

**Northern Ireland  
Childcare Cost Survey 2017**



# Foreword

An affordable and accessible childcare infrastructure has the potential to deliver improved wellbeing for all citizens in Northern Ireland. However, what this research highlights is the current infrastructure is acting as a barrier to work and impacting negatively on family well-being. The high cost of childcare can put parents into financial difficulty which can lead to stress and anxiety or force parents to stop work altogether. What is positive, is that parents place a high value on the quality of childcare in Northern Ireland and the role that it plays in their lives.

I would like to thank those who have shared their experiences of childcare in Northern Ireland. One voice amongst thousands raised a clear plea for action:

***“Think this is great you are doing this survey but am unsure if the results will be able to be used in a positive way. I think all that will come of this survey is that stats will be produced and published and then forgotten about...Please prove me wrong.”***

Employers For Childcare commits to making sure these voices are heard and this report marks an important step in proving this parent wrong and helping us to work towards making a real difference in the lives of families in Northern Ireland.

For some parents, the cost of childcare means that they would be financially disadvantaged if they were to work. For others, paying a significant proportion of household income to childcare leaves them financially insecure and at risk of, or experiencing, in-work poverty.

The average cost of a full-time childcare place now equates to 39% of the Northern Ireland average household income. For almost one third of parents, childcare is their largest monthly outgoing, ahead of the mortgage or rent, while almost half of families have had to go without or cut back on another expense to meet their childcare costs. One third of households have resorted to means other than their income to pay for childcare—depleting savings, using credit cards, asking for loans from family or friends and even taking out payday loans—this is simply not sustainable.

But it is not just about cost. The current childcare infrastructure presents a barrier to work and career progression. For example, many parents can't find the childcare that facilitates working shift patterns, nights and weekends. Parents who have a child with a disability particularly find it difficult to access the childcare that they need. Employers For Childcare first voiced these concerns in our 'Childcare for all?' report 2011. Frustratingly, it seems that for some families, little has changed.

Childcare provision and the high cost of childcare has an impact on family well-being. A difficult theme which has emerged is that some parents see no option other than to limit the size of their family to avoid increased childcare costs. The personal heartbreak that this causes comes across strongly and is perhaps what resonates most lastingly from this year's report.

In the absence of a functioning Executive at Stormont, with changes to the landscape of financial support, the roll out of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland, and the lack of a comprehensive Childcare Strategy with the necessary funding attached, we are concerned about the growing sense of worry and despair expressed by parents in regard to the cost of childcare and its impact on their lives.

Parents value the role that childcare can play in their lives where it promotes the development of children and enables them to access work. They recognise that providing quality childcare is expensive. What they are calling for is access to support, and investment from the Government, that makes quality childcare affordable and accessible.

We do not know when an Executive will be re-established, and what the priorities of the Government will be. What we can guarantee is that Employers For Childcare will be using this research to lobby for the investment in childcare that families, the economy and childcare providers deserve. We will continue with our mission to ensure that every parent can be better off working—even after childcare costs—and that children have the opportunity to access the developmental and educational benefits of high quality childcare.

**Marie Marin**, Chief Executive, Employers For Childcare

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# The key findings

## What is the cost of childcare in Northern Ireland?

- Overall, the average cost of a full-time formal childcare place has **remained consistent at £168 per week, or £8,736 per year.**
- However, many parents will have experienced an increase in cost depending on the type of childcare they use and, behind the average, costs **range from £100 up to £260 per week** – that could be **£13,520 per year!**
- The average cost of a **full-time place in a day nursery rose by £3 per week**, while the average cost of **a week at a holiday scheme has also risen.** A parent using a community based holiday scheme in 2017 could expect to pay, on average, **14% more than they had in 2016.**

**£168**  
per week  
**£8,736**  
per year

## What are families actually paying?



- Not all families look the same and, depending on the family, some report spending a lot more and some are paying less.
- Overall, families report spending **an average of £135 per week** on childcare while families using formal childcare only are spending on average £164 per week.
- But if we look at different families, these averages can vary considerably:
  - A single parent family** with two children spends an average of **£168 per week on childcare**, well above the overall average of £135.
  - A family with **a child under the age of five** reports spending, on average, **£213 per week on childcare** – 58% more than the overall average family spend!

- As a result, almost half of families – **46% - report having had to go without or cut back on another expense in order to meet their childcare costs.** This rises to more than half – 56% - of single parent families.
- For some, this means **cutting back on luxuries such as nights out.** Others are cutting back on or **going without essentials such as food and heating.** Some families are impacting on their future financial stability through not saving money, **not paying into a pension, or switching to an interest only mortgage.**
- A third of parents - **33% - resorted to means other than their income to pay for their childcare bill including savings, credit cards, loans from family or friends, and even payday loans.**
- And yet, two thirds of parents had not sought to find out what financial support they are entitled to with the cost of childcare; for many parents this was because they were **not aware they could be entitled to help with childcare costs.**



- The average cost of a full-time childcare place equates to 39% of the average household income in Northern Ireland. The average spend reported by a **family with a child under the age of five equates to 49% of the average household income** here.
- Childcare is the largest monthly outgoing for almost one third of parents**, greater than their mortgage or rent. After housing costs, childcare is the largest monthly outgoing for families ahead of grocery bills, transport, heating and other household costs.



## It is not just about cost... Work and career progression



The ability to access childcare is impacting on the working patterns of parents.

- **63% of households** reported a change in working patterns in the last year, 42% of which did so due to the cost of childcare.
- In households where a parent decreased their hours, more than half, 57%, attributed this to the cost of childcare.
- Many **parents who did not change their working patterns reported that they did so at a financial loss**, anticipating that this would be for the longer-term benefit of their career.

*"I love my career, I worked hard at university to get a good job but I feel that I have little choice but to leave work/significantly reduce my hours because it simply isn't worth our while for me to work and have pretty much all my wages go on childcare."*

*"Not enough childcare and it is too expensive preventing many women from returning to paid employment...Childcare is an economic issue as well as a social one and should be viewed as such by government."*

## Family well-being



It is also impacting negatively on the overall well-being of families.

- The cost of childcare and its impact on work affects parents and children through **limiting family size, contributing to stress associated with financial worries**, and resulting in **families not spending time together**.
- The role grandparents play in supporting parents to work, and in the development of their grandchildren, is well recognised, however **over reliance on grandparents can lead to negative impacts in terms of their physical, mental, social and financial well-being**.

*"The cost of childcare is the single biggest worry for our family. We do not have any safety net. If our car breaks down, we are not in a position to fix it because £800 every month must go to childcare. Neither of us sleep very well because of financial pressure and we both work full time in reasonably well paid jobs. We are not coping very well and a family member now has a serious illness. I do not know how we can continue to do this."*

*"Childcare has severely restricted our quality of life - we struggle and stress about money every month and it has had a severe impact on both our marriage and our mental health... all the while feeling guilty as we're away from our baby trying to do our best for him and give him everything we can."*

## Lack of provision

- Parents identify a lack of provision of childcare.
  - **More than half – 53% - of parents think there is insufficient provision of childcare in their area.** This rises to more than one in six – 64% - of parents who have a child with a disability.
  - There is a particular issue with a **lack of out of school childcare with afterschool clubs, holiday schemes and breakfast clubs** being the forms of provision most likely to be identified as insufficient.
  - **Parents in Fermanagh and Tyrone are more likely to report insufficient childcare provision** in their area.
- This results in almost one in six – 56% - of parents reporting that they are not currently accessing the childcare they require. Amongst these parents, almost two thirds – 65% - state that the cost of childcare is a key reason.
- **The majority of parents - 87% - think the quality of childcare provision in Northern Ireland is good or very good** compared to just **26% who rate the affordability of childcare provision positively**.

# Introduction

## About Employers For Childcare

Employers For Childcare aims to make it easier for parents with dependent children to get into work and to stay in work. The organisation encompasses a charity and the only Social Enterprise Childcare Voucher company in the UK. We help parents maximise their incomes, manage childcare costs and create a suitable work-life balance. Through working with employers and policy makers, we have sought to encourage and secure better support for families in the workplace and in public policy.

**Research, Policy and Lobbying:** we undertake research to provide us with the evidence to lobby Government on childcare, family and work-related issues, striving to ensure that the voices of parents, childcare providers and employers are heard when policy decisions are being made. We engage with policy makers and political representatives across the UK, from the Northern Ireland Assembly to Westminster.

**Family Benefits Advice Service:** our specialist Advisors carry out personalised benefits checks and better-off calculations to ensure that every parent is claiming all the financial help they are entitled to, particularly towards the cost of childcare. We also deal with queries on childcare and work-related issues through a Freephone Helpline used by thousands of parents, employers and others across the UK, and deliver face-to-face events, presentations, seminars, and publish information and research.

## About the Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey

Employers For Childcare has been conducting the Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey since 2010 to explore the cost of childcare and how this impacts on parents in Northern Ireland. It is the most extensive study of its kind in Northern Ireland, and is widely used to inform political debates, policy development in relation to the affordability of childcare, and service delivery.

This survey is distributed through our network of stakeholders, partnership organisations, political parties, policy makers and the media so the views of local parents and childcare providers are heard far and wide. The 2017 survey, the eighth in this annual series of research, received more than 4,800 responses from parents and over 700 from childcare providers.

Data collection took place between May and July 2017. Childcare providers in Northern Ireland were contacted through hard copy questionnaires and online. Parents were invited to respond to a survey that was published online, circulated across a variety of networks and shared on social media. Parents could self-select to participate in the research.

## Section 2: Cost of a childcare place in Northern Ireland



**Cost of a full-time  
formal childcare place**  
(across private and community/  
voluntary settings)

has remained consistent at

**£168**  
per week

## 2.1 Cost of a childcare place: overall

### Full-time childcare: day nurseries and childminders

Parents working full-time hours will typically require 50 hours of childcare a week; the majority of childcare settings which offer full-time places open between 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday.

The 2017 average cost of a full-time childcare place has remained consistent with last year's Childcare Cost Survey (2016) at £168 per week.

There are variations depending on the nature of the provider. The cost of a full-time place at a day nursery has risen by £3 per week while the cost of a full-time place at a childminder has stayed the same.

	2017	2016	Change
Day nursery	£166	£163	+£3
Childminder	£169	£169	No change
Full-time overall	£168	£168	No change



**Table 1: Overall cost of a full-time childcare place in 2017 compared to 2016**

### Out of school provision

Many parents require less than full-time childcare, or full-time childcare at particular times throughout the year, for example, during school holidays. Out of school childcare provision is typically provided at breakfast clubs, afterschool clubs or through holiday schemes.

The cost of a place at a breakfast club has increased by £1 per week since 2016 to £33 per week, while the cost of a place at an afterschool club has decreased by £2 down to an average of £83 per week.

	2017	2016	Change
Breakfast Club	£33	£32	+£1
Afterschool Club	£83	£85	-£2



**Table 2: Overall cost of an out of school childcare place in 2017 compared to 2016**

The average cost of a full-time childcare place has remained consistent at £168 per week, or £8,736 for a full year based on a 50-hour week across 52 weeks of the year. This is in the context, however, of rising inflation that is hitting families hard and impacting on real wages, and an increase in UK interest rates.

Behind this, there has actually been an increase in the cost of a full time place at a day nursery in both private and community settings. It is likely that this is related to the introduction of the National Living Wage, annual increases in the minimum wage and the introduction of pension auto-enrolment, all of which add to staff costs. This may also have impacted on the increase in the cost of a childcare place at breakfast clubs. In the coming year, with projected increases in the cost of living as inflation continues to rise, we may anticipate an increase in the cost of a full-time place across all settings.



## 2.2 Cost of full-time childcare: private setting

Full-time formal childcare can be offered in private settings or by community based/voluntary providers. Examples of private settings include private day nurseries and childminders. This section explores the cost of full-time childcare in private settings.

### Full-time private childcare costs: average

Compared to last year, **the cost of a full-time private place has risen by £1 to £169 per week.**

A week in a private day nursery now costs an average of £172, an increase of 3.6% on last year’s figure of £166 per week, above the level of inflation which, in June and July, stood at 2.6%<sup>1</sup>. Private day nursery costs have increased steadily since 2013, although this year’s increase is less than that between 2015 and 2016 when costs rose by 5%.

The average cost of a full-time place at a childminder has, however, stayed the same, at £169 per week following a decline of £1 per week between 2015 and 2016.

For the first time since 2010, the average cost of a full-time place in a private day nursery costs more than a full-time place with a childminder. Last year marked a £3 difference between the average cost of a childminder and a day nursery place, compared to a £12 difference in the 2015 results. This highlights a sharper increase in the cost of a place at a private day nursery than at a childminder.

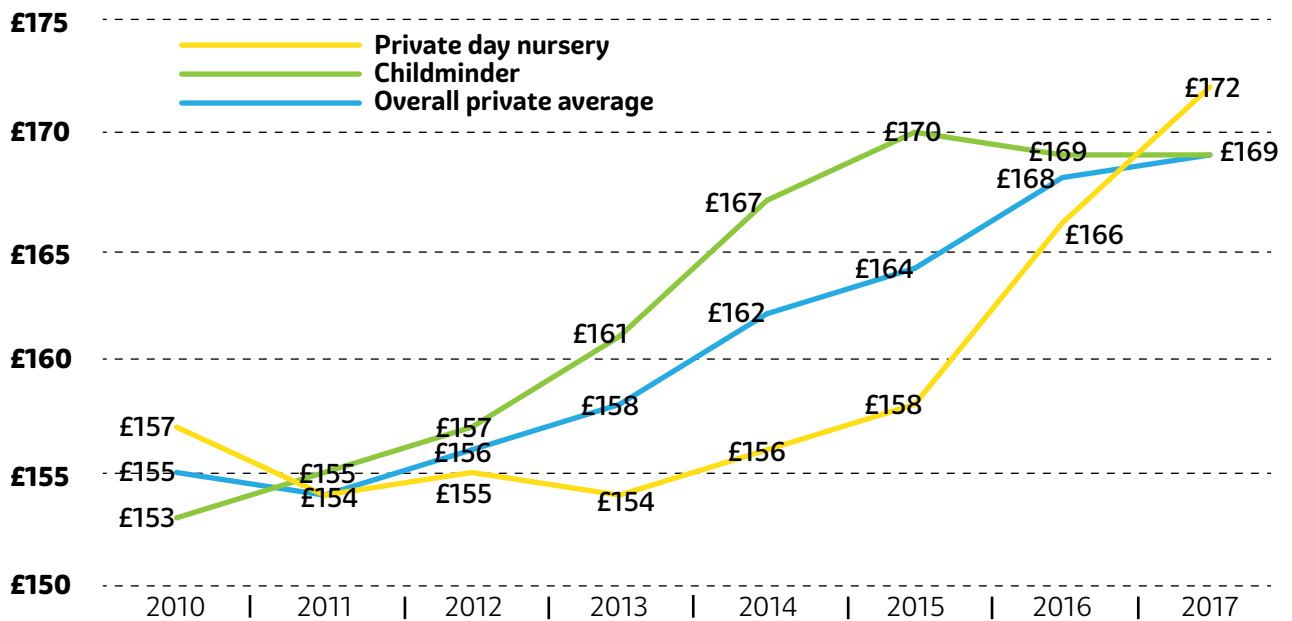


Figure 1: Change in full-time private childcare costs 2010-2017



1 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/l55o/mm23>

## Full-time private childcare costs: range

These averages are just that, averages, and the fees charged by individual childcare settings can range considerably. In 2017 the cost of a full-time place in a private day nursery ranges from £125 per week to £256 per week. The cost of a full-time place with a childminder ranges from £100 per week up to £260 per week.

### Private day nursery



### Childminder



## Variation across Health and Social Care Trusts

Each Health and Social Care Trust has a statutory duty to register and inspect childcare provision in their area. Early Years Teams are specialist teams of social workers within the Health and Social Care Trusts who are responsible for the registration, inspection, monitoring and support of childminders and day care providers. There are also five Childcare Partnerships situated in each of the five Health and Social Care Trust areas. The work of the partnerships includes the management of a range of early years and childcare programmes including Sure Start, DE Capital and the Early Years Development Fund.

A full-time private childcare place is, on average, most expensive in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and least expensive in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

Health and Social Care Trust	Day nursery: Private	Childminder	Overall average
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	£202	£184	£187
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	£180	£171	£172
Southern Health and Social Care Trust	£170	£171	£171
Northern Health and Social Care Trust	£158	£167	£166
Western Health and Social Care Trust	£160	£159	£159

Table 3: Full-time private childcare costs by Health and Social Care Trust 2017

## Variation across Northern Ireland

For the first time, the highest average cost for full-time private childcare is in County Armagh, closely followed by Counties Antrim and Down. The lowest costs are, as previously, recorded for counties Tyrone and Fermanagh (£159 and £140 per week respectively). Once again, costs in Fermanagh are much lower than in the other Counties. There is a £36 difference between the average cost in County Armagh (£176 per week) and the average cost in Fermanagh (£140 per week) which is equivalent to just under one day's full-time childcare in Armagh.

The highest average cost for a full-time place in a private day nursery is in County Down (£182 per week), while the lowest is in County Fermanagh (£140 per week). A full-time place with a childminder is, on average, most expensive in County Armagh (£178 per week) and lowest in County Fermanagh (£140 per week). The average cost of a full-time private childcare place has decreased slightly in County Down, while there has been an increase of £7 in both Armagh and Derry/Londonderry.

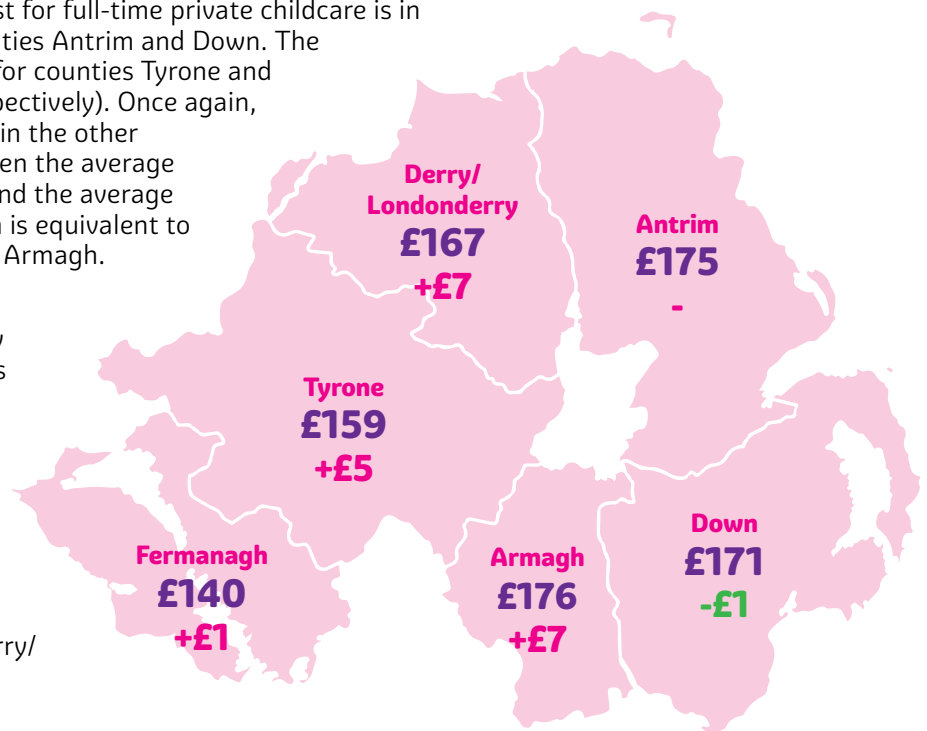


Figure 2: Average full-time private childcare costs across Northern Ireland

County	Private Day nursery	Childminder	Overall average	Average 2016	Change
Armagh	£167	£178	£176	£169	+£7
Antrim	£181	£174	£175	£175	No change
Down	£182	£169	£171	£172	-£1
Derry/Londonderry	£164	£168	£167	£160	+£7
Tyrone	£146	£161	£159	£154	+£5
Fermanagh	£140	£140	£140	£139	+£1

Table 4: Average full-time private childcare costs by county 2017

## 2.3 Cost of full-time childcare: community setting

The cost of a full-time place in a community day nursery has increased from 2016 by £1 to £144 per week. This is, however, a smaller increase than in the cost of a full-time place in a private day nursery.

In previous years, community childcare settings have been less expensive than private settings. This is a trend that has continued in 2017, with the cost differential between private and community day nursery settings £28 on average. This is an increase on last year's differential when figure was £23, but a decrease on 2015 when there was a difference of £31.

	2017	2016	Change
Day nursery: community setting	£144	£143	+£1
Day nursery: private setting	£172	£166	+£6
Differential	£28	£23	+£5

Table 5: Average community day nursery costs compared to private day nursery costs per week

This makes the cost of a full-time place at a private day nursery approximately 19% higher than at a community day nursery. As illustrated in Figure 3, the differential has closed since 2012 when it was at its highest.

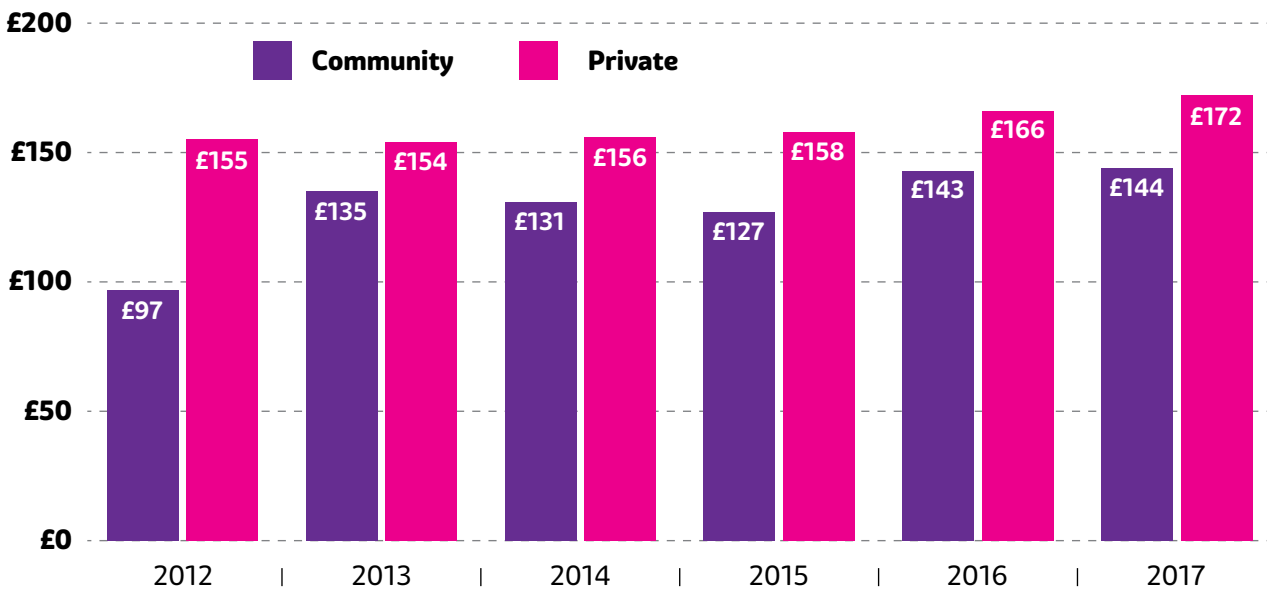


Figure 3: Differential between cost in a community setting and private setting from 2012-17

## 2.4 Cost of out of school childcare in Northern Ireland

There are three types of out of school club: **breakfast club**, **afterschool club** and **holiday scheme**. Each type is designed to cater for school-aged children to wrap around the school day and during holidays. Out of school childcare provision can be provided in private and community or school-based settings.

### Out of school childcare costs in a private setting: average

The cost of private out of school childcare has increased across all types. The average cost of a week's attendance at a private breakfast club has increased to £35 per week, £1 more expensive than in 2016. Private afterschool club costs increased by £9 per week, now costing £99 on average. Similarly, the cost of holiday schemes have increased since last year's survey. The average cost of a private holiday scheme is now £150 per week, an increase of £10 on last year's results.

The cost of afterschool clubs and holiday schemes in private settings, having declined between 2012 and 2014, have now increased for the third year in a row. The cost of a place at a breakfast club has also increased, having declined in 2014 and 2015.

Private setting	2017	2016	Change
<b>Breakfast Club</b>	£35	£34	<b>+£1</b>
<b>Afterschool Club</b>	£99	£90	<b>+£9</b>
<b>Holiday Scheme</b>	£150	£140	<b>+£10</b>



**Table 6: Average private out of school club costs per week**

### Out of school childcare costs in a community setting: average

While community childcare settings are typically less expensive than private settings, there have been increases in the average cost of a place in a community-based breakfast club and at a holiday scheme. The most significant increase is for holiday schemes which have, on average, increased by £13 from £95 per week in 2016 to £108 per week this year. However, the cost of an afterschool club in a community or school-based setting has decreased by £5, to cost on average £62 per week.

Community / school setting	2017	2016	Change
<b>Breakfast Club</b>	£25	£22	<b>+£3</b>
<b>Afterschool Club</b>	£62	£67	<b>-£5</b>
<b>Holiday Scheme</b>	£108	£95	<b>+£13</b>



**Table 7: Average community out of school club costs per week**

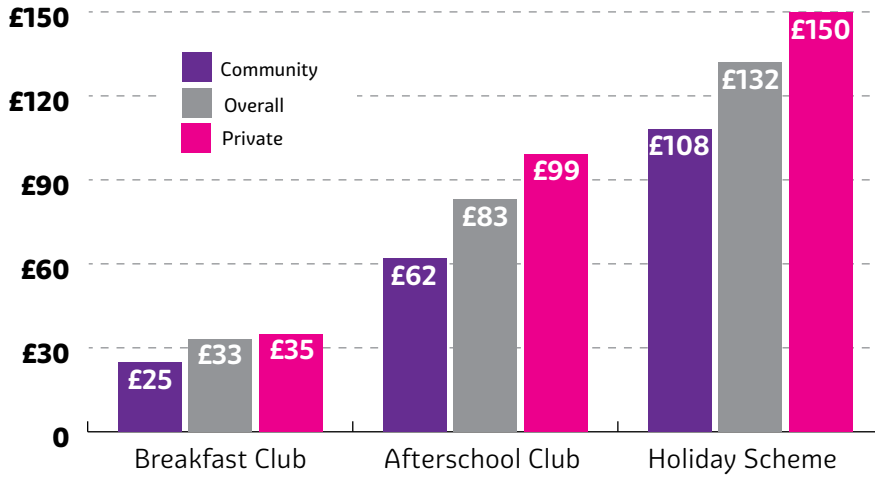


Figure 4: Average costs of community and private out of school childcare settings per week 2017

**Out of school childcare costs: range**

As with the cost of a full-time childcare place, the ‘average’ figures hide a wide variation of costs, with many schemes costing less and many costing more.



## Section 3: What are families actually paying?



**43**  
hours

Average number of  
hours families use  
per week

### 3.1 How are local families using childcare?

Overall, we found that families use an average of 43 hours of childcare each week. The majority, 60%, use a mix of formal and informal childcare in an average week, while 33% use formal childcare only and 7% use informal childcare only.

The typical breakdown for families using a mix of formal and informal childcare is 27 hours of formal childcare and 19 hours of informal childcare. Those parents using informal childcare only, are typically using this for 30 hours. Those parents using formal childcare only, typically require 38 hours per week.

Importantly, these figures are **averages only** and our survey findings highlight a wide variation in terms of childcare usage, from families using just 4 hours of childcare per week up to one family that is using 215 hours of childcare per week.

Figure 5 below shows the breakdown of childcare usage by nature of the provider and incorporates both formal and informal. Some parents will use a mixture of providers; therefore the percentages will not add up to 100.

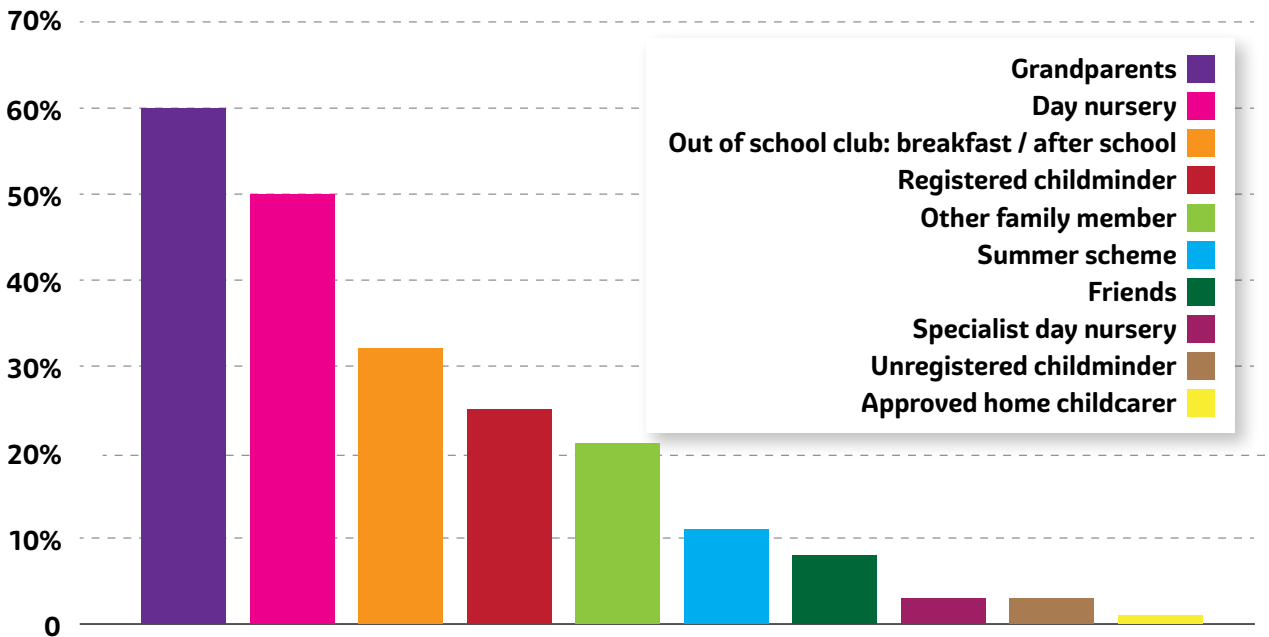
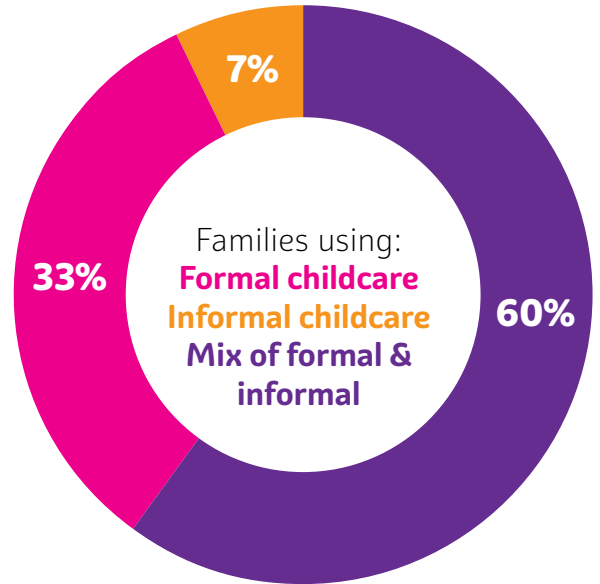


Figure 5: Breakdown of childcare usage

Families using only formal childcare tend to pay more towards their overall childcare bill than those using only informal childcare, for example through grandparents. The type of childcare used impacts the family's childcare bill.



## 3.2 What are local families spending on childcare?

Families report spending different amounts on childcare depending on the nature of the family make-up and the childcare they use. Families using informal childcare only, pay an average of £39 per week, while families using formal childcare only, pay an average of £164 per week.

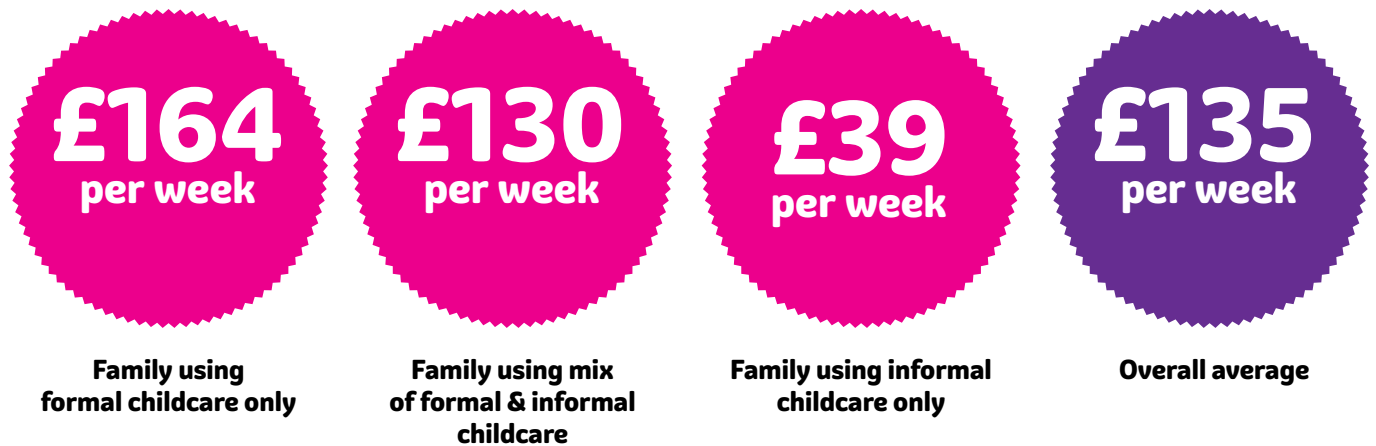
A family using formal childcare only, and paying the average of £164 per week, will therefore be paying up to £8,528 per year. Families who use a mix of formal and informal childcare save approximately £34 per week on average, paying up to £6,760 per year, spending approximately £1,768 less.

### But not all families look the same!

These averages capture a wide range of family circumstances, including those with one child, single-parent families, families with a number of children using childcare, and families where a child has a disability. Some families will be spending a lot more than 'the average', and others a lot less. For example, the average number of childcare hours used by a family with two children is 52 hours, well above the overall average of 43 hours per week. This increases again to an average of 70 hours when we only consider families with more than two children, who are likely to be using more hours of childcare. As a result, average costs are also higher for these families.

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#### Reported spend according to nature of childcare used:



## 3.3 Cost of childcare depending on the nature of the family

### Two parent family, both working, two children

The average number of childcare hours used in this scenario is 52, breaking down into 35 hours of formal childcare and 17 hours of informal childcare per week. These families are paying on average £162 per week for childcare.

However, where the family is using formal childcare only, they are paying on average £207 per week. Costs range from families who are not paying anything, and are using informal childcare only, up to a family that is paying £600 per week.

Two parent family, both working, with two children		All families
Childcare hours used	52 hours	43 hours
Spend per week	£162	£135
Spend per week (formal only)	£207	£164



### Single parent family, parent working, two children

In this scenario, the average number of childcare hours used is 53, breaking down into 36 hours of formal childcare and 17 hours of informal childcare. These families are paying on average £168 per week for childcare. However, where the family is using formal childcare only they are paying on average £247 per week.

Costs range from families who are not paying anything, and are using informal childcare only, up to a family that is paying over £400 per week.

Single parent family, parent working, two children		All families
Childcare hours used	53 hours	43 hours
Spend per week	£168	£135
Spend per week (formal only)	£247	£164



### Family has a child under the age of five

In this scenario, the family typically uses more childcare hours and is paying more for their childcare. On average, where a family has one child under the age of five (there may be more children in the family) they use 74 hours of childcare per week and are spending £213. Where they are using formal childcare only this rises to £264 per week.

Family has a child under the age of five		All families
Childcare hours used	74 hours	43 hours
Spend per week	£213	£135
Spend per week (formal only)	£264	£164



Conversely, where a family's children are all over the age of five, they use an average of 40 hours of childcare per week and are spending, on average, £128 for their childcare.

Early childhood, from birth to age five, is a critical development stage in a child's life. Research recently published by Save the Children NI, examined gaps in attainment between children growing up in poverty and their peers at age five and the impact that this has on them at ages 7, 11 and 14. The report calls for a world-class early education and childcare system which must be affordable, so that all children including those living in poverty, can access and benefit from it.<sup>2</sup>

### Family has a child with a disability

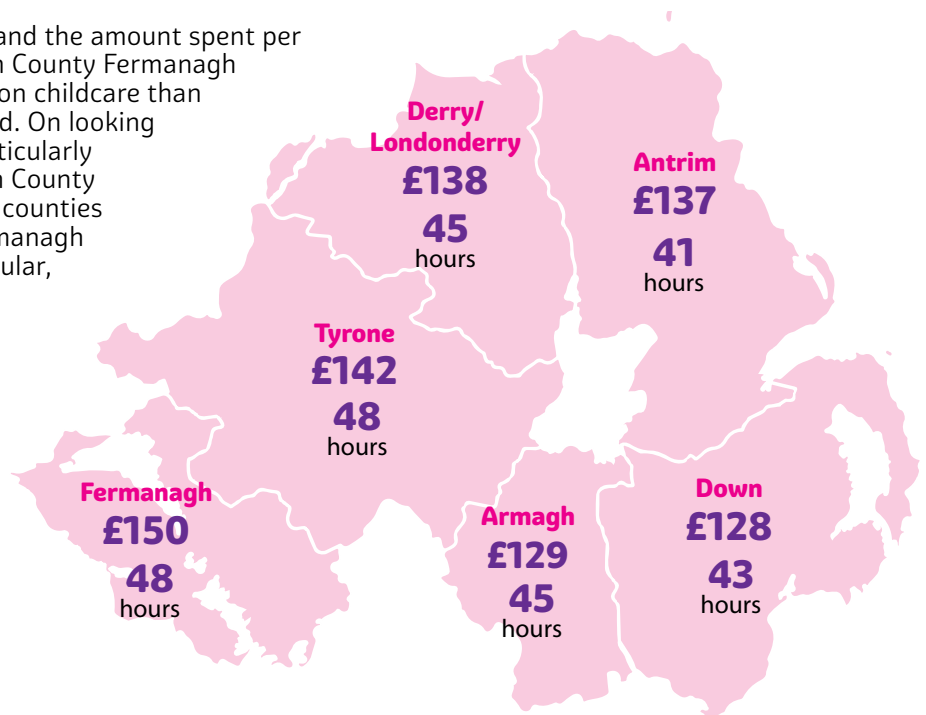
Here a family is typically using slightly more hours of childcare per week - 45 hours compared to the overall average of 43 hours - and are paying more for formal childcare, an average of £171 per week (Figure 6).

Family has a child with a disability	All families	
Childcare hours used	45 hours	43 hours
Spend per week (formal only)	£171	£164



### Families living in different parts of Northern Ireland

There are differences in childcare usage and the amount spent per week across Northern Ireland. Families in County Fermanagh are on average spending more per week on childcare than families in other parts of Northern Ireland. On looking more closely at why this is the case - particularly given that the cost of a childcare place in County Fermanagh is typically less than in other counties - it is likely due to parents in County Fermanagh using more childcare hours and, in particular, using more hours of formal childcare than in other parts of Northern Ireland. There could be a number of factors influencing this, including a longer travel time to and from work.



**Figure 6: The difference in childcare usage and the amount spent per week across Northern Ireland**

<sup>2</sup> 'Tackling the Poverty-Related Gap in Early Childhood Learning in Northern Ireland', Save the Children, 2017

## 3.4 What influences a family's choice of childcare?

There are a range of reasons why parents choose to use formal or informal childcare for their family, or a combination of both. For some, there is a sense of frustration at a perceived lack of choice, feeling that one or other option is not available to them, for example, due to the cost of formal childcare, or not having a local family support network to offer informal childcare. Key influencers identified by parents are:

**Cost of childcare** - for some parents the cost of formal childcare leads them to combine formal and informal childcare in order to reduce their overall childcare bill. Other parents attribute their decision to use informal childcare exclusively to the cost of formal childcare.

**Need for flexibility** - the need for flexibility of provision regularly features in the decision to combine formal and informal provision. Some parents referred to the opening and closing hours of their formal childcare provider as not being conducive to their own working hours, meaning they rely on informal childcare outside of those hours.

Some parents noted their decision to use an unregistered childminder related to the flexibility that this can afford them, and the fact they did not have to pay the unregistered childminder during holidays or when their child is not being cared for.

**Facilitating parents to access work** - reliability and the need to access childcare that facilitates parents' working hours are key reasons explaining parents' childcare choices.

**Benefits to the children** - for many parents, the choice comes down to what they perceive is best for their children and family as a whole. Many parents refer to the peace of mind in knowing that their children are safe, happy and have access to developmental opportunities, whether that is in a formal or an informal setting.

It is important to note that, for some parents, looking after their children themselves is their preferred choice. Some parents feel unable to do this for financial reasons and have suggested that there should be support for this.

**Specific needs of a child** - in some families, the specific needs of a child have a significant influence on the form of childcare that is accessed. In particular, parents who have a child with a disability report difficulties in accessing suitable childcare both in terms of giving their child the support needed and in affording that childcare where it is available.

**Perceived lack of choice in deciding on use of childcare** - finally, some parents perceive they do not have a choice in using formal or informal childcare, either because they cannot afford to access formal childcare but would like to, or they would prefer to use informal childcare and are unable to access this.

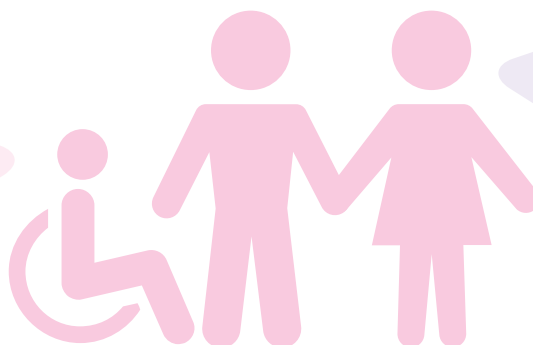
*"The mixture of informal and formal childcare makes the formal childcare more affordable - we do not pay for informal childcare. We could not afford full time formal childcare."*

*"Childcare is essential to allow me to work, particularly as a single parent ... very expensive but necessary."*

*"We are forced to use informal childcare as formal childcare is so expensive. We are fortunate to have family willing to take on this role free of charge."*

*"Without informal childcare I would be unable to work. I have had to reduce my hours to accommodate the fact that childcare cost if I was full time would cost equal to my monthly wage making it an impossible choice."*

*"Formal childcare does not start early enough for me to be able to work my required working hours. If I did not have the help of informal childcare, I would be unable to work full-time."*



### 3.5 How does the childcare bill compare to household income?

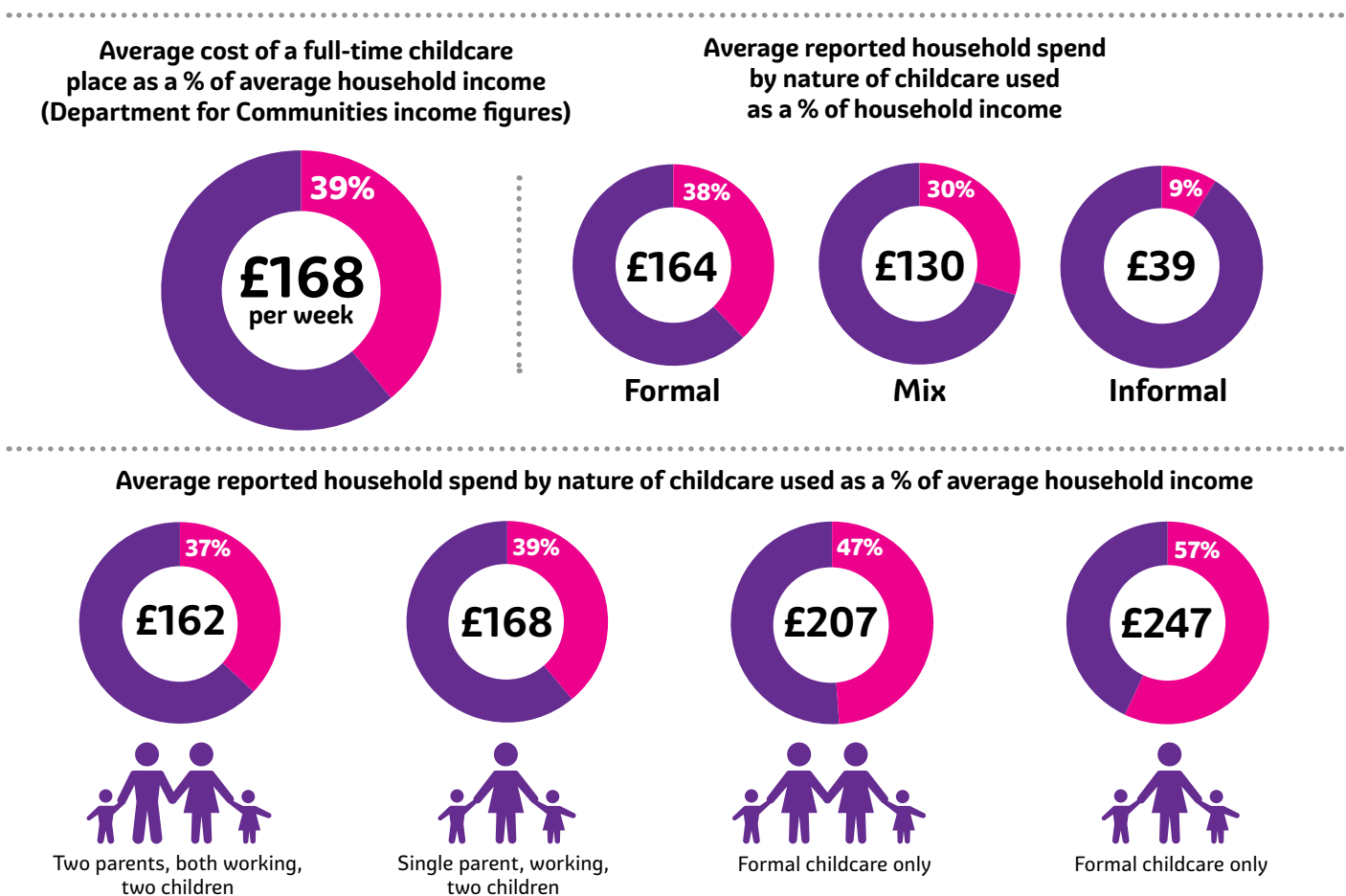
The childcare bill is a regular monthly payment for families. For some it constitutes a significant proportion of the weekly or monthly household income.

According to the report, 'Households Below Average Income Northern Ireland 2015/16', published by the Department for Communities, the average (median) income before housing costs in Northern Ireland increased by 4% from 2014/15 to £436 per week in 2015/16.<sup>3</sup> The tables below show the proportion of household income that correlates to average childcare costs.

This year, the average cost of a full-time childcare place, per week, equates to 39% of the median household income in Northern Ireland before housing costs. However, we recognise that some families will be using a mix of formal and informal childcare, some will be paying for childcare for a number of children, all impacting on the overall childcare bill for families and the proportion of income this equates to.

The average spend by a family using only formal childcare equates to a greater proportion of the average household income. It is understandable why parents, particularly those in one-parent households, those who are not accessing support they are entitled to, and those who have seen their own wages stagnate, can struggle with the cost of childcare.

Public sector pay was frozen for two years in 2010, except for those earning less than £21,000 a year and, since 2013, rises have been capped at 1% - below the rate of inflation.



**Figure 7: The cost of full-time weekly childcare as a percentage of average household income (Department for Communities income figures)**

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/hbai-2015-16.pdf> Published 17 August 2017 Note that an adjustment is made to income to make it comparable across households of different size and composition. These were the most up to date figures available at time of writing.

### 3.6 How does the childcare bill compare to other household bills?

The childcare bill is just one payment that families must meet each month. To put the cost of childcare into perspective, we asked parents to rate their household expenses from highest to lowest. Mortgage/rent payments were the highest monthly bill for the majority of parents (58%), mirroring the findings of previous years. The proportion of parents paying more for childcare than any other bill has fallen slightly since last year's survey to 30% (33% in 2016). This is still up on the 2015 figure of 25% and highlights that **almost one third of households are paying more for childcare than on their mortgage/rent**. After housing costs, the childcare bill was the largest monthly outgoing for families exceeding grocery bills, heating, transport and other household costs.

Asda's latest Income Tracker report<sup>4</sup> (July 2017) showed that families have a slightly increased amount of discretionary income of £199, up £0.91 a week on the previous year. However the report finds that there has been accelerating inflation in food and clothes, with the rate of inflation standing higher than earnings growth, and families have also had to pay more for electricity, as the UK's major energy suppliers increased prices substantially this year. Looking ahead, the report anticipates that the situation for families remains challenging as rising utility costs and food prices will persist. This is perhaps reflected in the small increases in the percentage of parents stating that their grocery bills account for their largest or second largest monthly outgoings (an increase of 1% and 2% respectively).

In seeking to manage the childcare bill, parents take a number of actions, including making financial sacrifices, using informal childcare to reduce overall costs, or changing their own work arrangements; all of which can impact on families in a number of ways.

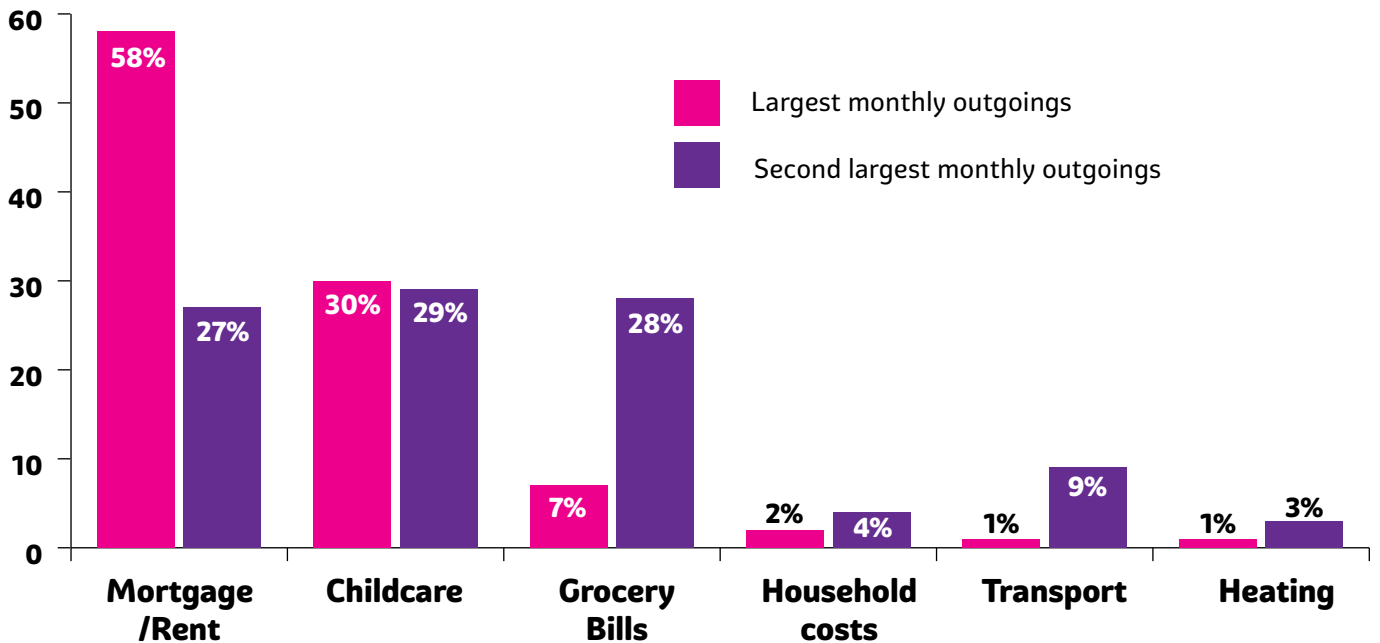


Figure 8: Parents' largest and second largest monthly outgoings

<sup>4</sup> Asda (2017) Asda Income Tracker, available at <http://corporate.asda.com/newsroom/2017/08/31/income-tracker-july-2017>

## 3.7 Impact on financial well-being

Childcare costs continue to consume a large proportion of household income and are one of a family's largest monthly outgoings.

### 3.7.1 Cutting back or going without to meet childcare costs

In the last year, 46% of parents reported their household has had to go without, or cut back on another expense, in order to meet their childcare costs. For many, the childcare bill must be paid in order for the parents to go to work and, as such, is a bill that takes priority.

Single-parent families are more likely to have to cut back or go without as a result of their childcare costs, with 56% of single-parent households reporting that this was the case in the previous year.

For some families, cutting back means going without luxuries such as gym memberships or nights out. In other cases, families are going without heating, cutting back on the quality of food they are eating or skipping meals altogether.

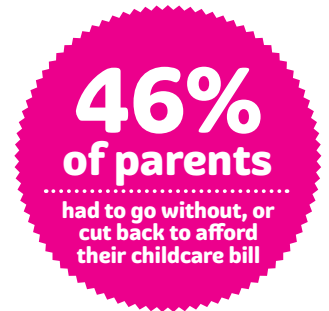
Many families are concerned about the long-term implications of not having money to save or put into pensions or for the future. Other families are concerned that they are just about breaking even at month end as a result of their childcare outlay, meaning they are unprepared for unexpected costs such as a car or household appliance break down.

There is clearly a scale in terms of the impact that childcare costs can have on a family's financial well-being. For some the impact is recognised as short term, with families cutting back on what they consider to be luxuries in anticipation of affording these again when childcare costs reduce, although this can still have an impact on overall family well-being.

In addition to cutting back on luxury items, families report cutting back on more general living expenses that, while not essential, can impact on family well-being, for example children's extra-curricular activities, having a family car, and clothing.

For others, the impact is much more fundamental with a potentially longer-term effect on the health and well-being of children. For example, some families indicated that they are cutting back or doing without healthy food, or heating for their homes. One family told us that they had had to visit a foodbank in order to ensure that their children were fed.

Some families express their concern that, in order to pay the childcare bill now, they are reducing their longer-term financial stability.



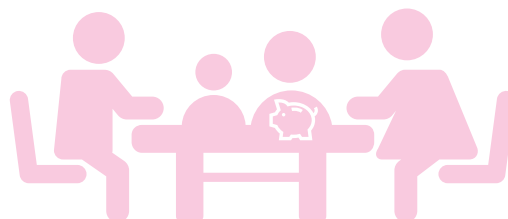
*"The cost of childcare is so high that I am unable to save money from month to month."*

*"Money that should be going towards pension and savings will be spent on nursery."*

*"We are only able to make minimum payments in clearing debts due to the cost of our childcare."*

*"We cut back to one car and haven't had a holiday in 6 years. Basically every month is budgeted in order to meet childcare costs and as costs increase, the squeeze becomes tighter. Less money for recreational use as a family."*

*"Every month family cut backs on general living, kids missing school trips and the weekly grocery shop to be reduced."*



*"We haven't had any heating oil for 4 months because we can't afford it. I have to go without breakfast and lunch to put food on the dinner table."*

### 3.7.2 More challenging at certain times of year

Many parents find certain times of the year more challenging than others, and can face an additional struggle to meet their childcare costs. In particular, parents mentioned that holiday periods, especially the long summer holiday, can put them under pressure.

### 3.7.3 Using means other than income to pay the childcare bill

33% of parents reported that they had, in the last year, resorted to means other than their income to pay for childcare. This is a significant increase on last year when 25% of parents told us that they had used means such as credit cards, loans from family or friends, or payday loans to pay their childcare bill. We will track this into 2018 to identify if there is a trend that growing numbers of parents are resorting to means other than their income to pay for childcare.

Of parents who used other means to pay their childcare bill a significant proportion—80%—had resorted to using savings. 2% had resorted to using payday loans, which marks a decrease on last year’s figure of 5%, but is still a concerning figure. Just under one fifth of these families have used a credit card where they have not paid the balance off in full in order to pay their childcare bill, meaning that they could be running a risk of getting into credit card debt and having to pay interest. 15% of these parents have paid their childcare bill using a loan from friends or family, while a slightly smaller percentage have relied on a gift from friends or family. Some parents have used a combination of different means, meaning that the percentages in the table below do not add up to 100%.

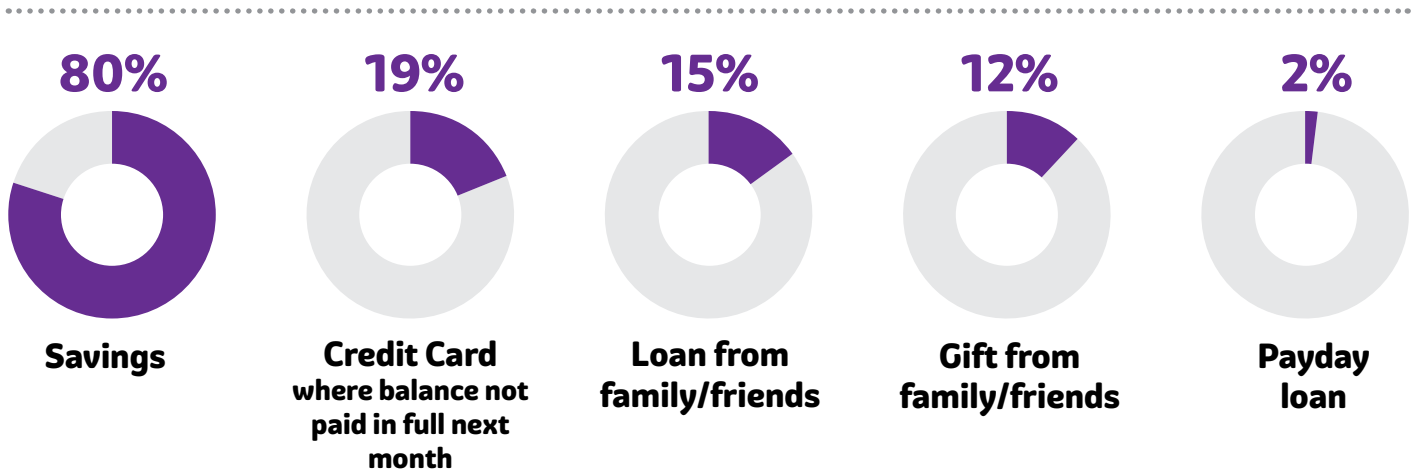


Figure 9: A breakdown of sources used by those parents (33%) who report using means other than income to pay for childcare



## 3.8 Accessing support for childcare costs

For some parents, the ability to access the childcare they need depends on their ability to access financial support and, therefore, they need to be able to get information on what support they are entitled to.

### 3.8.1 Parents currently accessing support

78% of parents report that they are receiving some form of support with their childcare costs. Amongst these parents, the breakdown is:

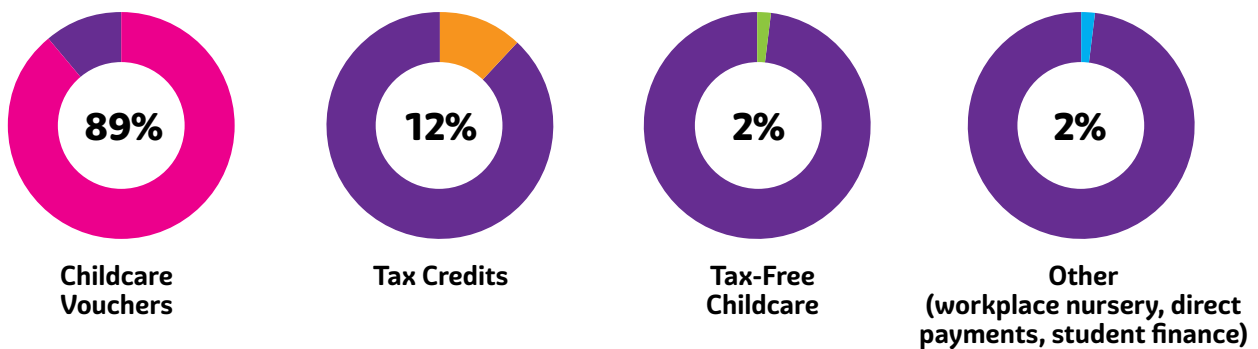


Figure 10: Support being accessed

### 3.8.2 Finding out what financial support is available

Just one third of parents, 33%, have taken steps in the last year to find out what financial support they are entitled to with the cost of childcare using a variety of sources and networks including:

- Advice-giving organisations, bodies or websites such as Employers For Childcare, Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Money Advice Service, MoneySavingExpert, NI Direct
- The parent’s employer or HR Department at work
- The Government website or HMRC website
- The Childcare Choices website
- General online search using various web browsers
- Social media, particularly Facebook
- Local MLA
- An online calculator with those provided by HMRC and Employers For Childcare specifically mentioned
- Accountant
- Childcare provider

Just one third of parents, **33%** have taken steps in the last year to find out what financial support they are entitled to with the cost of childcare.

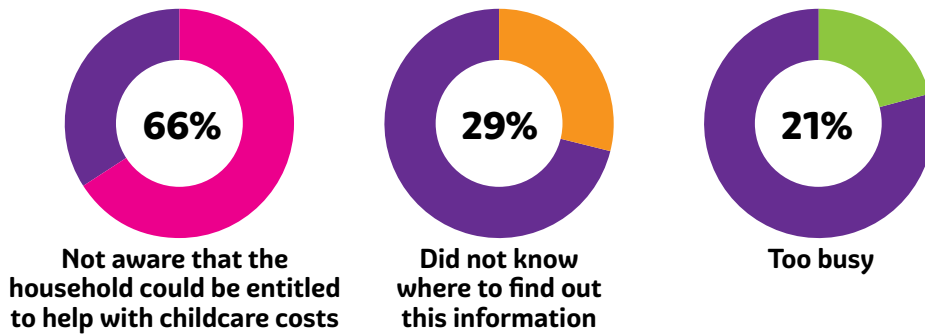
The variety of sources listed could reflect that parents do not know where to go for information on the financial support that they could be entitled to, and seek to find out more through general internet searches, social media and their own networks. With sources of information listed including childcare providers, employers, MLAs and professional advisers such as accountants, it is important that these individuals and organisations are aware that there is significant support available, and that they can signpost parents to advice-giving organisations.

Of the two thirds of parents who have not taken steps to find out what financial support they are entitled to, 10% explained this is because they do not require financial support, while a further 36% indicated they already know what financial support the household is entitled to.

When those who do not need support, or already know what support they are entitled to are excluded, the primary reason for parents not finding out what financial support they could be entitled to (given by 66% of parents in this position) is that they were **not aware that they could be entitled to help with their childcare costs**. Almost one third, 29%, **did not know where to find out this information**.

These figures highlight a worrying lack of awareness amongst parents that they could be entitled to support and where they can find out more information on the support they are entitled to. Comments from parents highlighted prevailing assumptions that parents who are working, are married, or have a certain level of income will not be entitled to any form of support.

This reflects the importance of ensuring that parents are given accurate and accessible information about support for childcare costs as it is likely that the majority of households will be able to access some form of support whether that is through Childcare Vouchers, Tax Credits, Universal Credit or Tax-Free Childcare. This is particularly important given the ongoing changes in the landscape of financial support with the roll out of Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare in Northern Ireland.



**Figure 11: Why have you not taken steps to find out what financial support you are entitled to?**

Nb: this excludes parents who stated they did not need support or already knew what they were entitled to.

### 3.8.3 Accessibility of information

Almost two thirds of parents, 64%, would like to find out more about what financial support they may be entitled to with the cost of childcare, suggesting that a majority of families are unsure if they are claiming all of the family benefits and entitlements that are available for their family.

We asked parents to rate the availability of information on financial support with the cost of childcare and, to put this in context, the availability of information more broadly on childcare options. 29% of parents rate the availability of information on financial support as good or very good, compared to 46% of parents, almost half, who rate the availability of information on childcare options as good or very good. 38% of parents think that the availability of information on financial support available with the cost of childcare is poor or very poor.

Parents are happier with the availability of information on childcare options, which has a positive weighted average, compared to the availability of information on financial support with the cost of childcare, which has a negative weighted average. Given the impact that the cost of childcare can have on families it is essential that the availability of support, and signposting of where to go for information, is promoted.

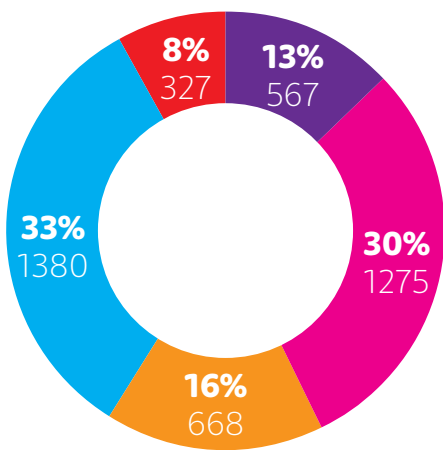
	Weighted average	Very good	Good	Neither good/poor	Poor	Very poor
Availability of information on childcare options	+29	12%	34%	30%	19%	5%
Availability of information on financial support available with costs of childcare	-13	6%	23%	34%	28%	10%

**Table 8: Availability of information**

### 3.8.4 Awareness of Tax-Free Childcare

Tax-Free Childcare, which commenced its roll out in April 2017, is a new Government scheme to help parents with the cost of childcare. In 2016, 69% of parents indicated that they were not aware of the Government’s plans to introduce this scheme. This year, 13% of parents reported they had never heard of the scheme before, a further 30% indicated that they have a poor understanding of it and 16% have an understanding that is insufficient for their needs. While this highlights that awareness of the scheme has increased, just 41% of parents indicate that they have a full or sufficient understanding.

This is concerning given that the scheme is now live and could be of benefit to many of those parents. Many parents now have an important choice to make between Childcare Vouchers and Tax-Free Childcare. Parents cannot benefit from both schemes, therefore it is important they seek guidance now to find out which scheme would leave them better off and, if they will be better off using Childcare Vouchers, ensure that they are members of the scheme before April 2018.



- I had never heard of it before**
- I have a poor understanding**
- I have a reasonable understanding but insufficient for my needs**
- I have a sufficient understanding for my needs**
- I have a full understanding**

Figure 12: How would you rate your understanding of the Government’s new Tax-Free Childcare scheme?

*“I have to always ensure that I have enough to pay for it so if I am low on money then I have to take it out of savings or cut back on food bill. I can’t cut back on fuel as I need my car for work. It can be a struggle and I often owe money because I have to wait until pay day to have enough to cover childcare costs.”*

*“No point if you earn above a certain threshold. I feel the system doesn’t recognise working parents and have seen this with my own eyes that parents are better off reducing their contracted hours to gain more benefits.”*

*“The cost of childcare is the single biggest worry for our family. We do not have any safety net. If our car breaks down, we are not in a position to fix it because £800 every month must go to childcare. Neither of us sleep very well because of financial pressure and we both work full time in reasonably well payed jobs. We are not coping very well and a family member now has a serious illness. I do not know how we can continue to do this.”*

## Section 4: It's not just the cost



**63%**  
of households reported  
a change in work  
patterns for one or  
more parents

## 4.1 Work and career progression

Where the cost of childcare consumes a significant proportion of household income, this can cause parents to question whether they need to change their working patterns—either working longer hours to bring in more income, or to reduce the hours they work—and therefore reduce their childcare bill. Where a tipping point is reached, and the cost of the childcare bill reaches or exceeds the income generated through employment, some parents make the decision to leave work altogether.

While this is a decision for individual families to make, and for some it is a carefully considered choice, other families feel that they do not have the options they would like open to them. Where a parent leaves work, or changes the pattern of hours worked, this can have a significant impact on the parent and on the family in both the short and long term. Access to childcare can be essential for parents to access work and training. This in turn provides the family with an income, financial stability and economic wellbeing.

### 4.1.1 Change in working patterns

Overall, 63% of households reported that there had been a change in working patterns for one or both parents with a number of trends identified:

1. Parents increasing their working hours in order to increase their income.
2. Parents reducing their working hours or leaving work altogether.
3. Parents changing the pattern of their working hours.
4. Parents continuing to work full-time, but at a financial loss.

We found that, in 38% of households, one or more parents increased their working hours. In 19% of households, one or more parents decreased their working hours and in 17% of households, one or more parents changed their pattern of hours, for example, working compressed hours, using a flexi-system or taking on shift work. In 2% of households one or more parents left work altogether.

In those households (63%) where there had been a change in the nature of work undertaken by one or more parents, the reason given by most respondents was the **cost of childcare** (42%) followed by **financial reasons** (32%) and a **change in the nature of the job** (28%).

When we break down responses depending on the nature of the change, some reasons gain more prominence. A higher proportion of parents who had decreased their hours, left work altogether or changed the pattern of their work gave the cost of childcare as a key reason behind this change. Where a parent had changed the pattern of their work or decreased their hours, they were more likely to identify an ability to access suitable childcare as a reason.

While in many cases, a change in working patterns is due to factors related to childcare, there are often a variety of factors at play and there may be other reasons. For just 16% of households, a change in work was attributed to personal preference suggesting that, for a majority of households, other factors are more important.

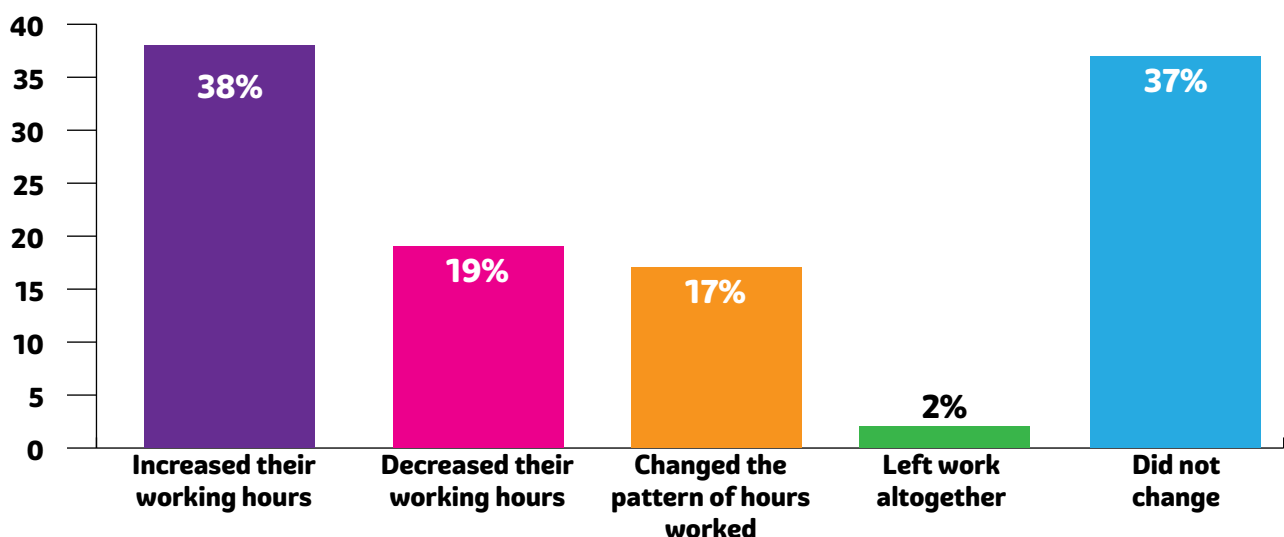


Figure 13: Reported change in working patterns

### 4.1.2 Increased hours or took on more work

Financial reasons and a change in the nature of the job were more likely to be given as a factor for increasing hours than in the overall sample of those who had changed their work in any way. Where parents factor the cost of childcare into the decision to increase their working hours, many expressed a concern that this impacts on the time that they can spend with their family.

### 4.1.3 Decreased hours

In households where one or more parents decreased their hours, more than half—57%—attributed this to the cost of childcare.

Many parents commented on having decreased their working hours as a decision directly linked to their ability to access flexible, affordable childcare, and voiced their concern at the impact this could have on their family. In some cases, a reduction of hours was necessary because otherwise the cost of childcare would meet or exceed a parent's income.

Parents in this situation are, however, concerned about the impact that decreasing their hours can have on their longer-term professional opportunities and development.

### 4.1.4 Leaving work altogether

For some households, one or more parents have taken the decision to leave work altogether. The principal reason given for this was the cost of childcare (49%).

Health reasons also featured more prominently in the decision-making process for parents who had left work altogether than in the overall sample (20% compared to 3%).

Some compared the cost of childcare to their earnings and, on balance, calculated that they would be better-off financially for one parent not to work. This still has an impact on overall family income and, as is apparent in some of the quotations from parents, is a difficult decision to make, and one that is not necessarily due to parental preference.

### 4.1.5 Changing pattern of working hours

Many parents changed their working patterns in a variety of ways including compressing their hours, taking on shift-work or using flexi-time. The primary reason is the cost of childcare, and is mentioned significantly more than in the overall sample of those who have changed their work in some way. The key reason given for a change in the pattern of working hours was the cost of childcare (59%).

The location of childcare also featured more prominently in the decision-making process for parents who had changed their working patterns than in the overall sample (12% compared to 5%). Again, as is the case for those parents who have reduced their working hours overall or left work, this impacts a family in a variety of ways including reducing the time a parent can spend with their family.

In some families, both parents changed the pattern of their working hours in order to minimise the hours of childcare required.

### 4.1.6 Working at a financial loss to support long-term career progression

The impact of changing work hours or patterns due to the cost of childcare is perceived by some to be detrimental to long-term career progression. For this reason some parents continue to work full-time, but at a financial loss, anticipating that this will be for the benefit of their careers.

	Overall	Increased hours	Decreased hours	Left work	Changed pattern of work
<b>Cost of childcare</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Financial reasons</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Change in nature of job</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Personal preference</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Ability to access suitable childcare</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Family reasons eg other caring responsibilities</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Location of childcare</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Health reasons</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>To undertake training/education/volunteering</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4%</b>

Table 9: Reasons parents give for changing their working arrangements

*"When having kids I had to change my working hours and days, reduction to part-time and leaving early to collect kids from day-care in time. Massive step back in my career and reduction in my salary."*

*"It is a strain but no alternative other than for one parent to give up work. We think of long term benefits (financially) when children start Primary School and benefits psychologically of seeing parents (of both sexes) in work."*

*"Again we work longer hours to pay for childcare and household bills. I have taken up a second job just to pay bills. I hate it as I'm hardly ever in the house to see my children, but have to do it to support my family."*

*"I'd love to work but cost of childcare means it's not worth my while. That's disappointing to me because I feel like I could be making a contribution to society as well as bringing up my children and I would enjoy it too."*

*"Having to work compressed hours (5 days in 4) in order to make child care affordable, means as a father I cannot get to see my son in the evenings as he is sleeping by the time I get home."*

*"In the last year I reduced my working hours because childcare costs were costing me more than I was getting paid."*

*"We take on overtime therefore in turn missing out on what little time we have with our children as we already work full time."*

## 4.2 Family well-being

The cost of childcare can impact on the overall well-being of families, whether as a result of financial strain, changes to parental work patterns or reliance on other family members - particularly grandparents - to provide support.

### 4.2.1 Impact on parents and children

A number of themes emerge, each of which puts a strain on individual parents, and the relationships between them:

- **Limiting family size.**
- **Stress associated with financial worries.**
- **Family not spending time together.**

Parents who responded to our survey stated, without prompting, that they had limited the size of their family, or are choosing to delay having another child, specifically due to the cost of childcare. Some parents expressed that they find this very upsetting and that it goes against their personal preference.

For other parents, financial worries that stem from the cost of childcare to their family can have a negative impact on day-to-day family life, lead to individual stress, and also put a strain on the relationship between parents.

In many cases, parents are going without themselves, and are finding it difficult to balance their work, family and social lives for the benefit of their mental well-being.

For many parents the necessity to plan their working hours around their childcare needs means that they are losing out on time with each other, or on time spent together as a family. While this can limit the size of the childcare bill for the family, it can negatively impact on overall family well-being putting strain on marriages, relationships and family life.

In order to ease this impact on family well-being, it is essential that parents can have access to affordable childcare that meets their needs and supports them to achieve the balance between work and family lives that best suits them.

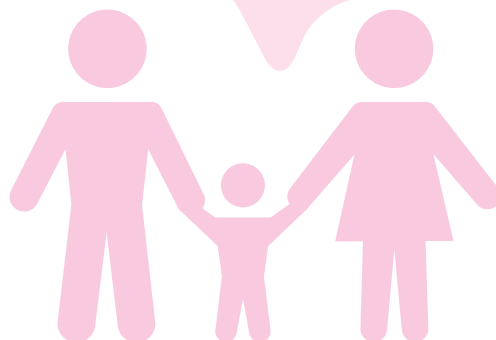
These quotations from parents echo the messages that Employers For Childcare was hearing 15 years ago when launching our first Summer Scheme guide, when parents told us about feeling like “ships in the night”, particularly during the long summer holidays. It is frustrating that, when we are talking to parents 15 years later, the messages are the same.

*“We don’t live anymore, there is little free time as a family and we don’t have any disposable income. The wife and myself are like ships in the night. She is working shift rota. Every other weekend and evenings.”*

*“It has a strain on relationships due to money worries. Parents do without a lot. Constantly paying overdraft fees and finding it difficult to keep on top of bills.”*

*“Anxiety/stress/ depression due to worry, every month handing whole pay over to childcare, and having to order shopping online as budget is so tight and can’t go even a pound over.”*

*“I need to work and have tried evenings and night shifts to combat childcare costs only to have my marriage suffer. More assistance with childcare would allow us to meet normal cost of living needs.”*



*“Increased financial strain and added stress on parental relationship.”*



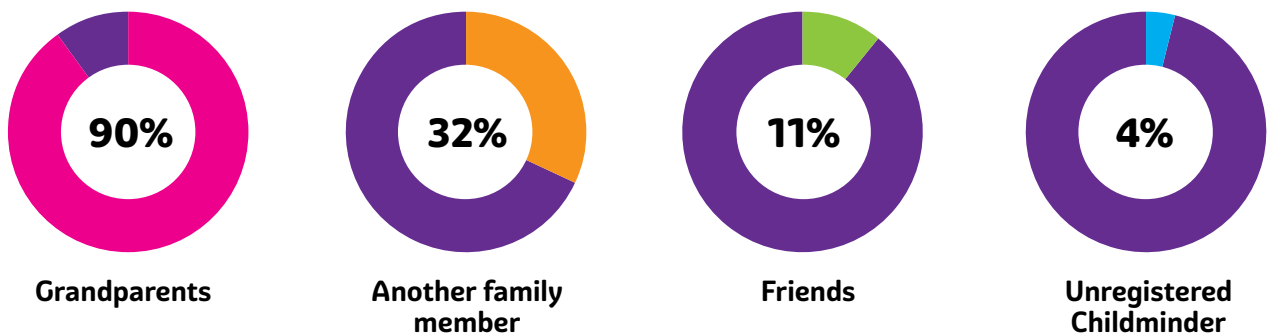
### 4.2.2 Impact on grandparents

A large number of families choose to use informal childcare, for example family and friends, to meet some or all of their childcare needs. This can be for a variety of reasons, including to reduce the overall cost of the family’s childcare bill.

Of all families using informal childcare, including those using a mix of formal and informal childcare, 90% use childcare provided by grandparents. Of those using informal childcare only to care for their children, 83% are using informal childcare provided by grandparents.

2,859 families in our survey reported using informal childcare, whether exclusively or in combination with formal childcare. Many parents use a combination of childcare, meaning the percentages in the graphic below do not add up to 100%

**90%**  
of families using informal childcare access childcare provided by grandparents



**Figure 14: Nature of informal childcare used**

Many of the parents who responded to our survey commented on how grateful they are to their own parents—their children’s grandparents—for the help and support they provide, enabling parents to access or to stay in work, whether through offering flexibility to accommodate parents’ own working hours, or by cutting the cost of childcare to affordable levels.

Parents also remarked on the broader benefits to their family, where children enjoy time spent with their grandparents, and the role that grandparents play in caring for their children.

However, many parents also voiced concerns about the impact that significant caring responsibilities can have on grandparents, and some spoke of the ‘guilt’ that they feel in relying on them - a sense that they are imposing a ‘burden’, despite the fact that grandparents are glad to provide this support.

In reflecting on the impact that responsibility for childcare can have on grandparents, three main themes emerge:

- **Physical and mental well-being.**
- **Social well-being.**
- **Financial well-being.**

Many parents commented on the impact that providing childcare can have on the physical and mental well-being of grandparents, putting them under pressure, and stress - particularly as they get older. A number of respondents commented on the restrictions placed on grandparents in terms of use of their own time, impacting on their social well-being, when they should either be enjoying their retirement or their own time off work. As a result, looking ahead, a number of parents raised concerns about the ongoing sustainability of these arrangements, particularly as grandparents get older and the impact of their caring responsibilities is felt more significantly.

Many parents reflected their concerns regarding the financial well-being of grandparents who may have changed their own working hours or left work in order to provide childcare, many of whom accept no or very little money to provide this care. This may become a greater concern as the state pension age increases. Several parents suggested that there should be formal financial assistance to support grandparents who take on this role, given how important it can be in enabling parents to access work and, therefore, saving the public purse overall.

For many families the choice to have grandparents provide childcare, whether on a part-time or full-time basis, is just that, a choice. Many parents identify significant benefits from these arrangements to their children, grandparents, and the family as a whole.

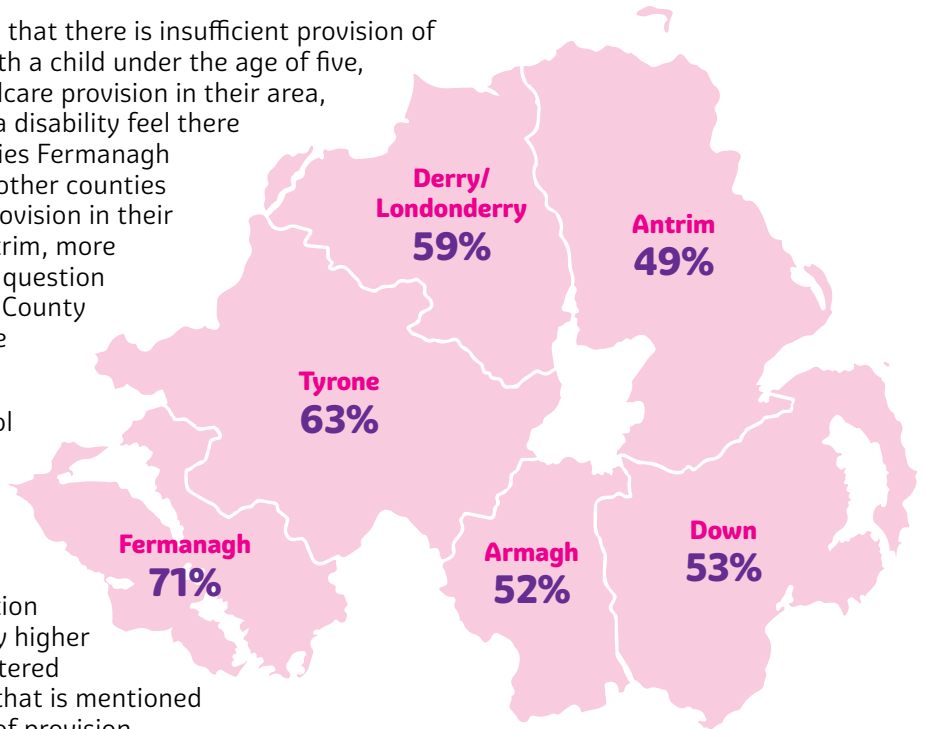
However, where these arrangements are put in place to mitigate issues with our current childcare infrastructure, for example, to reduce the cost of childcare or to provide flexibility so parents can get to work and where they are felt to be having a negative effect on grandparents, then this is a concern that must be addressed. If the childcare infrastructure better supported parental employment, this could in turn enable more grandparents to stay in the workforce if they choose to do so and, where necessary, remove or lessen the physical impact and strain on their mental well-being by providing many hours of childcare each week.

### 4.3 Childcare provision to suit the needs of families

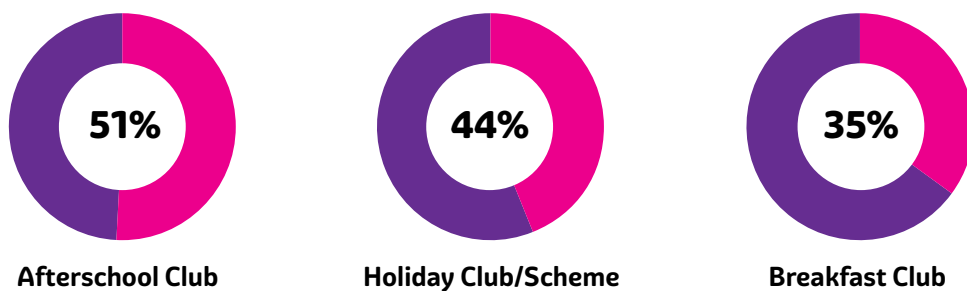
More than half of respondents (53%), think that there is insufficient provision of one or more types of childcare. Of those with a child under the age of five, 66% reported that there is insufficient childcare provision in their area, while 64% of parents with a child who has a disability feel there is not sufficient provision. Parents in Counties Fermanagh and Tyrone are more likely than parents in other counties to feel that there is insufficient childcare provision in their area. In all counties, other than County Antrim, more than half of parents who responded to this question reported insufficient childcare provision. In County Fermanagh, this figure is approaching three quarters of parents.

There is a particular issue with out of school childcare, with 51% reporting that there is a lack of afterschool clubs, 44% a lack of holiday schemes and 35% a lack of breakfast clubs. Looking at this breakdown across the different counties, this trend is largely consistent, with a significant exception in County Fermanagh, where a considerably higher proportion of parents stated a lack of registered childminders. This is the form of provision that is mentioned by more parents compared to other forms of provision.

Some comments shared by parents highlight that a lack of provision is felt more strongly at certain times of the year, and will also depend on the age of the children in the family and on whether they have specific or additional needs.



**Figure 15: Percentage of parents who believe there is a lack of childcare provision by County**



**Figure 16: Percentage of parents who believe there is a lack of out of school care**

	Antrim (946)	Armagh (176)	Down (466)	Fermanagh (66)	Derry / Londonderry (199)	Tyrone (162)
Afterschool club	49%	47%	58%	44%	49%	46%
Holiday club / scheme	45%	43%	45%	38%	42%	46%
Breakfast club	31%	28%	42%	32%	40%	37%
Registered childminder	19%	23%	20%	45%	24%	28%
Day nursery	19%	18%	15%	29%	22%	22%
Registered Nanny / Approved Home Childcarer	12%	9%	11%	15%	10%	18%
Specialist day nursery/unit	5%	3%	3%	5%	5%	5%

Table 10: Lack of childcare provision by County

### 4.3.1 Are you able to access the childcare that you require?

More than half of respondents, 56%, reflected that they are not currently accessing the childcare they require. Of those parents not currently accessing the childcare they require by far the most popular reason, given by 65% of parents in these households, is the cost of childcare in their area. The second and third most popular reasons, each given by 21% of parents, are a lack of suitable childcare and the opening hours of childcare in the area.

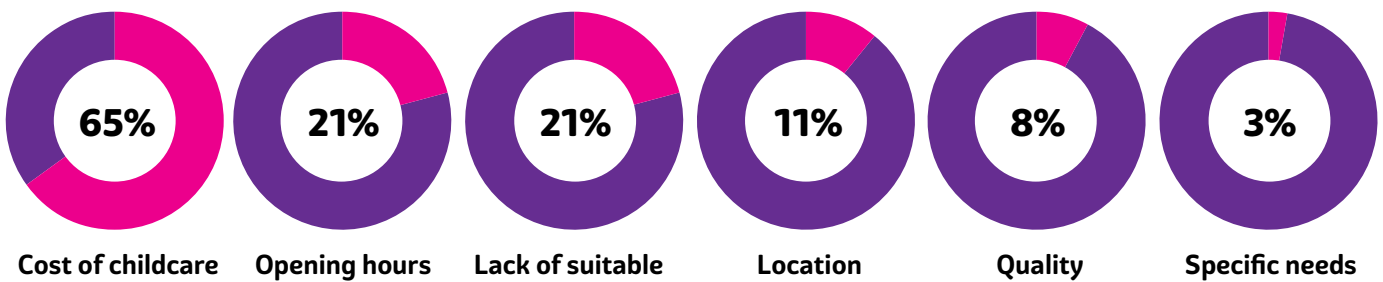


Figure 17: Percentage of parents who believe there is a lack of out of school childcare

### 4.3.2 Cost of Childcare

Unsurprisingly, with 65% of parents specifying it as a reason why they do not access the childcare that they require, many comments focus on the cost of childcare provision.

What the comments from parents help to highlight is a particular issue for parents who would like to be able to use part-time childcare, or to pay only for the childcare that they are using. A large number of parents expressed their frustration at the cost of part-time childcare compared to full-time childcare, often finding that there is little difference in cost. Some parents suggested changing the pricing structure to introduce a pay per hour or pay as you go system. It was also highlighted that parents may, on occasion, need to access childcare because of an emergency and this can be difficult to find.

### 4.3.3 Opening hours and flexibility

It was also apparent that parents who work outside of the typical daily working hours, for example at weekends or overnight, can experience issues in accessing the childcare they need.

### 4.3.4 Holiday childcare

As noted elsewhere in this report, many parents of school-age children experience greater challenges in accessing the childcare provision that they need during school holidays. This can be due to a number of reasons. For some, there is simply a lack of holiday childcare provision. For others, the provision may be there, but there are challenges in accessing it due to factors such as additional costs and the opening hours of the provision that is available.

### 4.3.5 Rural families

Finally, challenges experienced by families who live in rural areas and require access to childcare were highlighted.



## 4.4 Benefits of Childcare

The majority of parents (87%) think the quality of childcare provision in Northern Ireland is good or very good, with a similar percentage—83%—ranking the location and accessibility as good or very good. Conversely, just 26% rate the affordability of childcare provision positively, with 42% rating levels of affordability as poor or very poor.

Differences in opinion towards the different aspects of childcare provision are even starker when we use a weighted average. The table below shows that parents have more positive than negative attitudes towards all aspects of childcare provision, to varying degrees, other than to its affordability, where they have an overall negative approach.

	Weighted average	Very good	Good	Neither good/poor	Poor	Very poor
<b>Quality of provision</b>	+128	43%	44%	10%	2%	0%
<b>Location / accessibility</b>	+116	40%	43%	12%	5%	1%
<b>Affordability</b>	-22	6%	20%	33%	30%	12%
<b>Flexibility of provision</b>	+57	19%	40%	24%	15%	3%
<b>Suitability of opening times</b>	+84	27%	45%	16%	10%	2%
<b>Sufficient places</b>	+63	20%	42%	22%	13%	3%
<b>Waiting time to access</b>	+64	22%	34%	32%	10%	2%

**Table 11: Parent attitudes towards aspects of childcare provision**

Many parents commented that, although the cost of childcare is high, they were happy with the care provided and the benefits for their children. If a child is content, settled and the parent feels comfortable and trusts the provider then, for many, this is worth the cost.

Although childcare can be expensive, parents are quick to recognise positive experiences with childcare providers as well as the role of childcare workers and the important work they do. In particular, parents mentioned the positive impact good quality childcare has on their children. This is weighed up against the cost of the provision and the impact this has on the family.

## 4.5 Childcare for children with special or additional needs

Almost two-thirds (64%) of parents who have one or more children with special or additional needs feel there is not sufficient childcare provision. This is well above the overall figure of 53%. They flagged concerns they find it more difficult to access the childcare provision that they need—whether throughout the year, at certain times, or at particular stages in the child’s life—for example, the transition into school when wraparound childcare might be needed.

Employers For Childcare first gave voice to these concerns when we published our *Childcare for all?* report back in 2011<sup>5</sup> when we consulted with families of children with disabilities and/or special needs about their experiences of childcare and employment. Frustratingly, it seems that for some families, little has changed.

Parents who have a child with a disability report particular difficulties in accessing suitable formal childcare, both in terms of giving their child the support that is needed and in affording that childcare where it is available.

Not only is access to suitable or sufficient childcare an issue, parents of a child with a disability have flagged that this can mean the cost of childcare is higher. Earlier in this report, we noted that families who have a child with a disability are, on average, paying £171 per week where they are using formal childcare only. This is above the average of £164 across all families.

Parents who have a child with a disability are less likely to be using formal childcare only – 25% of families compared to the overall figure of 33%. They are more likely to be using informal childcare only (11% compared to 7%) or a mix of formal and informal childcare (64% compared to 60%).

They also tend to have a slightly less positive approach to childcare provision than overall across all families. This is reflected in the table below when compared with the table on the previous page setting out attitudes towards aspects of childcare provision. The table on the previous page highlighted that parents overall have a more positive than negative attitudes towards all aspects of childcare provision, to varying degrees, other than to its affordability, where they have an overall negative approach. When the views of parents who have a child with a disability are examined, the same trend is apparent, but overall their positivity is less than amongst the full sample of parents.

Views of parents who have a child with a disability	Weighted average	Very good	Good	Neither good/poor	Poor	Very poor
<b>Quality of provision</b>	+108	39%	38%	16%	6%	1%
<b>Location / accessibility</b>	+97	37%	33%	20%	9%	1%
<b>Affordability</b>	-20	7%	16%	36%	32%	9%
<b>Flexibility of provision</b>	+42	17%	36%	24%	18%	5%
<b>Suitability of opening times</b>	+73	26%	39%	19%	14%	2%
<b>Sufficient places</b>	+43	17%	35%	25%	22%	2%
<b>Waiting time to access</b>	+51	21%	26%	37%	15%	1%

**Table 12: Views of parents who have a child with a disability**

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.employersforchildcare.org/report/childcare-for-all/>

## 4.6 What is good about childcare provision in Northern Ireland?

While not all parents will share the same experiences, a number of common themes emerged from what parents report is good about childcare provision in Northern Ireland.

**High standards in a well-regulated sector** - a large number of parents reflected on the importance that, when they leave their child in a formal childcare setting, they know there are minimum standards in place, raising the quality of the provision and the sector is well regulated. Some specific standards that were mentioned include child safety and protection.

**High quality of care and learning and development opportunities for children** - many parents commented on the high quality of care their children receive, and the learning and developmental opportunities they are given. Some parents related this directly to the levels of training and education available for childcare professionals in Northern Ireland. Several parents commented on the range of activities and opportunities their children have access to, as well as their interaction with other children, and point to the positive impact this has had on them both socially and educationally.

**Positive experience of staff working within the sector** - parents also highlight the positive experience they had had of staff working within the childcare sector, both in their approach to caring for and developing children, and in their support of parents.

**Variety of options available** - a number of parents referred to the variety of options available as a positive feature of childcare provision in Northern Ireland.

**Support and information available to assist parents** - finally, for those parents who are aware of and able to access support and information, elements of this are highlighted positively, for example, some parents expressed their relief that some financial support is available. Other parents are grateful for the various sources of information such as the new App for registered childminders.

*"The day nursery we use is excellent in regards to child safety and protection and my kids love the social side to it."*

*"The nursery I use have dedicated and committed staff who genuinely invest in my little girl. The environment has been great for her social and emotional development and I feel completely confident (though a bit sad) about leaving her each day."*

*"The standard of care is exceptional. The children are extremely happy. Great programme of activities to stimulate them. Well regulated. I like that"*

*"Well regulated, high standards, quality trained professionals in employment in the industry."*

*"The nursery I use have dedicated and committed staff who genuinely invest in my little girl. The environment has been great for her social and emotional development and I feel completely confident (though a bit sad) about leaving her each day."*

*"The quality of the provision of our childcare is very good. In my eyes this not only stems from our provider being great with children but also from quality of the level of courses and training that are given to childcare professionals within NI."*





## Section 5: What can be done to improve childcare provision?



## What can be done to improve childcare provision?

This research highlights a range of issues associated with accessing childcare provision in Northern Ireland that continue to impact families. Some families are unable to access the childcare they require, while for others, accessing the childcare they need has a negative impact on their financial well-being or the overall well-being of the family.

For many parents, issues associated with childcare, whether that is the cost, flexibility or availability of provision, results in them changing their pattern of work. For some parents a tipping point is reached whereby the cost of childcare exceeds the financial gain from employment, causing them to leave the workforce altogether for a period of time.

We asked parents to identify what they think could be done to improve childcare provision in Northern Ireland. Unsurprisingly, the focus for many was the ability to access childcare that is affordable and flexible, meeting the needs of parents.

### What can be done to improve childcare provision?

1. Make childcare more affordable for parents.
2. Enhance the provision that is available.
3. Improve access to information on financial support that is available.
4. More strategic approach required from Government.

### Who has a role to play?

Our findings suggest roles for a range of stakeholders in improving the overall provision of childcare in Northern Ireland but principally for the Government, with parents advocating for a more strategic approach and appropriate investment.



## 5.1 Make childcare more affordable for parents

The majority of parents felt that a key improvement to childcare provision in Northern Ireland would be for it to be more affordable. Employers For Childcare believes we all have our role to play in this:

***“Childcare is a barrier to people getting into work in terms of cost and availability.”***

**Government:** A number of measures were suggested with a particular focus on the role of the Government in taking a strategic approach to reduce the financial impact on families. Parents mentioned a range of measures that they would welcome including: tax breaks; subsidies; capping costs; enhancing the levels of financial support available; and free childcare provision. Several parents referred to childcare provision in other countries and held these up as models of good practice, for example, the Scandinavian countries, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Canada.

Additionally, many parents noted the changes in childcare support in England, with the introduction of 30 hours free childcare for eligible children, and expressed their frustration that similar support is not available in Northern Ireland.

**Employers:** Some parents also referred to the role that employers can play in supporting childcare to be more affordable and accessible whether through offering workplace nurseries, ensuring that the Childcare Voucher scheme is available, supporting and advising employees, or simply through adopting a more flexible and understanding approach.

**Childcare providers:** Numerous parents called for childcare pricing structures, and the way in which fees are calculated, to be standardised and made more transparent. For example, a significant number of parents are frustrated at having to pay for childcare when their child is not there, whether this is during public or bank holidays, when their childcare provider is closed, or for half or full days when only a few hours are needed. They called for more transparency in how and when charges are communicated.

Again, the role of the Government in supporting childcare providers to deliver affordable childcare was highlighted, and in encouraging the extension of provision such as wraparound out of school childcare.

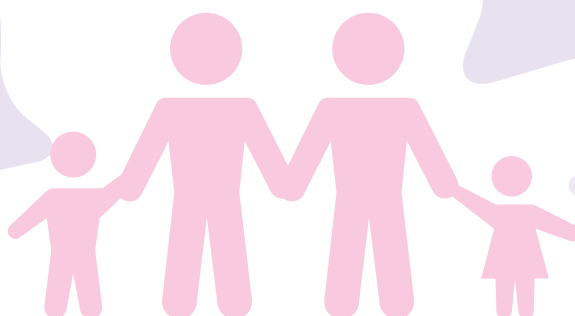


***“Line up with the childcare in other countries such as Denmark, Norway and Canada (Quebec in particular has an amazing government funded scheme).”***

***“Better childcare provision and affordability would mean more parents getting back to work... and contribute to the economy and general well-being of society. Subsidised childcare in a similar model to Sweden would revitalise a place like Northern Ireland. Free breakfast and lunches from crèches levels upwards for all children regardless of income would be life changing especially for poverty levels and low income families.”***

***“Additional financial support is essential. Childcare costs are having a direct impact not only on parents’ decisions to return to work/reduce hours but to have children in the first place.”***

***“30 hours free same as England would significantly improve our financial situation where we could live instead of survive.”***



## 5.2 Enhance the provision that is available

### Government and Childcare Providers

Some parents made recommendations designed to enhance the overall provision of childcare in Northern Ireland.

**Adding to and increasing certain types of provision** - there was a clear trend that parents with older, school-age children identify a lack of wraparound care to meet their childcare needs before and after the school day, as well as provision during school holidays.

**Extending opening hours and giving flexibility to parents** - many parents expressed their frustration that formal childcare settings do not open early enough and are not open late enough to facilitate working hours. This was an issue expressed by a significant number of parents, including those working what might be considered typical hours between 8am and 6pm on weekdays. It was particularly expressed by parents who work outside of these hours including those who work shifts, late nights and weekends.

**Promoting quality** - while the quality of childcare provision in Northern Ireland was highlighted as a key strength, a number of parents noted the importance of childcare providers being well-regulated and, crucially, that the 'ratings' and standard of quality should be easily available to assist parents in choosing a provider.

**Developing provision for children with specific and additional needs** - a number of parents commented that the specific needs of their child were not being met with current childcare provision, and suggested that there should be more availability for children who have a disability.

**Improving support available to providers and staff** - a significant number of parents expressed that childcare providers and staff need to receive greater recognition and support for the work that they do, to attract the best people to work within the sector, and to ensure they can continue to deliver a high standard and quality of care and education, without having to significantly increase their fees.



*"More enforced flexibility i.e. if you agree to pay for X number of days in a month, you should have some allowance to move those days around where possible instead of being rigidly stuck to specific days with no room for change."*

*"Breakfast clubs and wraparound care included within school which would allow homework to be tackled following school as a first cut, having childcare which does not facilitate homework puts a huge strain on families where both parents work and there are a number of children."*

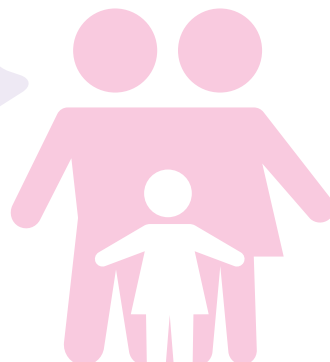
*"All nurseries must be regulated and ratings available."*

*"Better availability of childcare for disabled children."*

*"A ratings guide similar to the food hygiene rating scale used for restaurants."*

*"Access to disability childcare would mean I could go back to work."*

*"More special needs childcare and respite services."*



## 5.3 Improve access to information on support that is available

### Government/Sector Organisations and Charities

For many parents a key recommendation was that there should be improved access to information on childcare options and the different forms of support that are available to assist parents with the cost. There are a number of suggestions including booklets, websites and information packs for new parents. Some parents reflected that it can be daunting finding out information and navigating the financial support that is available.

A lot of this information is already available including websites such as **www.familysupportni.gov.uk** and NICMA's childminder database, as well as advice-giving organisations such as Employers For Childcare's Family Benefits Advice Service, PlayBoard NI, Early Years, Advice NI, the Law Centre, and Citizens Advice amongst others so one solution could be to put adequate advertising in place to ensure that parents know support is there and also how to access it.

Some suggestions reflected that there is information available but that this information could be added to or expanded, for example, adding parent reviews to existing databases of childcare providers.

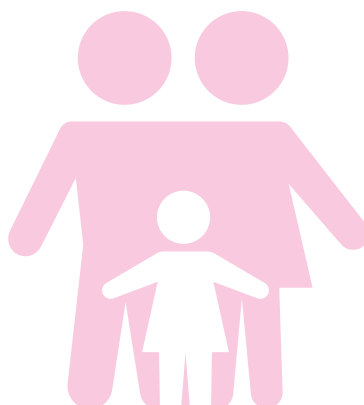


*"A general database where all registered childcare providers are listed, along with their cost, their environments (with pictures). Possibly also a place for each to be reviewed by parents, as leaving your child with someone you do not know well is a very significant event."*

*"All services should be centrally publicised on a bespoke website which clearly sets out the location, costs, qualifications of staff, special needs assistance, hours, etc., associated with each provider. The same website should also comprehensively list all forms of financial support and link to application forms."*

*"Increased information for parents - it can be very daunting and confusing, particularly in the early stages prior to school."*

*"Employers for childcare are a wealth of support and knowledge, not sure if all parents are aware of this."*



*"Better advertising for financial support and options available to working parents."*

## 5.4 More strategic approach required from Government

A large number of parents referred to what they perceive as the need for the Government to take a more strategic approach to its support for the provision of childcare and invest in it sufficiently.

Some parents expressed that investment is not always targeted where it is needed, with many commenting that help that is available tends to be skewed towards parents who are not in work to the detriment of working parents who are struggling to make ends meet.

For many respondents there was a sense that working parents are 'let down' by politicians and policy makers. In particular, parents regularly made reference to the criteria for funded pre-school places and how these are allocated in that preference is given to parents on certain benefits.

Regarding funded pre-school places, there is a common thread that these are, despite the Department's guidance, viewed as a key part of childcare provision and, as such, need to be extended and made more flexible.

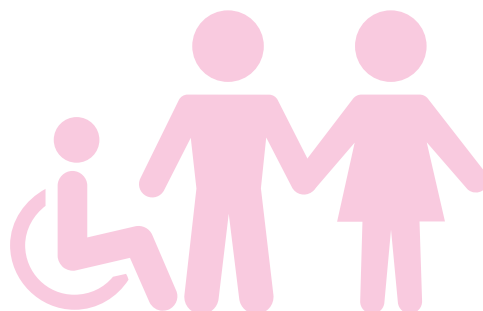
Overall, a key theme raised by parents time and time again is the role that childcare should play in supporting working when, in reality, many find that it either acts as a barrier to work or leaves families in a position where one or other parent is working simply to cover the cost of childcare. For many, this causes them to question whether it makes sense for them to remain in the workforce at all. Many parents called on Government to recognise this challenge and to address it, supporting parents to work and ensure financial stability for their families. It is clear that many working parents feel very alone on this issue, and not supported by Government.

*"Have to pay for formal childcare 52 weeks per year even though nursery is closed 1-2 weeks at Christmas, 3 days at Easter, 1 week in July, 2 days at Halloween and all bank holidays."*

*"Subsidised childcare in a similar model to Sweden would revitalise a place like Northern Ireland. Free breakfast and lunches from crèches levels upwards for all children regardless of income would be life changing especially for poverty levels and low income families."*

*"We work hard and don't seem to see the benefit because of the cost of childcare. We were particularly dismayed to learn that people on benefits get preference when it comes to government paid nursery places, over and above working people like ourselves."*

*"Grants / subsidies should be given to childcare providers so that their costs and therefore fees are not as high but staff are getting the pay they deserve."*



*"Get employers to be more flexible on supporting childcare by either providing onsite facilities or supporting flexible working hours and also working from home."*

# Conclusions

It is clear from this year's findings that many local families continue to struggle with the cost of childcare, whilst recognising the value that childcare can play in their lives and supporting the social and educational development of children. When parents feel unable to access those benefits due to the cost of childcare, or when they take on this cost and experience a negative impact on their financial well-being and on the overall well-being of the family, their frustration and their anxiety comes across strongly.

This research also reflects the value that parents place on the ability to choose the childcare that best suits their family's needs, whether due to a need for flexibility, or through personal preference. This often includes informal childcare, for example grandparents, and the benefits of this are clearly identified. However, for many parents, they do not feel that they have a real choice in terms of the childcare they can access, principally due to the cost of formal childcare. A number of broad conclusions therefore emerge from this year's research:

1. Parents value the role that childcare can play in their lives where it promotes the development of children and enables parents to access work.
2. Parents want to be able to make the right choice about accessing the childcare that best suits the needs of their whole family.
3. However, the cost of, or an inability to access, childcare can:
  - a. prevent families from having the choice they want,
  - b. act as a barrier to employment,
  - c. place a significant financial burden on families, and
  - d. impact negatively on family wellbeing.

## It's not just about cost...

These conclusions highlight how our current childcare infrastructure does not meet the needs of parents, childcare providers or employers. This is in part due to: high costs; lack of flexibility on opening hours; the availability of adequate provision across Northern Ireland; and a lack of childcare provision that meets the needs of families with specific needs. It is evident from the responses in this research that being unable to access affordable and adequate childcare can be a barrier to parents staying in work and their children accessing the developmental opportunities associated with quality childcare.

It can lead parents to reduce their hours, change their pattern of work, or leave work altogether, impacting on the financial well-being of the family and the longer-term career prospects of the parent. Conversely, in order to meet the costs of childcare, some parents are increasing the hours they work or taking on additional jobs which can, in turn, have a negative impact on overall family well-being, with families spending less time together. The choice to remain in work at a financial cost can also cause families to struggle.

## Relationship with in-work poverty

In October 2017, on the 25th International Eradication of Poverty Day, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People highlighted that, of 444,000 children in Northern Ireland, 103,400 live in poverty and the majority of these children, 61%, live in households where at least one parent is working<sup>6</sup>:

*"That is almost 1 in every 4 children in Northern Ireland living in a family which struggles to provide for their basic needs, provide a warm, adequate home, nutritious food, appropriate clothing and to pay for childcare."*<sup>7</sup>

In our survey, a clear sense of frustration emerged regarding what some parents perceived as a system that can penalise working parents, with some expressing the view that they would be better off not working. In looking to the future, it is essential that the childcare infrastructure in Northern Ireland is one that supports parents to access and stay in work or training and, once they are there, helps to ensure that work pays for those families and helps to lift them out of poverty.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.niccy.org/media/2904/niccy-child-poverty-briefing-october-2017.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.niccy.org/about-us/news/latest-news/2017/october/17/social-security-cuts-likely-to-drive-more-children-into-poverty/>

## Looking forward

The results of this survey give a strong voice to parents from across Northern Ireland, and Employers For Childcare will work to make sure their collective voice is listened to. We will continue in our mission to achieve a childcare system that meets the needs of children, families, childcare workers and providers as well as the economy and broader community. A childcare system that is affordable, accessible, high quality and flexible, and which supports those parents who have a child with a disability. A childcare system that enables parents to access and stay in paid work, education or training, and that recognises the value of childcare and those employed within the sector.

At the time of writing, Northern Ireland is without a childcare strategy, without an Executive, and parents are looking into the face of welfare reform, rising cost of living, uncertainty arising from Brexit and changes in the landscape of financial support for childcare. This report provides robust evidence highlighting issues which must be addressed to ensure childcare is affordable, accessible and meets the needs of parents, children and the wider economy.



# Appendix 1: Methodology & profile of respondents

## Methodology

Data collection took place between May and July 2017. Childcare providers in Northern Ireland were contacted through hard copy questionnaires and online. Parents were invited to respond to an online survey that was published online, circulated across a variety of networks and shared on social media. Parents could self-select to participate in the research.

### Childcare provider respondents

Facility type	Number	Percentage	Department of Health statistics	Notes
Childminder	463	58%	65%	78 Day Nurseries are also registered as Out of School providers with 75 offering afterschool clubs, 46 offering breakfast clubs and 35 offering holiday schemes. These 78 are <b>included in both categories</b> . A single registration only is required for a Day Nursery which also provides out of school services.
Day nursery	95	12%	7%	
Out of school club	130	16%	8%	
Other	106	13%	20%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	

We received **716 responses** in total, 15% of the overall population of day care providers in Northern Ireland, giving a robust statistical margin of error of 2.8% at a 90% confidence level. 78 Day Nurseries are also registered as out of school providers and, in line with the Department of Health's calculations in the Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2015/16 they are **included in both categories**, therefore the total number of providers used to calculate percentages is 794. Percentages are therefore calculated based on a figure of 794 providers.<sup>8</sup>

### Parent respondents

We received 4,843 responses from parents in Northern Ireland. With approximately 835,000 families with children in Northern Ireland this gives a margin of error of approximately 1.4% indicating a robust sample. With this level of response we can be reasonably confident that the sample reflects a true cross-section of parents in Northern Ireland. The profile of respondents is:

#### Family profile

- 93% households have two adults in a parental role, 7% have one adult in a parental role.
- 36% of households have one dependent child, 46% have two dependent children, 15% have three dependent children and 4% have four or more dependent children.
- 5% of families have a child with a disability or special needs.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Health Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2015/16 <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/child-social-care-15-16.pdf>

### Work status

- 86% of respondents reflect two parent households where both parents are employed / self-employed / on maternity or paternity leave.
- 7% of respondents reflect two parent households where one parent is employed / self-employed / on maternity or paternity leave.
- 6% of respondents reflect single parent households where that parent is employed / self-employed / on maternity or paternity leave.
- For less than 1% of families no parent in the household is employed / self-employed / on maternity or paternity leave.

### Household income

Income band	Percentage
£15,000 or less	1%
£15,001 - £30,000	10%
£30,001 - £40,000	16%
£40,001 - £50,000	20%
£50,001 - £60,000	18%
£60,001 - £70,000	13%
£70,001 - £80,000	10%
£80,001 - £90,000	5%
£90,001 - £100,000	3%
£100,001+	3%

### Location

County	Percentage	Population (2011 census)
Antrim	50%	34%
Armagh	9%	10%
Derry/Londonderry	9%	14%
Down	23%	29%
Fermanagh	2%	3%
Tyrone	7%	10%

# Appendix 2: Key terms

**Formal childcare:** The definition of registered formal childcare comes from the Children (NI) Order 1995 and includes people running day care services, used by children aged under twelve, and open for more than two hours a day. Day care services include facilities such as day nurseries, play groups, out of school clubs, holiday schemes and crèches, childminders who look after children aged under twelve for more than two hours a day in a private house. Formal childcare can be provided either in private settings or in community / voluntary based settings.

**Private settings:** Private childcare settings operate as a business, making a profit from providing their services. They are inspected by Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland to ensure they meet the standards set out in the Children (NI) Order 1995.

**Community based/voluntary childcare:** Community childcare providers offer community-based childcare services. Such provision is sometimes subsidised by Government funding to enable provision to be offered at a lower rate. Examples would be Sure Starts and women's centres which offer childcare services or day nurseries that are operated as charities or social enterprises.

**Informal childcare:** This is generally defined as care arranged by the child's parent either in the child's home or elsewhere, and is provided by relatives, friends, neighbours or babysitters and is unregulated. It is referred to as informal care because the arrangements are not formalised with contracts or employment rights (OECD Family Database) and are not registered with the appropriate authority.

**Childminder:** Registered childminders are self-employed carers based in their own home. They must be registered with their local Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT). Once registered, annual inspections are carried out by the HSCT. For new applicants references and health checks are required, as are police checks on all individuals in the household over the age of 10. Registered childminders can be registered to care for up to 6 children between the ages of 0 – 12 years of age (this number includes their own children).

**Day nursery:** Day Nurseries may be privately owned businesses, or run as charities or in community settings, and offer a structured approach to childcare. They must be registered with the HSCT and once registered are inspected annually. Day Nurseries must follow staff to child ratios as set out by the HSCT and can accept children as young as 6 weeks old.

**Out of school club:** Out of School Clubs are for children to attend before and after school and during school holidays. There are three types:

- **Breakfast Clubs** - open in the morning before school.
- **After School Clubs** - open after school until around 6pm.
- **Holiday Schemes** - open during the holidays with varying opening hours.

Clubs can be run by schools, private businesses or community groups.

# Employers For Childcare

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