

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

26 September 2024

Report by Director of Education

WEST PARTNERSHIP 1140 HOURS OF EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE  
RESEARCH

**PURPOSE**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Education Committee with an update of the progress made with the West Partnership 1140 Research and to share the approved recommendations.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. Education Committee is asked to note and comment on the research undertaken by the West Partnership on 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).

**BACKGROUND**

3. Since August 2021, all 3-4 year olds and some eligible 2 year olds in Scotland have been entitled to 1140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) per year. The Scottish Government highlighted the primary objectives of this policy were to improve children's outcomes and reduce the attainment gap; increase parents' opportunities to return to work, training, or further study; and support and promote family wellbeing.

4. The West Partnership Evaluating and Reporting Team have completed an evaluation of the expansion to 1140 hours across the region. Two research questions were developed to investigate this:

- What impact has the implementation of 1140 hours had on the development and attainment of children in the West Partnership?
- What are the experiences and views of stakeholders in relation to the extension of ELC entitlement and the impact this has had on the development and attainment of children in the West Partnership?

**REPORT**

**Methodology**

5. A sample of nurseries across the West Partnership was recruited to participate in this evaluation. Overall, 97 settings contributed to this evaluation following two rounds of recruitment. This includes local authority settings, as well as settings within the private and voluntary (PVI) sector.

6. The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) was adopted to investigate the impact of the entitlement on children's outcomes. This is a developmental screening questionnaire that

identifies children's progress across five domains. As such, it allows for an analysis of the trends and patterns of those currently accessing the extended entitlement. Early years settings participating in the evaluation were provided with a copy of the 48 month ASQ, and completed this with children as they turned 4 years of age. This enabled the researcher to analyse the impact of the entitlement for children who had accessed this for varying lengths of time.

7. A range of methods have also been applied to gather parents', practitioners', and children's experiences of the entitlement. Two surveys were distributed to parents and practitioners to explore their perceptions of its impact on children's outcomes. Interviews and focus groups also took place to gather rich qualitative data on their views. To ensure children's views were captured, child-led tours took place with children aged 4-5 years to better understand their experiences, and what this increased time has meant for them.

8. In addition to gathering their own data, the West Partnership obtained data from the Scottish Government's national evaluation of the expansion to 1140 hours. This included data from their parent survey, as well as ASQ data capturing children's outcomes prior to the expansion to 1140 hours.

### **Sample characteristics**

9. A total of 507 ASQ forms (244 = male, 263 = female) were returned from settings across the region. All children were four years of age at the time of taking part, and the length of time they had accessed 1140 hours ranged from 2 to 27 months.

10. In addition, 492 parents and 348 practitioners completed the surveys distributed by early years' settings. A further 61 practitioners and 21 parents participated in an interview or focus group, and 21 children participated in a child-led tour.

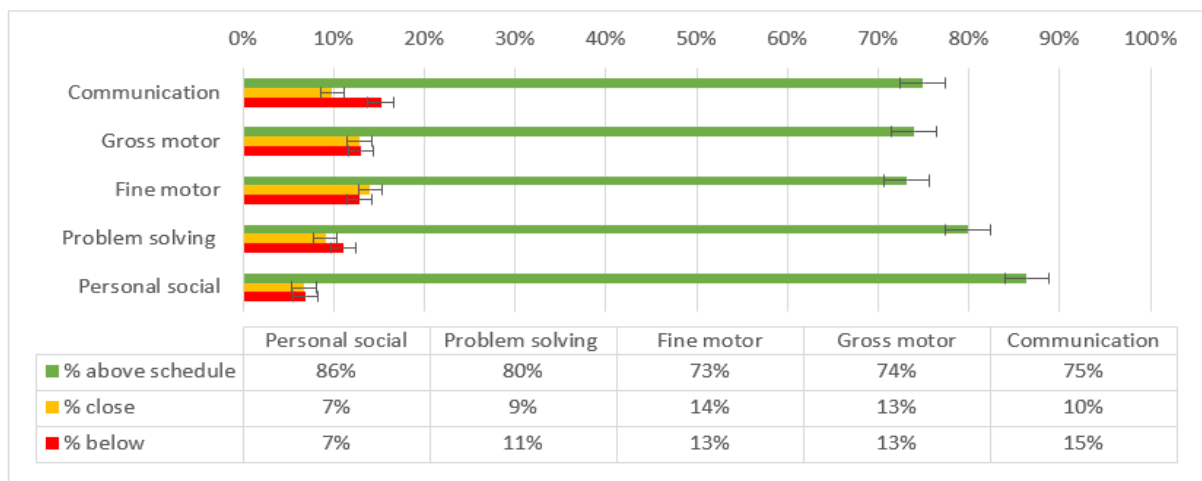
### **Key Findings**

11. Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ):

- The ASQ produces an overall score as well as a score for each domain, which can be used to identify if children are 'on schedule' based on the normed scores for their age group. Overall, 73-86% of all children in the sample were on schedule across each domain. These findings can be viewed in the figure below:

#### **Figure.**

*Percentage of children on schedule across ASQ domains*



- Statistical analyses were also conducted to explore the relationship between the number of months children have been accessing the entitlement, and their scores on the ASQ. Time accessing 1140 could not significantly predict children’s scores on the ASQ, which may indicate high levels of unexplained variance within the full sample.
- Differences in ASQ scores were also examined across different groups. For example, while most children were on schedule for each domain, this varied depending on the SIMD quintile in which they lived. Statistical analysis revealed SIMD contributed to children’s scores across all five domains, and this was most significant for scores in problem-solving and fine motor. This aligns with findings reported in the Scottish Government’s national evaluation of 1140 hours.
- Data from the Scottish Study of Early Learning and Childcare (SSELC) was received from the Scottish Government. This captured ASQ scores from children aged 3-3.5 years accessing funded ELC in the West Partnership in 2019 – prior to the expansion to 1140 hours. When comparing the proportion of children on schedule across each domain, there appears to be a higher proportion of children on schedule in the West Partnership’s sample than those in the SSELC sample. Although direct comparisons could not be made, it suggests children are continuing to progress while accessing the 1140 hours entitlement.

## 12. Parent and Practitioner Surveys:

- Responses from the parent survey were very positive, with most agreeing or strongly agreeing that since accessing the entitlement, their child is more independent (82%), and enthusiastic and engaged with their learning (87%). Parents also discussed the impact of the entitlement on themselves and their family. Since accessing the entitlement, 37% had increased their hours of work, and 36% reported their mental wellbeing had improved.
- Responses to the practitioner survey varied. Only 27% agreed or strongly agreed that the expansion to 1140 hours has had an overall positive impact on their setting. Clear differences were found between practitioners in term time and mixed model settings – while 52% of term time settings agreed or strongly agreed that the impact on their

setting had been positive, 66% of practitioners in mixed model settings disagreed or strongly disagreed. Only a minority of practitioners perceived that the expansion has positively affected children's outcomes. Qualitative data revealed this was due to a number of reasons, including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the short period of time the entitlement has been in place.

13. Qualitative Data:

Six themes were drawn from the qualitative data collected. These are:

***I. Nurturing Environments***

Data from stakeholders revealed the importance of consistent ELC for children's wellbeing. Parents perceived the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on their children and highlighted their initial concerns about the transition to full-time ELC. Both parents and practitioners discussed how children have since adapted to the entitlement however, and the positive relationships and sense of belonging they have developed within their early years setting.

***II. Experiences and Outcomes***

Data suggests that by attending ELC more frequently, children have increased access to a wide variety of high quality experiences. Parents discussed the impact of these experiences on their children's development, including their independence, confidence, and enthusiasm for learning. Views from practitioners however varied. While a minority of practitioners discussed how the entitlement enables them to record and track children's progress more flexibly, others perceived that these pressures restricted the free flow approach within their setting.

***III. Ensuring Quality for All***

Practitioners across the region discussed challenges they have experienced with delivering the 1140 hours entitlement. Those working in term time settings experienced difficulties with space and managing alongside the school's timetable, which could disrupt children's routines. Practitioners in mixed model settings however experienced challenges with ensuring all children receive the same quality sessions throughout the day, regardless of the attendance patterns they attend. They also faced additional challenges with organising meetings and completing paperwork and planning with fewer non-contact hours.

***IV. Wider Outcomes for Families***

Data from parents and practitioners suggests the 1140 hours entitlement has had a positive impact not only for children, but also for their families. Parents discussed how the entitlement has enabled them to return to work, training, or study, and their hopes that this would support their children long-term. Data from practitioners also suggests that through the expansion, there have been more opportunities to meet with families and signpost them to relevant agencies for support.

***V. Preparing for Transitions***

Parents and practitioners discussed the impact of accessing the 1140 hours entitlement on children's transition to primary education. Most parents perceived that the entitlement has enabled their children to build a sense of routine, which should support their transition. Some practitioners however believed this varied depending on

the model children access. Both parents and practitioners discussed the benefits of an additional year of ELC for those deferring their start to school, and how this has supported families to make the best decision for their child.

#### **VI. Staff Recognition and Wellbeing**

Data suggests the expansion to 1140 hours has placed significant pressures on staff, who have continually adapted their practice to ensure the ELC they deliver suits the needs of each child. With greater expectations, the majority of practitioners perceived that this has affected staff morale and wellbeing. Practitioners discussed the need to raise awareness of their role, and its educational benefits. It was believed this would not only prevent staff absences and staff leaving the sector entirely, but also encourage more people into the profession.

### **Report Recommendations**

14. This led to the development of several recommendations, which have been summarised in Appendix 1.

### **FINANCIAL AND EFFICIENCY IMPLICATIONS**

15. There are no financial or efficiency implications associated with this paper.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

16. Education Committee is asked to note and comment on the research undertaken by the West Partnership on 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).

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Director of Education  
26 September 2024

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#### **Appendix**

1. West Partnership Update on 1140 Hours Research and Publication Appendix One: Draft Recommendations

# West Partnership Update on 1140 Hours Research and Publication

## Appendix One: Draft Recommendations

### 1. The importance of learning as part of childcare

Qualitative data from parents, practitioners, and children revealed the importance of ELC for children’s learning, wellbeing, and development. Further promotion of the high quality experiences, interactions, and spaces in ELC across education could highlight the role of early years within the curriculum for excellence. Additionally, as ELC continues to evolve, practitioners should consider how their practice could be adjusted to meet the needs of the children they support and ensure their practice continues to adopt a child-led approach.

Recommendation	Setting	Local Authority	Regionally	Nationally
1.1 Reconsider the language used to communicate and promote the funded entitlement. A greater focus on ‘funded early learning and childcare’ as opposed to ‘free childcare’ would emphasise that learning and care are inseparable.	✓	✓		✓
1.2 Promote this research and the national standard across the early years’ sector, local authority staff and schools. This would highlight the important role of ELC in supporting children’s development, and the strict criteria settings must follow.	✓	✓	✓	✓
1.3 Adopt a slow pedagogy approach (Clark, 2013). This is likely to support children to adjust to attending ELC for longer periods, and help maximise the opportunities available through the funded entitlement.	✓	✓		

## 2. Early Learning Curriculum

As early years' settings and primary schools form the early level curriculum together, there must be strong connections between both sectors to ensure there is continuity in children's learning. Settings, schools, and local authorities could support the building of stronger sectoral relationships in a number of ways.

Recommendation	Setting	Local Authority	Regionally	Nationally
2.1 Develop the strong work of local authority and the WP Assessment and Moderation networks to include early years' settings.	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.2 Promote early years' trackers and moderation activity conducted between early years' settings and primary schools. This will further improve communication and handovers between settings and help build stronger sectoral relationships.	✓	✓	✓	

### 3. Quality and Consistency of ELC

Qualitative and Quantitative data highlighted clear differences in the perceptions of practitioners working in term time and mixed model settings. In particular, those in mixed model settings experienced challenges with completing paperwork, planning, and organising meetings. In addition, it was identified that some models offer more continuity than others. There were concerns that this may impact the quality of ELC children receive long-term.

Recommendation	Setting	Local Authority	Regionally	Nationally
<p><b>3.1</b> Undertake an evaluation of the models available in each local authority, considering the impact of each model on the availability of experiences, interactions, and spaces in early years' settings. They might also consider the impact for staff, and the non-contact time they have available.</p>		<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>	
<p><b>3.2</b> Increase awareness of the models available in each local authority among parents and families. This may involve providing additional information on the benefits and possible drawbacks of each model, to ensure they can access one that suits the needs of their child and family.</p>		<b>✓</b>		
<p><b>3.3</b> Consult with parents/carers of children with ASN regarding the models available for funded ELC. This will help to ensure a pattern of hours that best suits each child is offered.</p>		<b>✓</b>		



## 4. Development of the ELC Workforce

Practitioners discussed the benefits of the professional learning opportunities they accessed, and how these supported the delivery of learner entitlement. Qualitative data also highlighted possible gaps in staff development that settings and local authorities may wish to consider further. Practitioners perceived that raising the profile and professionalism of early years would help encourage more people enter and/or remain in the sector.

Recommendation	Setting	Local Authority	Regionally	Nationally
<b>4.1</b> Increase professional learning opportunities which respond to practitioner need and availability, with a particular focus on flexibly tracking and monitoring outcomes.	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>
<b>4.2</b> Increase the focus on modelling, coaching, and strategies which support staff when working with children with ASN. This should ensure all practitioners are skilled to deliver inclusive ELC to all children.	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>✓</b>
<b>4.3</b> Senior officers promote consideration of a national job title and pay scale for all early years staff, to avoid practitioners moving unnecessarily between local authorities, resulting in greater consistency and coherence.				<b>✓</b>

## 5. Supporting Staff Wellbeing

Data from practitioners suggests the expansion to 1140 hours has had a significant impact on staff morale and wellbeing. It was perceived that this has led to an increase in staff absences, thus affecting the quality of ELC deliverable.

Recommendation	Setting	Local Authority	Regionally	Nationally
<b>5.1</b> Offer increased support for students completing the Bachelor's in Childhood Practice (BACP), with a focus on resilience and strategies for coping when under pressure in ELC settings.	✓	✓	✓	