-year-olds in England suggests that any expansion through a **targeted offer for the most disadvantaged children would need to be planned carefully and supported with extensive outreach** work to secure good take-up.

- It also shows that **targeted entitlements can be more successful with families who have children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**, endorsing the decision to extend them to families with two-year-olds with SEND in Jersey.

WHERE? – Key take-aways for Jersey on informal care, and maintained and private/voluntary ECEC

- Care from friends or relatives is commonly relied upon by working families around the world, especially those with the youngest children and those who live in countries that do not offer comprehensive access to free/cheap formal ECEC. It is naturally a strong feature in Jersey, given the high level of female employment.
- Impacts of informal care vary greatly by who the carer is and their circumstances. However, **higher use of informal care is associated with good vocabulary but also greater likelihood of a range of social and emotional difficulties** developing than formal care. Formal group care is more associated with conduct issues. Packages of care incorporating formal and informal care can be complementary.
- Thus, in Jersey there is a **case for a more proactive approach to protecting children from the risks of high use of informal care (but not seeking to stop it)** – e.g. discouraging exclusive use of informal care (especially for three- to four-year-olds) and targeting support to informal carers with less capacity to provide strong home learning environments (potentially harnessing formal ECEC to do this).
- Jersey's mixed ECEC market, which includes school providers and a significant private and voluntary sector delivering state-funded entitlements and parent paid ECEC, is comparable to the UK.
- It is **not clear that school and maintained settings are intrinsically better for child development than private and voluntary settings – or vice versa**. What happens in the setting, and who attends it, are more important than how the setting is owned/funded.
- Experience in England suggests that curriculum and accountability may have helped to level differences in standards, but that **private and voluntary settings serving disadvantaged communities are likely to require significantly more support to offer a quality service**.
- **Jersey might therefore consider introducing an Early Years Pupil Premium model** to correct this, and/or **harnessing in-kind support from state maintained settings** to build capacity in private and voluntary settings that serve highly disadvantaged communities.
- An alternative would be to develop state maintained/schools provision to better meet the needs of these communities and become the dominant providers (although consideration would need to be given to the impacts of closing settings in certain locations, especially in rural areas).

HOW? – key take-aways for Jersey on structural inputs for quality ECEC:

- While changes around spending, qualifications, and ratios are often considered to set preconditions for positive experiences and interactions for children within ECEC settings, **structural inputs do not guarantee either process quality or strong outcomes for children**.
- The balance of evidence shows that **qualifications and training are connected to better outcomes for children**. Graduate leadership in particular is widely valued across countries.

- **However, whilst investment in graduates can deliver better outcomes, at a population-wide level this has not been evident in England.** This may be to do with the people who train, whether they stay, the environments they work in or how the system judges quality. What early years professionals do matters, but this cannot be readily measured by qualifications.
- For Jersey, this again points more towards **prioritising building professional capacity and ensuring a stable, valued and highly skilled workforce, including optimising professional development, instead of or alongside any graduate drive.**
- **Higher staff-to-child ratios support child-staff relationships across different types of ECEC settings, and are particularly important for the under-threes – but there are no set ‘golden rules’.** This suggests there is value to protecting current ratios in Jersey, whilst also being sufficiently flexible to accommodate small changes where there is a case to do this in order to improve capacity to deliver a quality offer.
- There is strong evidence that **structures that support the effective integration of ECEC and wider early years services – and especially ECEC and schools – support better outcomes for children.** The case for developing this through the ‘community schools’ in Jersey is strong.

Contents

1.	INTRODUCTION	7
2.	WHY: NAVIGATING THE INTERNATIONAL ECEC EVIDENCE	9
3.	WHAT: DEFINING 'QUALITY'	14
4.	WHEN: THE AMOUNT OF ECEC BY AGE AND HOURS	17
5.	WHO: WHO STANDS TO BENEFIT MOST FROM ECEC?	24
6.	WHERE: INFORMAL CARE, STATE AND PRIVATE AND VOLUNTARY ECEC	27
7.	HOW: STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF QUALITY	33

1. Introduction

Aims

This paper provides a brief overview of some of the key messages from UK/international evidence on what an optimal early childhood education and childcare (ECEC) offer looks like in terms of children's wellbeing and development. It is intended as a background paper to inform long-term strategic thinking about the direction for ECEC in Jersey, and ensure that short-term decisions and policies can be developed consistently with this vision.

Background and structure

In autumn 2022, Isos Partnership were invited by the Government of Jersey (GoJ) to work with partners across the ECEC sector to develop a robust, tangible and widely supported set of proposals for the future development of ECEC for children aged 0 to five in Jersey. These aim to advance long-term ambitions for a system of provision which is high quality, sustainable and meets the needs of families. The focus of this work is, in particular, Jersey's early years system architecture. In our initial 'discovery phase', key stakeholders from GoJ and Jersey's early years system shared concerns relating to five significant and pressing implementation challenges facing Jersey's early years system. These are set out in our previous paper and can be summarised as: workforce recruitment and retention; costs and sustainability of private and not-for-profit providers; capacity and utilisation within school nurseries; informal childcare and financial support to parents; and trust and collaboration across the sector.

GoJ colleagues have since highlighted the need to ensure any new solutions are developed within the context of a clear, long-term vision and up-to-date understanding of messages from UK and international evidence on what kind of ECEC offer would deliver the best possible outcomes for children in Jersey. We have sought to summarise key messages from the research on what makes good-quality ECEC, including reproducing diagrams from a range of existing reports. We set out some considerations on navigation of the international evidence (p9) and then focus on areas where 'big picture' questions/choices have arisen through our conversations. Specifically, these relate to:

- 1. WHAT: defining 'quality' ECEC and understanding its effects.** This relates to all thinking about ECEC system design and reform, and appreciation of the day-to-day experiences of young children within ECEC settings. (p14)
- 2. WHEN: the benefits and risks of the amount of care for young children by age and intensity (number of hours).** This relates to questions about whether Jersey's free early years entitlement should in future be extended to all two-year-olds (as budget 2022 discussions proposed) or whether alternatives should be considered. It also relates to future aspirations around one-year-olds and whether the (recently

extended) parental leave offer should be strengthened to better incentivise/support parents to stay at home during this period and/or whether further support and investment should be put into creating more high-quality formal childcare. (p17)

3. **WHO: what the evidence tells us about who stands to benefit most from early childhood education and care.** For policy, this relates to decisions about the relative balance of targeted and universal ECEC offers in Jersey, and the role of ECEC systems in achieving equity. (p25)
4. **WHERE: relative strengths of schools compared with private and voluntary settings and informal care.** This relates to the desired future shape and role of Jersey's early years private and voluntary market; whether its continued growth should be supported and promoted or consolidated; and how strongly growth in provision of early years places in schools should be prioritised. It also relates to the extent to which GoJ should try to support or disincentivise informal care. (p27)
5. **HOW: other 'structural' determinants of quality and what factors within a setting can make a real difference to children's outcomes.** This relates to strategic questions about whether ratios could or should be flexed to address need and capacity, the role of graduates, training and professional development, the role of public expenditure in promoting quality, and the case for a more integrated offer provided through or with community schools or family hubs, including childcare and other types of support for families. (p33)

In orange boxes at the end of each section, we draw out summary messages for Jersey.

Our focus throughout the paper is on evidence about the kind of provision that has most positive impacts on children's wellbeing and developmental outcomes (a 'quality' offer). We are of course conscious that a government strategy based on an ideal for child development in isolation from the realities of Jersey's early years workforce, the childcare market, the funding available and the choices and preferences of Jersey's families would not be useful. We are also aware that improving child wellbeing and outcomes sits alongside wider objectives for ECEC, such as supporting working families.

We have also not drawn significant distinctions between child development measures typically associated with 'school readiness' and more general child development and wellbeing outcomes. All indicators of positive development are counted. This is because, over time, the evidence base has demonstrated how tightly interrelated and mutually reinforcing different realms of child development are. For example, a child who develops well in terms of early social and emotional skills, but scores poorly in early cognitive ability or vocabulary, will be more likely to develop behavioural issues in school and poorer life outcomes on leaving. This has been written about widely.¹

¹ E.g. [Shuey et al 2018](#)

2. WHY: Navigating the international ECEC evidence

A long-standing evidence base shows that ECEC can have transformative, positive effects on young children. Evidence from the UK and elsewhere has shown that ECEC can support young children's development, with life-long positive effects. Whilst not as influential as the home environment, in the UK, pre-school experience has been found to enhance children's all-round development, with high-quality provision combined with longer duration having the strongest effect.² Long-running studies in the US (dating back to the 1960s) have demonstrated the long-term effects of high-quality pre-school education, finding better high school education outcomes and better rates of employment at age 40.³ More recently, analysis across 57 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries found that children who attended early years education for at least two years performed better than others at 15, accounting for socio-economic profile.⁴

Countries which spend a higher proportion of public expenditure on early childhood in general appear to provide higher performing ECEC systems. OECD countries spend on average just over 0.7% of GDP on early childhood education and care (or US\$5,500 per child based on 2017 analysis), with large variations across countries. Scandinavian systems are the highest spending, alongside France and New Zealand (see Figure 1). The UK ranks at the mid/lower end of the table and the US towards the bottom. ECEC systems in many higher spending countries – in particular those in Scandinavia – have a reputation for ECEC offers that lead the way in terms of what researchers have identified as effective practice in terms of curricula and pedagogy, and entitlements.

Few studies compare early childhood outcomes across countries, but those that do also tend to find a link between higher spending on ECEC and more positive child development. Figure 2 shows the effects of participating in ECEC on students' academic achievement (reading scores) at 15 after controlling for socio-economic status. Participation in ECEC in France, Denmark and Finland (all higher spending systems) is clearly related to positive outcomes at 15.

² [EPPE 2004](#)

³ [Perry Preschool Study](#)

⁴ [OECD 2017](#)

Figure 1: Public expenditure on childcare (under-threes) and pre-primary education (over-threes) and total public expenditure on early childhood education and care, as a % of GDP, 2017⁵

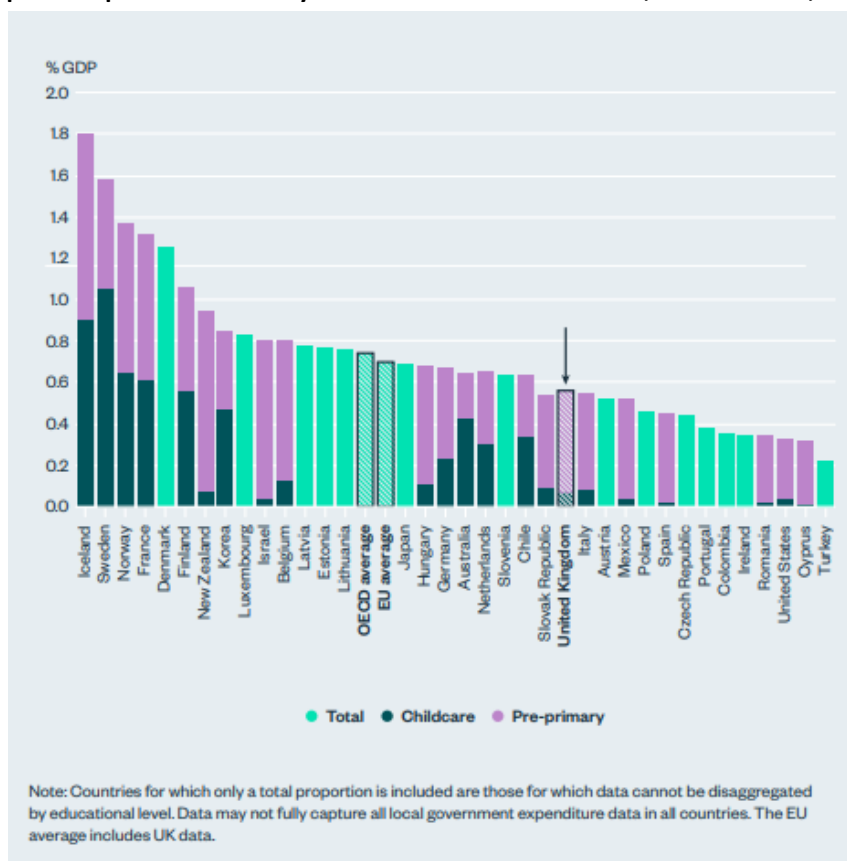
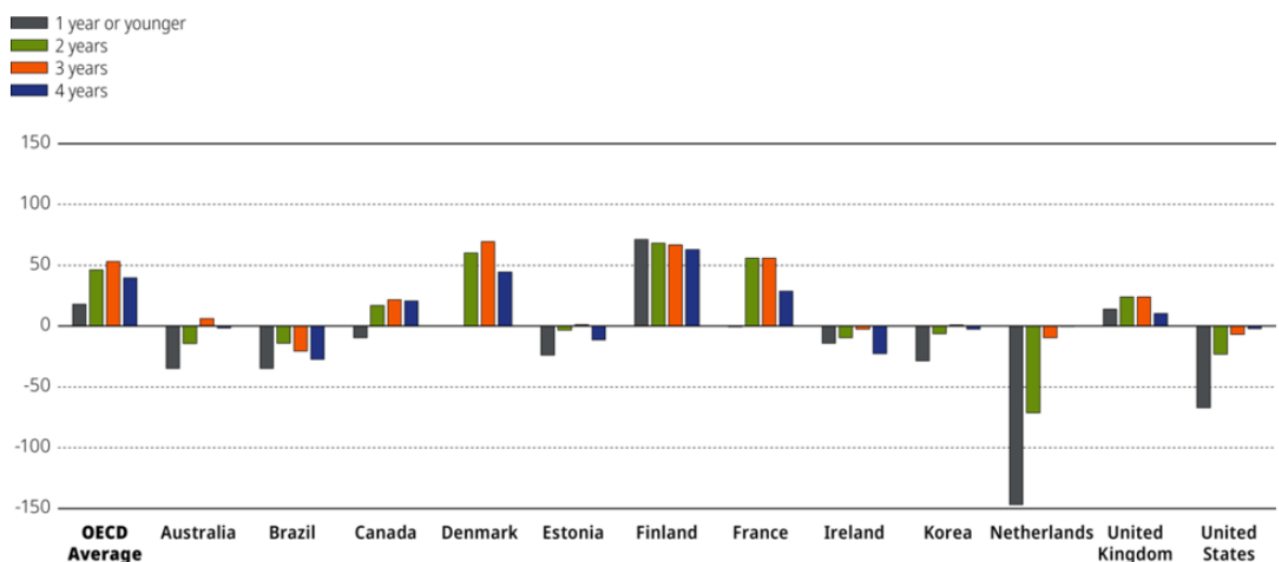


Figure 2: Relationship between age of participation in early childhood education programmes and students' reading scores at age 15 across countries, controlling for socio-economic status, 2018⁶



⁵ Diagram reproduced from: [OECD 2018](#)

⁶ Chart reproduced from: [IELS 2020](#)

However, the correlation between spending and high performance is not absolute. For example, some high-spending ECEC systems outside Scandinavia have come under criticism for patchy and varied offers, or provision which focuses too much on facilitating ‘return to work’ policies at the expense of quality and children’s outcomes. Notably, France’s high spending has not been matched by sufficient provision of places – formal childcare provision is reported to be available for only half of eligible children, and there is relatively little centre-based provision.⁷ And recently Luxemburg, another of the highest investors in ECEC, with a significant free offer and extremely high participation rates, was criticised by the OECD, which found “an array of unevenly resourced services, leading to uneven quality beyond minimum requirements”.⁸ The notably negative relationship between participation in ECEC in the Netherlands and reading scores at 15 is also notable, despite Netherlands being a mid-rank spender. This leads to questions about the value of investing early where the quality of education is not sustained at school age.

Correlations between ECEC inputs and children’s outcomes also depend on what we are measuring. An in-depth study, which assessed 7,000 children across England, the US and Estonia across a variety of developmental outcomes, found that children in Estonia (the highest spending of the three) demonstrated the most well-rounded balance of skills, including early empathy and pro-social skills, and that children in Estonia had the smallest differences in outcomes amongst children based on their socio-economic backgrounds. However, they did not perform as well on some social and emotional measures as children in either of the other two countries, and were outperformed by English children in relation to emergent numeracy.⁹

Yet whilst it is possible to identify certain system flaws and strengths, the complexity and diversity of ECEC systems, and children’s lives, suggest a need to avoid seeking a single model or recipe for ECEC success from international research. Researchers have increasingly highlighted the array of interrelating influences and contextual factors that shape and mediate how children experience and benefit from ECEC. This means that what works in one country, or one context, may not be effective in another. The design and reform of ECEC systems need to take account of at least five types of consideration (see **Figure 3**):

- **the specific needs of children** (the ‘*who*’) – as individuals, such as for a child with special educational needs and disabilities, as population subgroups, and in relation to home learning environment and the care children receive from their parents (the home environment has been proved to have a powerful and consistent influence on children’s outcomes, including the home learning environment, the quality of the parent/child relationship and parental limit setting)¹⁰

⁷ [RAND, 2022](#)

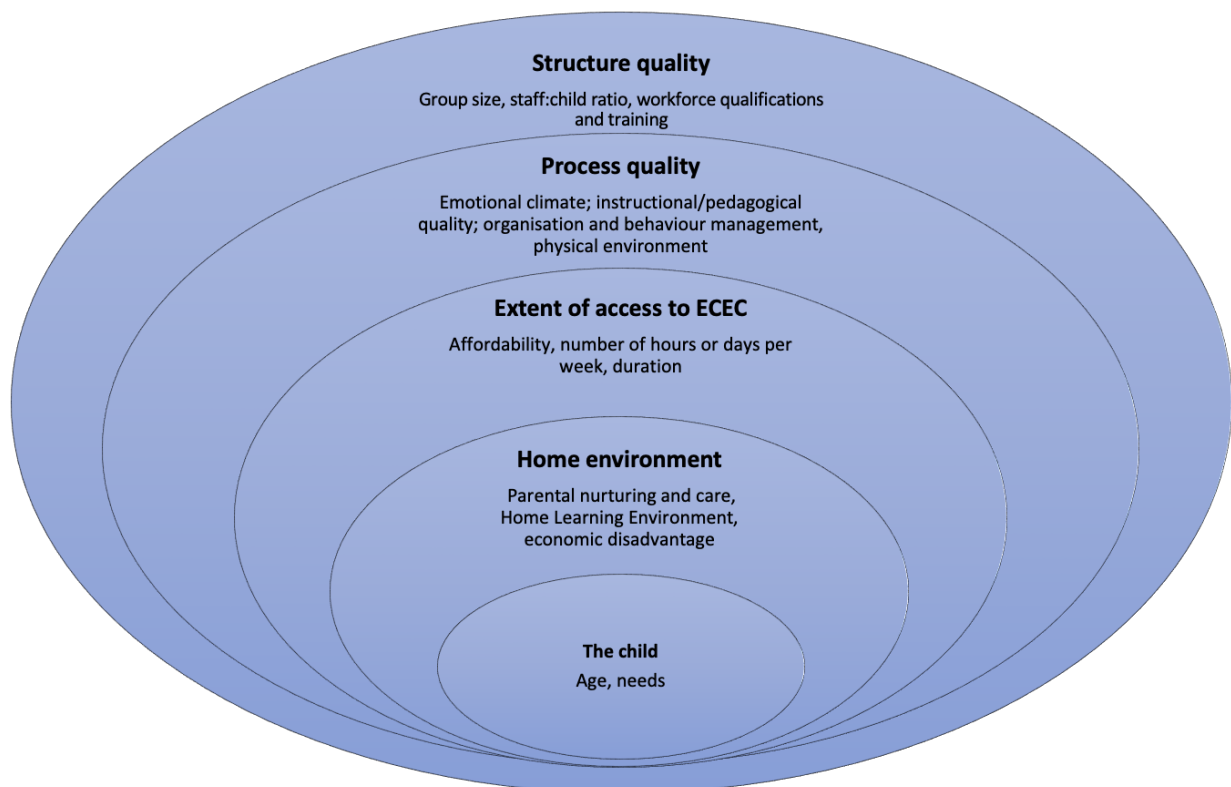
⁸ [OECD 2022](#)

⁹ [OECD 2020](#)

¹⁰ For example [Melhuish et al, 2021](#)

- **access to and use of ECEC** (the ‘*when*’) – the starting age of ECEC as well as the intensity (number of hours) in settings, with related questions of affordability and parental demand
- **process quality** (the ‘*what*’) – understanding the day-to-day experiences of young children in ECEC settings, including questions of pedagogy and emotional wellbeing
- **structural quality** (the ‘*how*’) – understanding the structural factors, such as the ECEC workforce and public investment in services, that combine to shape process quality.

Figure 3: Conceptualising factors affecting the children’s experience of ECEC – Isos Partnership summary



The ‘levelling up’ of provision in countries such as England has helped shine a light on the importance of context. For example, whilst experimental studies demonstrate a strong and clear correlation between graduate leadership and quality outcomes, and individual studies suggest that investment in new graduates has been effective,¹¹ these changes and others have not delivered the scale of benefits to children’s outcomes one might have expected at a population level. Researchers have reflected that this may be to do with the types of people who become graduates in this context, the extent to which progression opportunities have kept them in the system, the way the English system judges or measures ‘quality’, or other factors that have an impact on the lives and outcomes of this generation of children.¹²

¹¹ [Mathers et al, 2010](#)

¹² [Blanden et al 2017](#)

Key take-aways for Jersey on navigating the evidence base:

- Participation in ECEC can have **transformative, positive effects** on young children.
- Countries that spend more on ECEC tend to have the highest-performing systems and deliver better outcomes, although more **spending alone will not guarantee this**.
- The multiple factors that interact to shape ECEC systems, and children's experiences of ECEC, mean there is a lot of ambiguity in the messages from international evidence about what works, and **no single, replicable 'recipe for success'**.
- Aspects of international evidence and experience of other ECEC systems nevertheless **can inform policy thinking in Jersey**, taking into account complexity and context differences.
- It is also important to think about **ECEC reform in the context of a child's home environment (which has a powerful and consistent influence on children's outcomes) and the broader context**. It does not offer a 'silver bullet' – any reforms need to be considered as part of a wider system of support for families.

3. WHAT: defining ‘quality’

>> *Jersey context: Across our November interviews in Jersey, a cross-cutting theme was whether the expansion of ECEC, if it could be achieved, would lead to better wellbeing and outcomes for children. Or whether, to take a more neutral approach, or even actively support/encourage more home-based parental care. A reoccurring message across the research is that benefits are maximised and trade-offs mitigated where the ECEC provided is of ‘quality’. So, what is quality? <<*

The role of quality within ECEC systems

Given that most children already access some ECEC, **experts increasingly argue that expanding access to ECEC without attending to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children.**¹³ Indeed, there is evidence that some low-quality ECEC settings may damage children’s outcomes and subsequent prospects.¹⁴

Recent evidence from England and the rest of the UK on the effect of quality includes:

- Attending higher-quality ECEC in nursery classes, nursery schools or playgroups between the ages of two and four was associated with better academic results at Key Stage 1.¹⁵
- Children in higher-quality ECEC settings showed more independence and less anti-social/worried behaviour by the time they entered primary school.¹⁶
- However, research looking at the longer-term effects of quality found that the quality of provision had little or no effect on GCSE qualifications, unless it was very high.¹⁷

What is high quality in ECEC?

Whilst a lot of focus has been on structural factors that influence quality (ratios, funding, qualification levels), at the heart of quality ECEC is the day-to-day experiences of young children. In the literature, this is often referred to as ‘process quality’. Good and effective ECEC settings have high levels of process quality that are characterised by:

- warm, interactive relationships with children
- caring for children’s regular needs (toileting, food, rests)
- strong staff knowledge of the curriculum and how children learn
- encouraging high levels of parental engagement in children’s learning.¹⁸

¹³ E.g. [Siraj et al. 2018](#)

¹⁴ [Shuey and Kankaras 2018](#)

¹⁵ [SEED 2021](#) (England only)

¹⁶ [EPPE 2004](#)

¹⁷ [EPPSE 2017](#)

¹⁸ [Archer and Oppenheim 2021](#)

There is an increasing body of evidence – informed by experienced practitioners – that is helping to define key features of process quality in terms of effective pedagogical practice. Over the years, country studies such as EPPE (2004) have identified many clear features of quality practice. However, academics have traditionally used a wide variety of metrics to make judgements in this area,¹⁹ making universal markers of process quality difficult to specifically isolate. More recent analysis of ECEC staff judgements across countries using the same ‘situational judgement questions’ has found a high level of agreement on best practices. Key factors of effective practice were summarised as: supporting child-directed play by following the children’s lead; managing conflicts through behavioural management and directing children’s attention to the classroom rules; and supporting pro-social behaviour by encouraging sharing and collaboration among children.²⁰ Guidance for early years leaders and professionals is also increasingly clear and practicable in the UK, such as recent publications on turning the principles of good ECEC into practice and putting the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum into practice.²¹

Historically there has been considerably less attention to and understanding of the specific features of high quality provision for the under-threes, but consensus on the need for highly skilled, specialised practice has grown. The importance of responsive care and emotionally attuned relationships in the very earliest months and years has long been well understood and backed up by a wealth of research on attachment, and more recently neuroscience.²² In recent years, a consensus has emerged that, to reflect this, pedagogy for children under three needs to be specialised and different from provision for older children. Indeed, academic measures of quality now differentiate between the under-threes and the over-threes, with the latter focusing more on educational aspects of provision.²³ The growing international evidence base on quality for the very youngest children places a comparatively strong emphasis on stable relationships, sensitive and attuned adults, routines and play that allow children to interact and take the lead in their own learning, environments that are not stressful from a child’s perspective, and staff working holistically together.²⁴ Having stable staff teams with the necessary knowledge and capabilities, supported by strong leaders, has been highlighted as essential in enabling settings to deliver this.²⁵

It is notable that countries with higher funded, high-performing ECEC systems are also more likely to spread their funding evenly across the under-three and over-three age ranges,

¹⁹ For example, [SEED 2018](#) utilises four different scales to measure quality: 1. The Sustained Sharing Thinking and Emotional Well-being scale (SSTEW), 2. The Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R), 3. The Early Childhood Environment Scale, 4. The Extension to the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-E).

²⁰ [Nilson et al. 2020](#)

²¹ [Grenier 2021a](#), [Grenier 2021b](#)

²² Royal Foundation 2021

²³ [SEED 2018](#)

²⁴ Dalli et al 2011

²⁵ [Mathers et al. 2014](#)

potentially creating a greater likelihood of meeting these conditions. This is illustrated in **Figure 1** above.

Key take-aways for Jersey on good-quality ECEC:

- The benefits to children's outcomes from **high-quality ECEC** are significant. Conversely, expanding ECEC without attending to quality could be detrimental to outcomes.
- The growing literature on what 'quality' looks like focuses on **children's experiences and interactions within settings**.
- This underlines the importance of all **ECEC professionals in Jersey having the skills, capacity and sensitivity required to, for example, scaffold child-led learning**. This suggests that in Jersey setting the conditions for this should be a key consideration in all ECEC training and curriculum policy, but also more widely in relation to ECEC funding and infrastructure reform.
- **Stable relationships with skilled and emotionally attuned adults for children under three** are particularly critical. So, in Jersey reducing staff turnover and ensuring a non-stressful environment seem particularly vital in relation to settings that cater to the youngest children.
- Assuming ECEC participation continues to be high (or grows) amongst younger children in Jersey, **a re-balance of funding to better support quality for under threes** could be considered, reflecting distribution in the most high-performing systems.

4. WHEN: the amount of ECEC by age and hours

>> The Jersey context: In Jersey families are entitled to 32 weeks' paid leave on the birth of a child, exchangeable between mothers and fathers, and protected unpaid leave was recently extended to a year. Jersey's early years entitlement for children aged three and four is long established, and was recently increased from 20 to 30 hours in term-time. It is taken up by 90% of the eligible population. A decision has also been taken to extend the free entitlement to some two-year-olds. The question of 'where next?' for these entitlements remains live. Should Jersey's parental leave offer be strengthened further? In terms of the early years entitlement, should priority be given to building a universal offer for two-year-olds, extending further down the age range, or changing the format of the current offer? <<

What other countries do

On average, across European countries, mothers are entitled to 22 weeks of paid maternity leave around childbirth (or nearly 4.5 months). The majority provide payments that replace over 50% of previous earnings, with a significant number of countries offering a mother on average earnings full compensation across maternity leave – see **Figure 4** below from analysis of the OECD Family Database. Most also offer some paid leave for fathers, although the amount differs significantly – across Europe and the OECD, 12 countries offer three months or more of paid leave just for fathers. The UK is relatively generous in terms of the amount of paid maternity leave it provides, with elements extendable to nine months. But, alongside Ireland, the rates paid to mothers in the UK are amongst the poorest in the OECD. Paternity leave is also limited. The US is the only OECD country with no national leave entitlement.²⁶

Most countries in Europe provide some form of entitlement to ECEC, with entitlements expanding over time. There are currently two approaches to providing universal access to ECEC: some countries provide a **legal entitlement** to an ECEC place, while others make ECEC attendance **compulsory**. Since 2014/15, eight countries have introduced compulsory ECEC for one year prior to starting primary education²⁷ and three countries have made compulsory attendance longer than one year.²⁸ Several countries have introduced or extended legal entitlements to ECEC.²⁹ Few countries in Europe do not guarantee an ECEC place.³⁰ **Figure 5**, below, shows the presence of universal entitlements and compulsory ECEC across European countries by age (as of 2018/19).

²⁶ [OECD, 2022](#)

²⁷ Belgium, Czechia, Croatia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden.

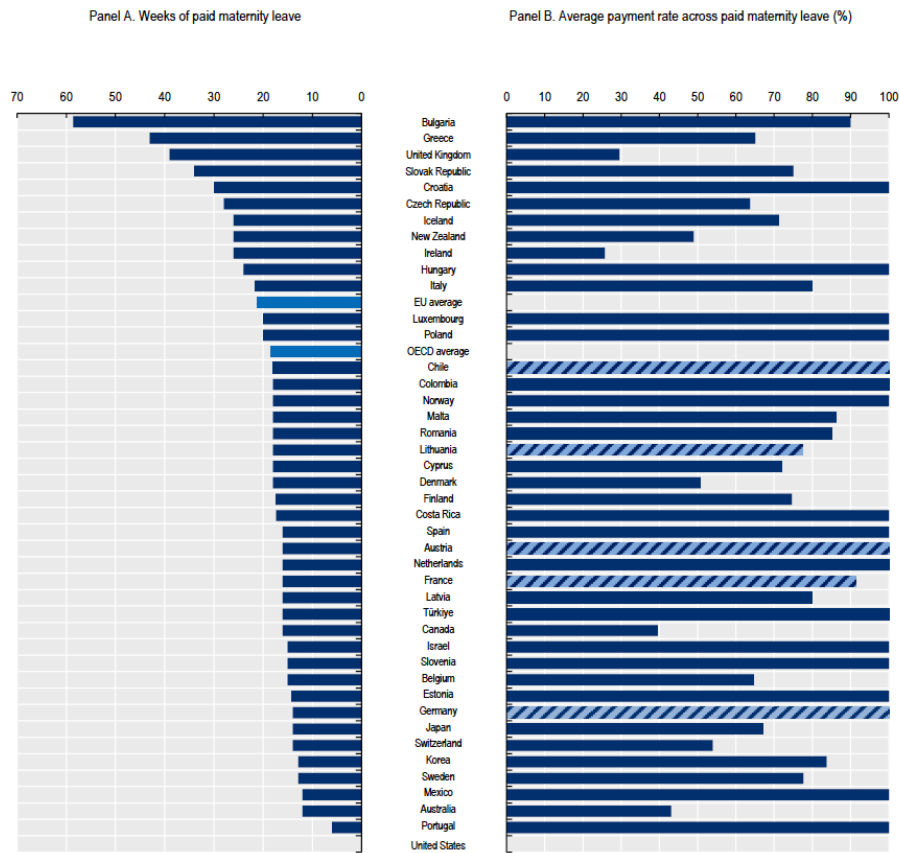
²⁸ In France, the starting age of compulsory education has been lowered from age six to three.

²⁹ [European Education and Culture Executive Agency 2022](#)

³⁰ [European Education and Culture Executive Agency 2016](#)

Figure 4: Duration of paid maternity leave and average payment rate across paid maternity leave, 2022³¹

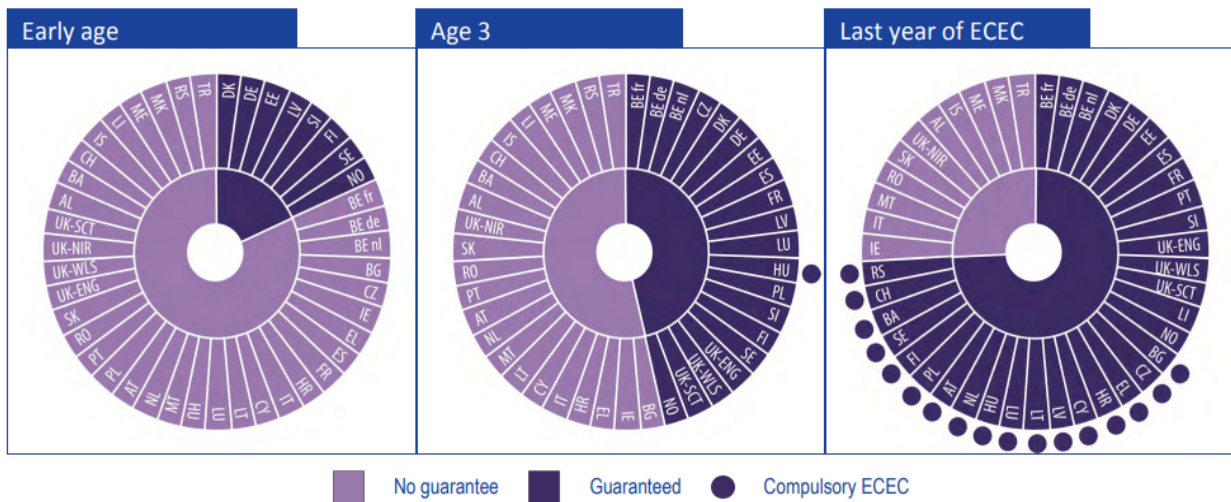
Duration of paid maternity leave and the average payment rate across paid maternity leave for an individual on national average earnings, 2022



Note: Striped bars indicates payment rates based on net earnings. Net earnings for Chile refer to 2016. See notes to Table PF2.1.A. Source: See tables PF2.1.C-PF2.1.E.

Figure 5: Place guarantee in ECEC, 2018/19³²

Figure 1: Place guarantee in ECEC, 2018/19

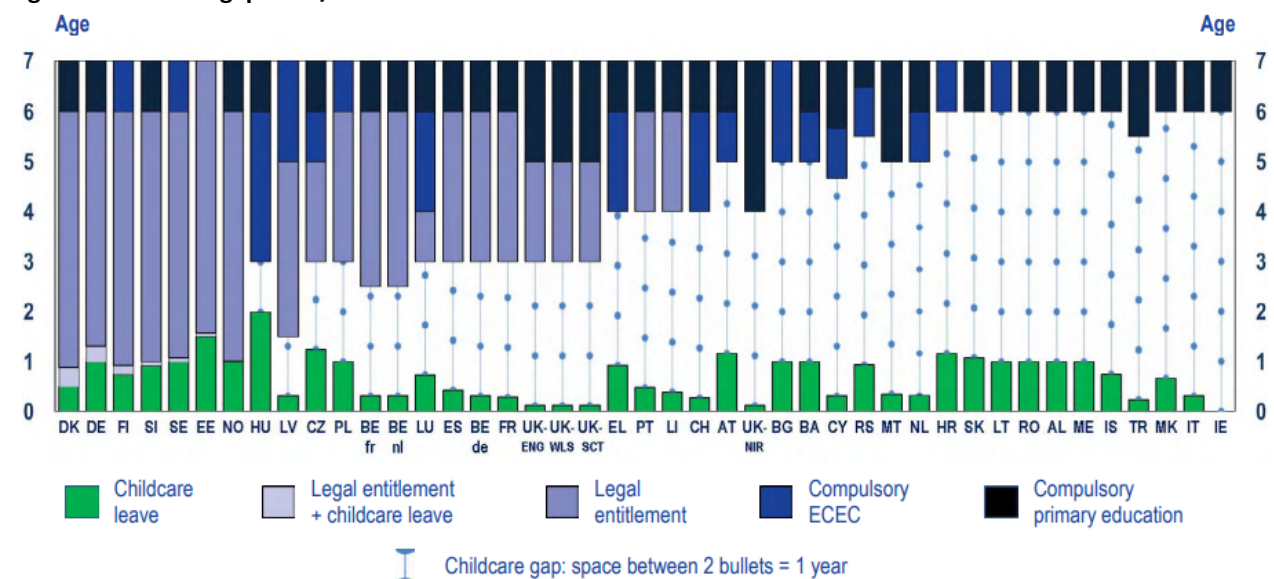


³¹ Chart reproduced from: [OECD, 2022](#)

³² Chart re-produced from: [European Education and Culture Executive Agency 2019](#)

Most countries in Europe have a gap in their entitlement offer (see **Figure 6**). Only eight countries³³ guarantee a continuous place in ECEC for each child from an early age (six to 18 months), often immediately after the end of childcare leave (although in the March 2023 budget, the government in England also announced plans to extend an entitlement of 30 hours per week free childcare to all those aged 9 months up where parents are working from September 2025)³⁴. Some countries focus on care at home by parents and create incentives to encourage them to look after their own children for a longer period. In others, an institutional approach to childcare is more heavily promoted. Regardless, ensuring synergy and continuity between childcare leave and ECEC entitlements is very important.

Figure 6: Childcare gap 2018/19³⁵



Most European countries guarantee between 20 and 29 ECEC hours a week. Weekly opening hours are often aligned with those of primary schools. Opening hours that cover parents’ full-time working week are only available in five countries.^{36 37}

Evidence on starting age in formal ECEC³⁸

A range of evidence suggests that more time with mothers³⁹ during a child’s first year has a significant positive effect on a child’s long-term outcomes, including high school completion

³³ Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway.

³⁴ [DfE, 2023](#)

³⁵ Chart reproduced from: [European Education and Culture Executive Agency 2019](#)

³⁶ [European Education and Culture Executive Agency 2019](#)

³⁷ Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Slovenia and Norway.

³⁸ The literature on the use of ECEC sometimes includes both starting age of ECEC use and duration (in years) of use. The findings for both variables are broadly similar and, generally speaking, given starting age and duration are very closely correlated, this paper looks solely at starting age.

³⁹ While this study (and others) tend to focus on caregiving by mothers, there is no reason to suggest that the same effects would not also be true of fathers. Early childhood research, policy and practice continue to enforce gendered notions of caregiving.

rates and increased wages at the age of 30, with a particularly beneficial effect for mothers with low education levels, when compared with the alternative of informal care.⁴⁰ There is no single consistent message from empirical studies across or within countries about the exact point at which being cared for by a parent at home becomes less beneficial. Studies from Europe and Canada that have looked at the impact of extending maternity leave from six to 12 months find no clear effect on children's outcomes.⁴¹ Significant variation is likely due to differences in the individual children and families' circumstances, as well as the ECEC alternative available. Attachment literature suggests that at around six months most babies become more adaptable and able to form bonds with a second care-giver, but little beyond this.⁴²

For children under the age of three, there is some evidence that ECEC may not be uniformly positive, particularly in relation to the emergence of behavioural problems. Some major longitudinal studies have found negative associations, which are mostly related to children beginning ECEC before the age of two. Use of ECEC from an early age has been linked with a slightly increase incidence of behavioural problems at ages three and five,⁴³ and early, extensive and continuous formal care from birth onward has been linked with social and behavioural difficulties for children at age two, during school transition and in adolescence, regardless of the quality.⁴⁴ The most recent study of ECEC and child outcomes in England (SEED) found that, for the 40% most disadvantaged children, starting ECEC early (before the age of two) and high use was associated with poorer outcomes for externalising behaviour and emotional self-regulation (small to medium sized effects).⁴⁵

However, this evidence of risks of behavioural problems coexists with positive associations. The SEED study reported above also found benefits for this group on all Early Years Foundation Stage Profile outcomes (except physical development), as well as small benefits in relation to verbal ability.⁴⁶ And while the EPPE study identified an association with behavioural problems, starting ECEC before the age of three was also linked to better cognitive development.⁴⁷

Possible explanations for the negative impact on the youngest children's behaviour relate to both the needs of those children and whether the provision given is indeed meeting those needs. Some observational research from the US has found that younger children can become less attached to their primary carers, have to compete with others for the attention of professional carers, are exposed to busier and noisier environments, which trigger stress,

⁴⁰ [Carneiro et al. 2011](#)

⁴¹ E.g. Summary in [Rossin-Slater \(2017\)](#)

⁴² Bowlby

⁴³ [EPPE 2004](#)

⁴⁴ [NICHD 2006](#)

⁴⁵ [SEED 2020](#)

⁴⁶ [SEED 2020](#)

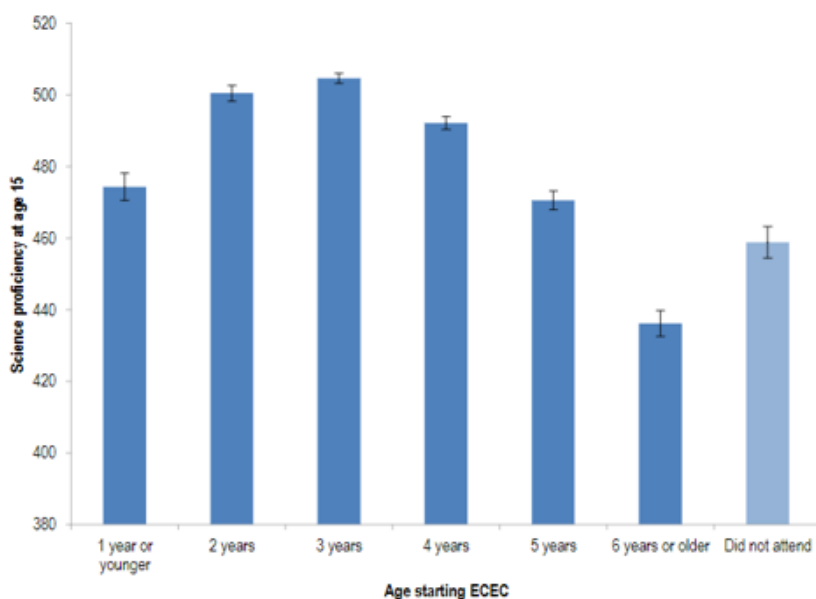
⁴⁷ [EPPE 2004](#)

and are more likely to learn bad behaviour from their peers. However, the research does not conclusively demonstrate that any one of these things is critical or cannot be addressed.

The apparent socio-emotional risks of use of ECEC for younger children may be more to do with the quality of the provision, which is lower than that provided for the over threes. As indicated in the previous section, in countries where ECEC systems are designed to support the specific needs of very young children, early participation in ECEC may be beneficial. This is corroborated in the EPPE study, which found that the slightly increased risk of anti-social behaviour seen in children starting pre-school before age three was found to be reduced by high-quality pre-school provision.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as shown in Figure 1, in countries such as Finland and Denmark, which bear many of the hallmarks of high-performing ECEC systems and invest well in the youngest age range, there are strong associations between early use and positive outcomes in later life.

The clearest evidence of the beneficial impacts of ECEC comes from studies of three- and four-year-olds. As shown by **Figure 7**, starting ECEC at age three is associated in international studies with the highest levels of cognitive development.⁴⁹ This has also been found to be true in the UK.

Figure 7: Relationship between age starting ECEC and cognitive development (measured as science proficiency at 15)⁵⁰



Number of hours

⁴⁸ [EPPE 2004](#)

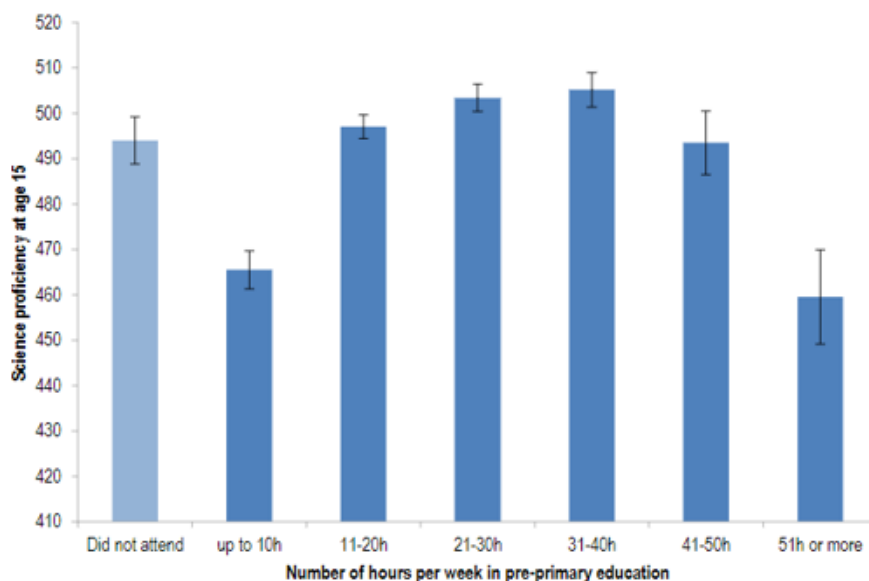
⁴⁹ [Shuey and Kankaras 2018](#)

⁵⁰ Chart reproduced from: [Shuey and Kankaras 2018](#)

While there is no consensus on the ‘ideal’ number of hours per week required to support children’s outcomes,⁵¹ positive effects of ECEC participation appear around medium-to-high use of ECEC. This is evident in some international studies – see, for example, **Figure 7**. And the SEED study in England has specifically found this to be the case across cognitive and social and emotional outcomes. SEED further concludes that, within this range, increased hours in ECEC are associated with improved outcomes for children.⁵²

The lowest cognitive outcomes tend to be associated with very high use (35+ hours), although the latest research suggests these may dissipate over time. In addition to association with worse cognitive outcomes, recent evidence from England points to certain negative socio-emotional outcomes, with internalising behaviour and conduct problems associated specifically with the highest use group (greater than 35 hours per week).⁵³ And as noted in discussion of starting age, findings from the US on social and behavioural difficulties were particularly linked to early start and high use.⁵⁴ And more than one significant study in England has now found that the association with conduct problems from long hours reduces or disappears by school age.⁵⁵

Figure 7: Relationship between number of hours per week in pre-primary education and cognitive development (measured as science proficiency at age 15)⁵⁶



However, there is also evidence that, for children to experience the positive effects of ECEC, there is a minimum number of hours required for beneficial impacts. For example, the most recent evidence from England found that, for the 40% most disadvantaged children, a

⁵¹ [La Valle and Jones 2020](#)

⁵² [Melhuish and Gardiner, 2021](#)

⁵³ [SEED 2020](#)

⁵⁴ [NICHD 2006](#)

⁵⁵ Melhuish and Gardiner 2021 and Melhuish et al 2004

⁵⁶ Chart reproduced from: [Shuey and Kankaras, 2018](#)

minimum of 10 hours per week, no later than age two, with mean use of over 20 hours per week between age two and school, demonstrated the biggest increases in chances of achieving positive EYFSP outcomes.⁵⁷ However, there is also evidence of diminishing returns, with one study in the UK finding that going to formal ECEC for half a day is just as good as full-time attendance,⁵⁸ and recent evidence from England finding that, for the 60% least disadvantaged children, the greatest benefits of ECEC were associated with an early start and low-to-medium use (up to 20 hours).⁵⁹

Key take-aways for Jersey on ECEC entitlements and amount by age and hours:

- At 32 weeks, Jersey's paid parental allowance is longer than that of most other countries, with pay likely to be broadly in line with averages, although more generous than the UK.
- The decision to **extend job protected leave to 52 weeks in Jersey is in keeping with evidence** on child development, which suggests that, beyond six months, parents are likely to be best placed to judge when is best to return according to their child's and family's needs.
- Given this, there is also a **case for extending paid parental leave beyond the first 32 weeks for lower income families on an equity basis** – i.e. to ensure choices about when to return to work within the first year are less likely to be driven by financial need by some families.
- Jersey's universal free entitlement offer is comparable to other European offers in terms of the focus on 3- and 4-year-olds, and a gap in entitlement provision for younger children, although some countries provide a more significant offer, including for low-income 2-year-olds in the UK.
- **Increasing ECEC entitlements/financial support for families with children aged from six months to two years old in Jersey would have the potential** to support positive child development, although **only if it is secured through age-appropriate good-quality provision**.
- The **clearest evidence of the beneficial impacts of formal ECEC are for three- and four-year-olds**, with greater benefits linked to increase with exposure (until very high usage). So the **decision to extend the entitlement for three- and four-year-olds from 20 to 30 hours is well supported** and is likely to deliver better future outcomes for children, although this may be mediated by other factors.
- From a child development perspective, there is a **strong argument for Jersey to aim to achieve 100% take-up amongst three- to four-year-olds**. One option could be to explore making participation for this age group compulsory, as a number of other European countries have done.
- Given some risks highlighted in the evidence, it would be **worth understanding the extent to which very long hours of participation in group care** (more than 35 hours per week) are a feature for Jersey families – and if so, who uses this, where do they access it and what are its impacts?

⁵⁸ [EPPE 2004](#)

⁵⁹ [SEED 2020](#)

5. WHO: Who stands to benefit most from ECEC?

>> The Jersey context: Whilst most families in Jersey are comfortably off, a significant minority manage on a low income and insecure contracts, including in communities with limited English and some relatively new arrivals with no recourse to public funds. Health professionals report that these families are often less likely to engage with formal ECEC, are more likely to use unregistered childminders and family or friends, and can be less visible. Financial support for ECEC beyond the free entitlement for three- and four-year-olds is limited – low and middle earners can claim up to around a quarter of ECEC costs, but few do. Jersey Childcare Trust supports some places for those from deprived backgrounds, where a child also has a disability or developmental delay, and the free entitlement offer is now being extended to children with SEND at age two. A key question is whether and how Jersey should take a more proactive approach to driving up participation of children from a broader group of disadvantaged families. <<

Additional benefits from ECEC participation have consistently been demonstrated for children from less advantaged backgrounds, including for the youngest children. A range of studies have shown that the potential benefits of ECEC participation appear to increase with the gradient of social disadvantage. When ECEC is of high quality, it can be particularly effective at improving outcomes for children from disadvantaged households.⁶⁰ Certain positive effects of ECEC – such as the association between formal group ECEC and better verbal ability during the first year of school – have been associated only with children from the lowest quartile of the home learning environment score.⁶¹ The potential benefits for disadvantaged children have also been linked with starting ECEC from an earlier age (before the age of two) and higher use, with children from the 40% most disadvantaged families in the early start/high use group having a higher probability of achieving the expected level in Key Stage 1 reading, writing and science and a pass in the phonics screening check.⁶²

Those who may benefit most from ECEC are often least likely to access it. In European OECD countries, children under the age of three in low-income households are a third less likely to participate in ECEC than those in high-income households, and also generally have lower participation at ages three to five.⁶³ Looking at England specifically, the likelihood of a child participating in ECEC is impacted by the deprivation of their local area, their family's annual income, their parents' work status and their family structure. For example, 74% of children in the least deprived areas receive formal childcare compared with 57% in the most deprived. Over three quarters with an income of over £45,000 access formal childcare compared with just over half (52%) of those earning under £10,000. And children from couple families where

⁶⁰ [EPPE 2004](#)

⁶¹ [SEED 2020](#)

⁶² [SEED 2021](#)

⁶³ [OECD, 2020, Figure 3](#)

neither parent is in employment are least likely to be accessing it (47%).⁶⁴ The reasons why take-up is lower are complex, but are linked to the current entitlements (which currently offer a higher number of hours for working parents of three- and four-year-olds), the cost of ECEC (which, by some measures, is the highest in Europe), and the supply of places, as well as cultural and language barriers.⁶⁵

Evidence from cross-national studies shows that universal entitlements may be a more effective means of engaging disadvantaged groups than targeted entitlements or funding.

Countries offering publicly funded universal ECEC have been found to have a significantly higher level of participation of subgroups (such as those from low-income families, with special needs or disability, from minority ethnic groups, and whose home language is different from the national language) than countries where there are targeted funded entitlements.⁶⁶ Universal offers are considered to create more of a culture of expectation and entitlement, which makes parents more inclined to come forward.

The difficulty of engaging families in a targeted offer has been demonstrated in England with the targeted offer for two-year-olds, which for a long time struggled to reach two thirds of the children eligible.

The offer was rolled out nationally in 2013, and provided 15 hours of free childcare per week for two-year-olds from disadvantaged households. Take-up from the start was very varied across local authorities, and particularly low in larger cities. Cultural and linguistic factors were identified as a barrier, with all ethnic minority groups less likely to take up the offer, and those with poor English least likely to take it up. However, low take-up was also evident amongst white British pupils in some areas. Possible factors include the offer not being well known, provision not being accessible and a lack of clarity about how to qualify. Stigmatisation was also a concern initially, although there is no evidence this has materialised. Most local authorities in England have put significant resources into targeting and outreach to families of eligible two-year-olds over a number of years, and whilst take-up remains varied across local authorities, it is now reaching over 70% as a result.

Children with SEN in England were highly represented amongst those taking up the targeted offer for two-year-olds from the start, suggesting potentially that targeted offers may work better for this group than for disadvantaged children.

In 2014 the odds of pupils who have SEN (with or without a statement) taking up the offer were found to be 17% greater than for non-SEN pupils. However, it is unclear whether this reflects truly higher take-up rates amongst children in this group or the fact that children starting nursery early are more likely to be identified as needing additional support by professionals as a positive consequence of attending childcare.

⁶⁴ [DfE 2019](#)

⁶⁵ [Teager and McBride 2018](#)

⁶⁶ [Bertram and Pascal 2016](#)

Key take-aways for Jersey on targeting disadvantage:

- Relatively low use of formal ECEC reported amongst economically disadvantaged families in Jersey is not surprising in light of similar trends in other countries in Europe and beyond.
- **Disadvantaged children tend to benefit more significantly from high-quality ECEC**, so from a child-development equity perspective, there is a strong case for addressing this, prioritising policies that seek to increase ECEC participation amongst economically disadvantaged groups.
- International experience suggests that **rolling out universal entitlements is likely to be the most effective means of achieving higher participation of economically disadvantaged groups**. On this basis, there is an argument for Jersey to continue to pursue the previously proposed extension of the universal free entitlement to all two-year-olds if this is practicable.
- The experience of the targeted offer for two-year-olds in England suggests that any expansion through **a targeted offer for the most disadvantaged children would need to be planned carefully and supported with extensive outreach** work to secure good take-up.
- It also shows that **targeted entitlements can be more successful with families who have children with SEND**, endorsing the decision to extend them to families with two-year-olds with SEND in Jersey.

6. WHERE: informal care, state and private and voluntary ECEC

Informal care (friends, relatives and unregistered nannies)

>> The Jersey context: Whilst there is no available data on the use of informal care in Jersey, insights from professionals provided in our November interviews suggested that informal care provided by relatives, friends or unregistered babysitters and childminders is in common use in Jersey amongst families with children in the early years, alongside or instead of formal ECEC. This is particularly perceived to be the case amongst higher income groups, as well as some working families on the lowest incomes, with younger children not eligible for the free entitlement. Some have argued for a system which more actively supports – or even promotes – informal care in Jersey. <<

Informal care provided by friends and relatives (especially grandparents) is a common part of the package of care used by families in most countries, especially amongst the youngest children. The OECD finds that among 0- to two-year-olds, rates of informal care vary from as high as around 43% in Hungary to 1% or below in Denmark, Finland and Sweden. For three- to five-year-olds, rates range from 49% in Slovenia to 0.2% in Denmark and Sweden.⁶⁷ Survey data in England shows that around 30% of those with pre-school children use this form of care.⁶⁸ Most often this is delivered by grandparents and the average time is nine hours per week. Previous studies there have suggested that uptake is particularly high among lower income groups and single parents, but that informal care is also proven to be frequently relied on as part of a package of care in England across the socio-economic spectrum.

It is exceptionally difficult to measure the impacts of informal childcare on children, or make generalisations about this. Informal care is – by definition – delivered by a multitude of individuals, including a large proportion of grandparents but also other relatives and friends and unregistered nannies/babysitters, bringing a diversity of strengths and backgrounds, unbounded by regulation or specific curriculums etc. It is also often provided alongside other types of more formal provision as part of a wider package of care, making the impact of the informal care component hard to isolate. Where attempts have been made to collate evidence on the impact of informal care, it has largely been through exploring non-experimental, longitudinal cohort studies (such as the Millennium Cohort Study and the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children in England). These can show links but not hard statistical differences based on a control group. More recently, the SEED cohort study, tracking 6,000 children, has been able to control for a number of factors and be more confident of establishing causal links.

⁶⁷ [OECD, 2021](#)

⁶⁸ National survey data in England suggests that there 27% of families with children in the early years used informal care in 2021 (down from 32% pre-pandemic). [DfE \(2022\)](#)

Past studies have, if anything, shown a positive link between informal care and vocabulary development for children aged three and under amongst those from better-off households.

Studies looking at the impact of informal care provided by friends or family on children aged under three⁶⁹ have broadly found that children from more advantaged households developed *slightly* better in terms of vocabulary compared with those in centre-based care. For those children from disadvantaged households, there was no obvious developmental benefit, but informal care did not appear to hold them back. This analysis also found no clear association between care from grandparents and vocabulary, where care from grandparents was used less intensively, and a small association between children having more negative peer relationships and being looked after by grandparents, especially among boys.

More recently, higher use of informal care at ages two to four has been causally linked with better vocabulary, but also a significantly greater likelihood of social and emotional difficulties. Analysis from the SEED study⁷⁰ looked at the impact of informal care (including unregistered nannies/baby-sitters, as well as family and friends) between the ages of two and four. It also found that more time in informal care is associated with small benefits for a child's verbal ability at the start of school. However, the study also showed a significant association between higher use of informal care and social and emotional difficulties, which was not present in relation to other forms of care. There were many other measures where no significant effect from informal care was found at all.

Balancing the benefits of informal care against formal group care suggests trade-offs are very mixed, even just within the domain of social and emotional development. Looking at SEED's results for informal care in the round *alongside* the outcomes they found to be associated with group-based formal ECEC (such as private or voluntary or school/maintained nurseries), a complex picture emerges. SEED analysis suggests that group-based formal ECEC is associated with more positive outcomes in general than informal care and formal individual care, such as registered childminders. It also suggests that better socio-emotional outcomes are associated with *more hours* spent in formal group ECEC settings. Yet at the same time, more hours in formal group ECEC settings are also linked to greater likelihood of behavioural (or 'conduct') problems emerging.

There is also evidence that informal and formal care can be complementary. For example, SEED analysis shows that the addition of some individual ECEC to formal group ECEC may mitigate some of the negative socio-emotional outcomes associated with a high use of formal groups.⁷¹ And just as evidence points towards the potential of childcare professionals to work with parents to support and enhance the home learning environment (the most significant factor influencing later outcomes), they could have the potential to support informal carers to do the same.

⁶⁹ Hansen and Hawkes (2009) and [Bryson et al \(2014\)](#)

⁷⁰ [Melhuish et al, 2021](#)

⁷¹ Melhuish et al, 2021

Relative merits of schools and private, voluntary and independent settings (PVI)s

>> The Jersey context: Jersey currently has a very mixed market of early years provision, including a significant private and voluntary sector, with one or two large international chains. Whilst funding rates have been significantly raised for the private and voluntary sector, representatives suggest that sustainability is often still a challenge. Meanwhile, nearly all Jersey primary schools offer early years provision and a number have spare capacity. In balancing decisions about how to resolve this, and considering the most desirable future provider architecture for Jersey, there is a desire to understand more about relative merits of different types of setting, and whether there are any intrinsic differences in quality across different types of setting. <<

Many high-performing ECEC systems are predominantly delivered through state maintained providers. Very low proportions of provision in Scandinavian countries and many other European countries such as France are delivered by for-profit providers. The UK has a much more mixed market and higher proportion of for-profit providers, especially supporting under threes but also providing around half of the free entitlement places for three- and four-year-olds. State-maintained nursery schools in England also have a strong reputation for delivering amongst the best support for children, although evidence is hard to clarify and they are also funded at a much higher rate.⁷²

However, children in private and voluntary settings often outperform others and differences in intake and context mean it is not possible to say which is ‘better’. Looking at the progress of individual children across OECD countries suggests that those accessing privately funded and managed settings, or publicly funded and privately managed settings are more likely to do better across a range of academic assessments than publicly managed and funded settings – see **Figure 8** below. One hypothesis put forward to explain this is that privately managed provision may be more flexible and responsive to the needs of children, while maintained provision is more regulated and more uniform.⁷³ However, differences are often likely to be more to do with the types of children likely to be accessing private childcare versus state-funded provision. Public institutions often charge lower fees than private institutions and differences in fees charged. In England, for example, maintained nurseries are five times more likely than private providers to take children who receive the early years pupil premium and more than three times more likely to take children with special educational needs, although within the private and voluntary sector there are also significant differences, with social enterprises and voluntary settings more likely to focus on these groups.⁷⁴

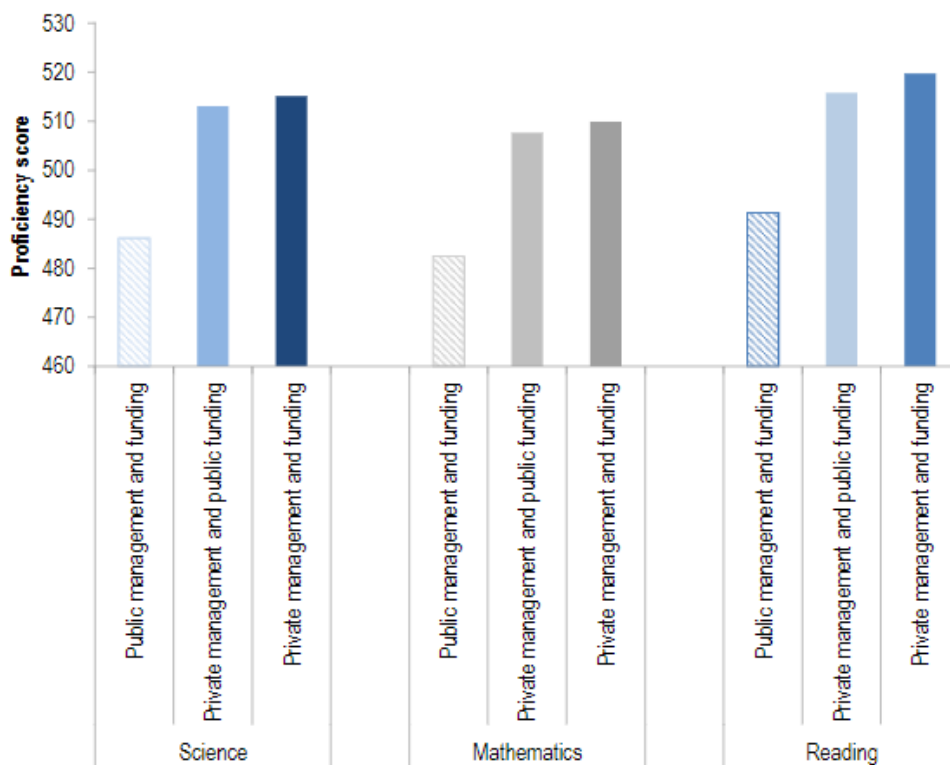
⁷² [Paul and Popove, DfE, 2019](#)

⁷³ [Balladares et al, OECD, 2020](#)

⁷⁴ [Stratham et al 2022](#)

Figure 8: Differences in students' academic proficiency and type of funding of their pre-school institutions⁷⁵

Figure 27. Differences in students' academic proficiency and type of funding of their pre-school institutions



Source: OECD (2016^[216]), "2015 Reading, Mathematics and Science Assessments," Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (database), <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2015database/>.

Studies that have directly observed practice and children's outcomes in England point towards a convergence in the quality of provision by provider type over recent years. The EPPE study (2004) found that good quality could be found in all types of settings, but it was higher overall in maintained nursery schools (which are relatively well funded and teacher-led). More recently, analysis by SEED did not identify any notable differences across the two sectors – academics noted slightly higher-quality practice in maintained settings, but this was not sufficiently large to necessarily lead to differences in child outcomes. They also found a positive association between hours spent in private and voluntary settings and positive social and emotional outcomes. This 'levelling up' of the quality of PVI provision over time may be a consequence of greater standardisation of the inspection framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (a curriculum that applies to all settings) and upgrades over time in the skills and qualifications of the workforce across the private and voluntary sector, despite the fact that the workforce remains heavily challenged.

Yet, the quality of ECEC provided to children by private and voluntary settings tends to be more susceptible to community context – and levels of disadvantage – than maintained settings/schools. Analysis in England has found that the quality of ECEC provided in

⁷⁵ Chart reproduced from: [Shuey and Kankaras, 2018](#)

government-maintained schools in disadvantaged areas and serving disadvantaged children was comparable with (and sometimes higher than) the quality in schools serving more advantaged communities.⁷⁶ The same research showed that the quality of ECEC provided to three- and four-year-olds was lower in PVI settings in deprived areas and those attended by individual children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The quality of interactions; support for learning, language and literacy; and provision for diversity and individual needs were all found to be lower amongst more deprived private and voluntary settings. The lower likelihood of private and voluntary settings in disadvantaged areas in England being able to deliver key aspects of quality has been argued to be directly related to the limits on settings' ability to charge low-income parents more, despite frequently facing higher demands within those settings in terms of workforce input and specialist support.⁷⁷

There is also some evidence from England to suggest that some for-profit chains in this market may be less focused on meeting disadvantaged children's needs. A notable study of for-profit childcare providers commissioned by Nuffield in England⁷⁸ found no substantial evidence of inferior quality being provided by for-profit settings, but did identify a relative lack of focus on meeting the needs of disadvantaged or vulnerable families, based on interviews and website information. They also found a lower presence of for-profit settings in poorer communities, although the difference was not large. Further work is needed to understand more about this, given that private providers in England are also known to cater very widely to disadvantaged two-year-olds and children with SEN. The Nuffield study also found that that medium-to-large chains in England are typically borrowing significant amounts to make acquisitions, thus spending a relatively high amount on servicing debt, sounding caution about this. The sudden closure of one very dominant for-profit childcare business in Australia that borrowed a lot to grow very quickly notoriously jeopardised provision for significant numbers of children for a period.⁷⁹

Strategies to address discrepancies in private and voluntary provision across communities in England have focused on fair local management, growing the amount of maintained and school provision in some areas, and targeted funding for settings. From the 1960s, the setting-up of nursery schools and classes in England focused on areas of social deprivation, and this is reflected in the differential take-up reported above. More recently, England's Early Years Pupil Premium was introduced, which enables all providers (private and voluntary or maintained) to access additional funding support for each disadvantaged child they take. Early evaluation suggested that the Early Years Pupil Premium was having a promising impact, although this was limited by the very low rate of funding.⁸⁰ Local authorities are also tasked

⁷⁶ [Mathers and Smees, 2014](#)

⁷⁷ [Morgan and Reed, 2016](#)

⁷⁸ [Simon et al, 2022](#)

⁷⁹ [Paul Sweeney blog, 2018](#)

⁸⁰ [Roberts et al, DfE, 2017](#). Currently Early Years Pupil Premium Rates in England are £342 per year for a child from a disadvantaged background and £800 for a disabled child.

with ensuring sufficiency of provision in their local area and are not allowed to discriminate by type of provider.

Key take-aways for Jersey on informal, maintained and private and voluntary sector ECEC:

- Care from friends or relatives is commonly relied upon by working families around the world, especially those with the youngest children and those who live in countries that do not offer comprehensive access to free/cheap formal ECEC. It is naturally a strong feature in Jersey, given the high level of female employment.
- Impacts of informal care vary greatly by who the carer is and their circumstances. However, **higher use of informal care is associated with good vocabulary but also greater likelihood of a range of social and emotional difficulties** developing than formal care. Formal group care is more associated with conduct issues. Packages of care incorporating formal and informal care can be complementary.
- Thus, in Jersey there is a **case for a more proactive approach to protecting children from the risks of high use of informal care (but not seeking to stop it)** – e.g. discouraging exclusive use of informal care (especially for three- to four-year-olds) and targeting support to informal carers with less capacity to provide strong home learning environments (potentially harnessing formal ECEC to do this).
- Jersey’s mixed ECEC market, which includes school providers and a significant private and voluntary sector delivering state-funded entitlements and parent paid ECEC, is comparable to the UK.
- It is **not clear that school and maintained settings are intrinsically better for child development than private and voluntary settings – or vice versa**. What happens in the setting, and who attends it, are more important than how the setting is owned/funded.
- Experience in England suggests that curriculum and accountability may have helped to level differences in standards, but that **private and voluntary settings serving disadvantaged communities are likely to require significantly more support to offer a quality service**.
- **Jersey might therefore consider introducing an Early Years Pupil Premium model** to correct this, and/or **harnessing in-kind support from state maintained settings** to build capacity in private and voluntary settings that serve highly disadvantaged communities.
- An alternative would be to develop state maintained/schools provision to better meet the needs of these communities and become the dominant providers, although consideration would need to be given to the impact of closing settings in certain locations, especially in rural areas.

7. HOW: Structural determinants of quality

>> The Jersey context: A variety of structural changes have been proposed within Jersey to improve quality and address some of the current system strains. Some sector leaders are keen for settings to be given greater flexibility around ratios, given pressures in the workforce – a move that the sector in England is resisting. There is also a question of whether the previously proposed ambition to increase graduate leadership should be re-established or prioritised, and whether a more integrated ECEC and family support offer based around ‘community schools’ could be developed. <<

There are important associations between process quality – the day-to-day experiences of children in ECEC – and ‘structural quality’, which comprises the setting’s physical, human and material resources. Commonly identified aspects of structural quality include:

- **Child-to-staff ratios**
- **Group size**
- **Staff qualifications**
- **Staff training and professional development**
- **Staff turnover**
- **Space and facilities within settings**
- **Regulation and data use**

Many of these indicators of structural quality are associated with later PISA school outcome results. As a general rule of thumb, high-performing European countries with good school outcomes have:

- **Higher staff-to-child ratios** (i.e. higher numbers of staff to children)
- **Higher levels of staff qualification and training**
- **Higher levels of regulation**
- **Higher levels of investment**⁸¹

While structural quality is easier to regulate and is often considered a precondition for process quality, it is no guarantee of either process quality or strong outcomes for children.⁸² But while structural quality does not guarantee good outcomes, it is comparatively easier to regulate through policy, to monitor (through inspection, for example) and to measure in research. As a consequence, government policy towards ECEC tends to focus on aspects of structural quality.

Staff qualifications and training

⁸¹ [Bertram and Pascal 2016](#)

⁸² [Shuey and Kankaras 2018](#)

The balance of evidence shows that qualifications and training do promote higher process quality. The EPPE study found that settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher observed quality and their children make more progress, particularly if the manager is highly qualified.⁸³ Similarly, another study found that the higher the proportion of staff in the setting with a formal level of education, the higher the quality, with well-trained and qualified staff with a good understanding of child development and pedagogy making it more likely that the early years curriculum is implemented effectively.⁸⁴

The role of graduate leaders in particular has been increasingly valued across many countries. All heads of ECEC settings must be qualified at Bachelor's level or higher in the majority of the European education systems. This is the case for three in five education systems in settings for younger children, and for four in five systems in settings for older children. In seven education systems, the minimum qualification level for heads is even higher, at Master's level. This applies to all heads in three education systems (Bulgaria, Romania and Iceland) but only to those managing settings for older children in four systems (France, Italy, Luxembourg and Malta). In one third of OECD countries leaders must have specific qualifications.

Early evidence from England's Graduate Leader Fund suggested the value of investing in the development of graduates. The evaluation of England's Graduate Leader Fund, which supported private and voluntary settings to train and employ graduates in England in the period 2008 to 2015, found that settings for children aged three to five with a graduate leader made significant improvements to quality compared with settings that did not. Benefits included more positive interactions between staff and children, support for communication and language, and providing for individual needs and diversity.⁸⁵

However, more recent evidence shows that employing graduates is not a silver bullet, and is unlikely to be effective in isolation from wider policies to ensure a stable, valued and highly skilled workforce. An important 2020 study in England using the national pupil database (6 million children),⁸⁶ and comparing teachers' assessments of children who attended different nurseries but the same primary school, found only a weak positive association between having a graduate present at a setting and/or in the classroom and children's outcomes, as measured by EYFSP scores at age five and through to age seven. The size of the effect was slightly larger when a qualified teacher (someone holding qualified teacher status) was teaching, compared with when a staff member with early years professional status (EYPS) was teaching, and where children were in settings longer. But there was no significant difference by whether a graduate was working directly with children or not. The authors concluded that nurseries which are good "cannot be predicted by staff qualifications or Ofsted ratings",

⁸³ [EPPE 2004](#)

⁸⁴ Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2006

⁸⁵ [Mathers et al 2010](#)

⁸⁶ [Bonetti and Blanden 2020](#)

calling for a greater focus on process quality. They commented that the findings “are reminiscent of the literature on teacher quality: this matters greatly for outcomes but not on account of readily measured teacher characteristics such as qualifications.”

There is good evidence that targeted, evidence-informed, in-service professional development (PD) can improve interactions between staff and children, leading to better social and emotional outcomes. A randomised control trial in Australia found that a PD programme based on the foundational principles of child learning and development delivered significant improvements in the quality of staff interactions with children. These included more sustained shared thinking and greater support for children’s social-emotional wellbeing. This led in turn to a reduction in reported internalising behaviours.⁸⁷ OECD analysis has found that in-service training is positively associated with process quality, even over and above formal pre-service qualifications.⁸⁸

Ratios

Higher staff-to-child ratios and smaller group sizes have consistently been found to be supportive of relationships between children and staff across different types of ECEC settings, and are particularly important for the under-threes. Reflecting this body of evidence, in recent years, the OECD has observed a trend of reducing numbers of children per teacher in ECEC systems, suggesting that countries see it as key driver for system improvement.⁸⁹

While there are no golden rules for the best ratios or group sizes, academics have proposed models that are well established. For classes for the over-threes, assuming a group of 22 to 24, this consists of two adults, assuming both have qualifications related to working with young children in an ECEC setting.⁹⁰ These numbers are reduced for the under-threes. For example, Early Head Start staff ratios are 1:4, with group sizes limited to eight children.⁹¹

Integrating ECEC with other services

‘Integration’ of early years services has long been recognised as a necessary feature of systems that effectively address the complexity of the lives of families with young children – this has been well reflected in research, not least from England’s Sure Start. A range of qualitative studies suggest that integration across traditional service boundaries can improve access to and take-up of services, provide better referrals, reduce the costs of professional interactions and produce planning and operational efficiencies – helping to ensure that

⁸⁷ [Siraj et al. 2018](#)

⁸⁸ [Shuey and Kankaras 2018](#)

⁸⁹ [OECD 2021](#)

⁹⁰ [Bertram and Pascal 2016](#)

⁹¹ [Bertram and Pascal 2016](#)

children's needs are identified earlier and those with higher levels of risk or lower visibility are less likely to 'fall between cracks'.⁹² In England, Sure Start children's centres represented a major attempt to integrate services through the creation of one-stop shops for families, with multi-component, multi-agency support across ECEC and health, as well as parenting support. Although the model differentiated significantly, long-term benefits for health across the programme have been proven.⁹³ Positive effects have been linked to frequency of use, inter-agency working, and the number of evidence-based programmes used by centres.⁹⁴ This evidence is informing the development of new integrated early years initiatives across the UK, including Family Hubs in England, and the roll-out of Flying Start in Wales.

The value of embedding ECEC centrally as part of an integrated early years support offer is often highlighted, and seems increasingly important given high ECEC participation. Most of the literature on integrated early years support highlights ECEC as a critical core component⁹⁵ with some showing clear benefits to children's outcomes. For example, good-quality childcare delivered within Sure Start areas as part of the programme raised outcomes in language development,⁹⁶ and take-up of early education and care amongst disadvantaged children was higher in areas with Sure Start provision.⁹⁷ It has been argued that as ECEC services become near-universally accessed, childcare professionals tend increasingly to provide the most regular professional contact point for children and the first port of call for families,⁹⁸ underlining the importance of making ECEC central to integrated services for families with children in the early years.

Integrating ECEC services with primary education specifically has been recognised as bringing particular benefits around transition to school but also more widely in terms of building relationships with families and supporting positive long-term outcomes. There is established international evidence that the co-location of ECEC settings with primary schools is associated with more frequent meetings and communication with primary school staff and transition-related activities for parents and guardians.⁹⁹ Beyond this, it is notable that a growing number of school leaders on both sides of the Atlantic are expanding their reach into the early years as a means of influencing outcomes. In England, there has been a broad expansion of the proportion of schools offering nursery places (including for two-year-olds) in recent years, with notable and clear models developed by some of the academy chains.¹⁰⁰ In the US, there has been a movement towards community schools and child-parent centres. These initiatives bring together efforts to promote integration within the early years, with

⁹² [Victoria State Government, n.d.](#); [Reed et al 2022](#)

⁹³ [Cattan et al. 2021](#)

⁹⁴ [Sammons et al. 2015](#)

⁹⁵ For example, [Pascal, et al \(2019\)](#)

⁹⁶ [Melhuish et al. 2010](#)

⁹⁷ [Campbell et al. 2018](#)

⁹⁸ [Oppenheim et al. 2022](#)

⁹⁹ [OECD 2018](#)

¹⁰⁰ E.g. See Reach Feltham Children's Hub, Harris nurseries and Ark Start and predecessor paper [Morgan and Reed, 2016](#)

primary schools, other service providers and engagement with parents as one, strategic offer that achieves these aims simultaneously.¹⁰¹

Key take-aways for Jersey on structural inputs for quality ECEC:

- While changes around spending, qualifications, and ratios are often considered to set preconditions for positive experiences and interactions for children in ECEC settings, **structural inputs do not guarantee either process quality or strong outcomes for children.**
- The balance of evidence shows that **qualifications and training are connected to better outcomes for children.** Graduate leadership in particular is widely valued across countries.
- **However, whilst investment in graduates can deliver better outcomes, at a population-wide level this has not been evident in England.** This may be to do with the people who train, whether they stay, the environments they work in or how the system judges quality. What early years professionals do matters, but this cannot be readily measured by qualifications.
- For Jersey, this again points more towards **prioritising building professional capacity and ensuring a stable, valued and highly skilled workforce, including optimising professional development, instead of or alongside any graduate drive.**
- **Higher staff-to-child ratios support child-staff relationships across different types of ECEC settings, and are particularly important for the under-threes – but there are no set ‘golden rules’.** This suggests there is value to protecting current ratios in Jersey, whilst also being sufficiently flexible to accommodate small changes where there is a case to do this in order to improve capacity to deliver a quality offer.
- There is strong evidence that **structures that support the effective integration of ECEC and wider early years services – and especially ECEC and schools – are likely to support better outcomes for children.** The case for developing this through the ‘community schools’ in Jersey is strong.

¹⁰¹ [Jacobson 2018](#)

Analysis undertaken by Isos Partnership, commissioned by the Government of Jersey.

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