



Out of School Care in Scotland – who uses it and why?

Context and methodology

This paper summarises the key points of a statistical analysis of usage of out of school care provision by families in Scotland, carried out by Parenting across Scotland in collaboration with Edinburgh University¹. It reports on types of provision, primary reasons for use and correlation with specific demographic and socio-economic factors. The information analysed is intended to inform the work of the current Scottish Government Task Force on Out of School Care (OSC).

The analysis was carried out using data gathered from families in Scotland participating in the UK Millennium Cohort study². It focuses on OSC for children aged five, seven and 11-years during weekdays in term time³. A number of other research papers were consulted in order to provide contextual information.

In contrast with provision for pre-school children, of which some hours are provided free of charge to parents, and which aims to support early learning and healthy development, out of school care (OSC) in Scotland has developed largely as a response and/or an encouragement to parental labour market participation and in all cases requires parents to pay for the service. The financial support arrangements by central and local government have historically been complicated – the 1998 National Childcare Strategy⁴ provided some funding for start-up and development from the UK government, but there were many other funding sources - Local Enterprise Companies, tax credits, social inclusion partnerships and strategic initiatives such as the New Community Schools⁵ programme. Support in kind was provided by many local authorities by allowing school premises to be used free of charge. The current nature of OSC, and cost to families of provision, was influenced significantly by the nature of the development funding.

¹Guthrie, A. (2019). OUT OF SCHOOL CARE IN SCOTLAND: WHO USES IT AND WHY? . A research report commissioned by Parenting Across Scotland and undertaken as a Q-Step placement project.

²<https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/cls-studies/millennium-cohort-study>

³ The analysis did not cover weekends and school holidays

⁴<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100408211402/http://www.dcsf.gov.uk>

⁵<https://www2.gov.scot/Publications/2002/08/15194/9566>

Until the establishment of the current task force in 2018, attention to the role of OSC in contributing to national strategic outcomes has been limited. The last specific policy document on the subject, 'School's Out'⁶, was published in 2003. The nature of usage and provision appears to have changed little over the fifteen years since the document was issued. Though much of the publication was concerned with structures and processes, it did emphasise the important role that high quality out of school provision could play in improving life chances for disadvantaged children. Given current policy priorities such as addressing inequality and closing the attainment gap, it seems opportune to consider how OSC could make a meaningful contribution, particularly as international evidence on this matter is compelling⁷.

Types of provision covered

Most of the provision used by families, and included in this report, is required to be registered with the Care Inspectorate⁸. Such facilities include after school care clubs, childminders and care providers such as private and voluntary sector establishments that offer out of school care alongside other forms of child care, such as pre-school provision. The report also examines usage of non-registrable care arrangements such as sports and activity clubs, grandparents and other family or friends. The use of breakfast clubs is also included in the report.

Child characteristics

Many children do not attend OSC provision. While usage increases as children get older, even at its highest it represents less than half of all children in the age group. It seems clear that cost of provision impacts on participation. While almost 100% of four year olds take up their funded pre-school place, only 25% of five year olds use formal OSC. The correlation between OSC use and higher socio-economic family circumstances would appear to substantiate this.

Data on the profile of children using OSC services was relatively limited. The source data covered age and sex but did not include variables such as disability or additional support needs, ethnicity, health status or cognitive development.

It should be noted, however, that there are some variations in use of provision by sex. At the age of five, girls participate in sports or physical activity clubs more frequently than boys. By 11, the position has reversed with boys showing more frequent participation in such provision – 19% as opposed to 16%. Breakfast clubs, do not show any significant relationship between gender or age and participation and provide for a far smaller proportion of children than after school services.

Child participation in sports clubs and related physical activities also seems to reflect the general pattern of inequality. Aged seven, almost half of all children in the lowest

⁶<https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/47032/0023963.pdf>

⁷Assessment of the benefits and costs of out of school care, Scottish Executive, 2003

⁸<http://www.careinspectorate.com/>

socio-economic groups are involved in no such clubs or activities, compared with 19% in the highest groups.

Many children are looked after by their grandparents outwith school hours. After breakfast clubs, after school clubs and sports clubs, grandparents look after the highest proportion of children. Childminders are also used by some families for both morning and after school care.

Parent characteristics

Parents' occupational status and educational attainment level are more strongly correlated with OSC use than any other factor considered in the report. Generally, the better educated and the higher the occupational status of the parents, the more likely they are to use formal OSC – 30% in the highest categories compared with 13% in the lowest. Parents' age is also important, with 17% of parents aged 40 – 49 using OSC, contrasting with only 7% of parents aged 20 – 29.

There are, however, some important variations to this general pattern. Lone parenthood appears to be associated with use of after-school services only at age seven: the percentage of children attending such clubs is lower in lone parent families. In contrast, lone parenthood is related to breakfast club use at age five, seven and 11 – the percentage of children attending breakfast clubs is higher in lone parent families. In this provision, 12% of lone parents' children are users as opposed to 8% of the children of two parent households⁹. Breakfast clubs also show variation in terms of age of parent users – unlike other provision, at age seven, children whose parents are aged 20 – 29 are more likely to attend a breakfast club than those whose parents are 40 – 49. Broadly speaking, breakfast clubs show a more even distribution of users across the socio-economic spectrum than other forms of OSC and, indeed, at age seven, usage is greater in the 20% most deprived areas than in the 20% most affluent.

Use of other childcare seems to bear out the pattern presented by after school and sports clubs. Provision that is likely to cost more, such as childminders, is more likely to be used by parents of higher socio-economic status. That which is likely to cost less, such as grandparents and friends, is used by a greater proportion of parents in lower socio-economic groups.

Reasons for use

Parents in the survey were asked to indicate whether or not they use different types of OSC mainly for childcare reasons.¹⁰ Childcare is cited by 80% - rising to 90% in the highest socio-economic groups – as the principal reason for using OSC. This

⁹Bradshaw, P., Hall, J., Hill, T., Mabelis, J. and Philo, D. (2012) *Growing Up in Scotland: Early Experiences of Primary School*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

¹⁰ Other reasons for using OSC could include providing opportunities for the child to socialise and play.

factor is the key reason for the vast majority of children aged five, though by age seven the percentage of parents giving this response has dropped from 82% to 71%. In almost all cases, this is likely to reflect the requirements of parental employment or other parental commitments.

Though income is not per se included in this analysis, it would be reasonable to conclude that, in most cases, higher occupational status and higher educational qualification levels would be consistent with higher earnings. Not only does this make OSC more affordable in absolute terms, it benefits higher earners disproportionately as a lower percentage of household income is committed to childcare.

The other reasons for using OSC were not explored in the report. It is possible that, especially as this report covered activity provision, that children's own interests or hobbies could be a factor. The change mentioned above between the ages of five and seven might corroborate this.

In relation to breakfast clubs, childcare is given as the principal reason for usage significantly less frequently, with around two thirds of parents citing it as their main reason. The key reason for the other families is not clear, but provision of morning food, vital to effective learning, may be a significant factor needing further exploration.

Factors that may underpin usage patterns

Given the usage patterns established by the interrogation of the data, it seems highly probable that household income is a powerful determinant in overall usage of OSC. The cost to families, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of household income is likely also to be a factor.

Breakfast club usage shows a different pattern of usage from that of after school care. This may reflect the historical antecedents of breakfast clubs. This type of provision experienced major expansion as part of the New Community Schools initiative in the late 1990s/early 2000s and was set up in school premises principally to ensure that children from the poorest communities received nutrition early in the day adequate to support their effective learning. Location and historical usage patterns may go some way to explaining why breakfast clubs' usage differs from that of other services examined. Work patterns of those of lower socio-economic status may also be a factor.

Regulations governing entitlement to social security benefits may well be important in determining usage patterns for some households.

As well as cost, location, availability and accessibility are likely to affect usage. People cannot use facilities that are not there. Provision is likely to exist where demand exists and where there is capacity to develop services. After-school clubs are a prime example of this. More clubs exist in communities where more parents are in employment and can afford the charges. Many are run as voluntary organisations by parent committees – this requires both the organisational capacity

and the willingness to become involved in this way among parents – again this is likely to be more prevalent among parents of higher socio-economic status.

The distribution of services may be a general factor in usage. Facilities for children were developed in some deprived communities through social inclusion and regeneration funding and some apparently anomalous findings may reflect the existence of such services.

Further data that would be useful in understanding usage and potential benefits of out of school care investigation

While the data gathered and analysed provides many valuable insights into some key variables that impact on use of OSC, strategic planning could be greatly enhanced if additional information was made available. In particular, information on the following topics would be most useful:

- household income
- cost of provision
- proportion of family income spent on OSC
- aggregated figure for use of all provision
- reasons why many families do not use any provision
- why families choose their particular combination of services
- more detailed demographic information on children
- impact of use of provision on children's learning and wellbeing
- work patterns of parent users and potential parent users
- nature of activity provision
- how quality is defined in terms of OSC
- other community services that could play a role.

Conclusion

The patterns of usage indicated by the findings would suggest that there is a strong association between household income and OSC use. It is therefore probable that any benefits it confers will accrue more to children whose circumstances are already advantaged. Despite the government's commitment, both in the 2003 'School's Out' document, and in the 2008 Early Years Framework¹¹, to encourage use of both early years services and OSC as a means of closing the gap between rich and poor, some current usage patterns are more likely to increase it. Statutory entitlement (as for pre-school provision), distribution of provision and charging policies (such as means-testing) should be examined in some detail to consider how more equitable impact can be achieved.

Research evidence conclusively demonstrates the potential value of 'high quality' care. Much more explicit definition is needed of what constitutes 'high quality' in

¹¹<https://www2.gov.scot/resource/doc/257007/0076309.pdf>

OSC, with a particular focus on outcomes for children. At the same time evidence should inform the development of inputs to OSC, such as upskilling the workforce, curriculum improvement and ensuring suitability of the physical environment.

More and better data should be routinely collected. The section above outlines some key elements of this but good qualitative data should also be gathered routinely from parents, children, providers and other stakeholders such as trade unions, employers, the Department for Work and Pensions and HMRC.

Finally, getting best value from existing provision should underpin future policy directions. There are likely to be a range of facilities used by children when they are not at school in most communities. Community level audits, on which a strategy for optimal use of existing provision, and for development of further services to meet local need, would be a useful contribution.