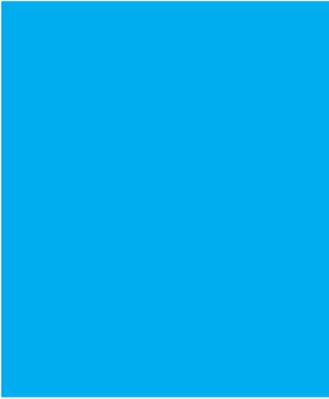




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Early Learning and Childcare Consultation

Report 2023-24

Education and Learning

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Early Learning and Childcare Consultation 2023-24

Introduction

Local authorities have a statutory duty to consult every two years on the provision of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) to inform the planning and delivery of services. Perth & Kinross Council's (PKC) Education and Learning Service consulted with the public between 19 February and 17 March 2024.

The consultation took the format of an online survey aimed to gain insight around the following areas:

- The future delivery of ELC across Perth and Kinross
- Anticipated needs around childcare into the future
- The impact of poverty on the lives of children and families in Perth and Kinross
- The use of and digital technology to support children and young people's education and learning

The survey was accessible at [Early learning and childcare consultation 2023-24 - Perth & Kinross Council Citizen Space - Citizen Space \(pkc.gov.uk\)](#) and sought the views of parents and carers regarding early education provision and childcare, school-aged childcare, digital learning and other services available in their local area. People planning to have children were also invited to give their views.

The survey was promoted across Perth and Kinross through the council's social media accounts and through school and ELC settings' communication channels. Those signed up for news distribution lists were also invited to participate.

Previous Consultation

Early Learning and Childcare Consultations also took place in 2018/19 and 2021. Previous reports regarding the findings were published on the Consultation hub and can be found at the following links:

- [Early learning and childcare consultation 2021 - Perth & Kinross Council Citizen Space - Citizen Space \(pkc.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Early learning and childcare consultation 2018/19 - Perth & Kinross Council Citizen Space - Citizen Space \(pkc.gov.uk\)](#)

Following the full expansion of 1140 hours of funded ELC from August 2020, PKC undertook further engagement with parents and carers of children aged 2-5 years old accessing their funded ELC place to understand overall parent satisfaction with the expansion to ELC within PKC and the current offer available within their community.

This took place in 2022 and the report was published at [1140 hours - Early Learning & Childcare Consultation - Perth & Kinross Council Citizen Space - Citizen Space \(pkc.gov.uk\)](#).

Purpose of Early Learning and Childcare Consultation 2023/24

We would like to thank all those who took the time to participate in the consultation. The results will help to shape how ELC and other services are delivered across Perth and Kinross. The results for specific geographic areas in the authority will be analysed in more detail to inform the development of local childcare services, family learning opportunities and other support from the council.

Profile of Respondents

This consultation received a total of 500 responses which is a fall in response to previous consultations in 2018 (744 responses) and 2021 (677 responses). This is higher, however, than those received in the 1140 Consultation in 2022 which received 393 responses.

Responses were received from across the whole Perth and Kinross area and from residents in all 11 ELC communities (Fig 1).

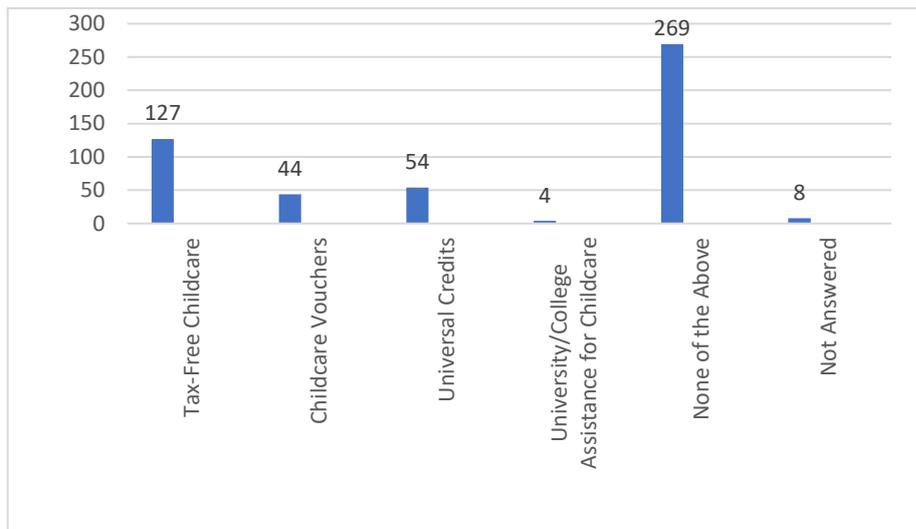
- The highest proportion of responses came from North Perth (26%) and South Perth and Earn (14.2%).
- The more rural communities of Pitlochry, Strathtay, and Aberfeldy, each had a response proportion of less than 4%.
- Four respondents reside out with the Perth and Kinross local authority area, and five respondents preferred not to say where they lived.

Fig 1: Respondents by ELC Community

Option	Total	Percent
Aberfeldy area	12	2.40%
Auchterarder area	26	5.20%
Blairgowrie area	57	11.40%
Carse of Gowrie area	38	7.60%
Crieff area	56	11.20%
Kinross area	34	6.80%
North Perth area	130	26.00%
South Perth and Earn area	71	14.20%
Pitlochry area	19	3.80%
Scone area	33	6.60%
Strathtay area	15	3.00%
Out with Perth & Kinross	4	0.80%
Prefer not to say	5	1.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

- Of the 500 respondents, the majority (86%) indicated that there were two parents living in the household responsible for the children living there. 12% were single parent households.
- Of 499 respondents, the vast majority (98.4%) were parents or carers. 5.4% of respondents also indicated they were planning or expecting to have a child.
- When asked to indicate if they were in receipt of support to assist with the cost of childcare, more than half of respondents (53.8%) indicated that they were using none of the options given (Fig 2).

Fig 2: Current Support used for Meeting Childcare Costs



Communication

There were 490 responses received to question 5: *Can you indicate where you would normally find information about ELC options?* The responses received were broken down as follows:

Fig 3: Where Information on ELC Options is Normally Found

Option	Total	Percent
PKC website	378	75.60%
Word of Mouth	257	51.40%
Social media	215	43.00%
National Websites	99	19.80%
Professionals supporting my family	56	11.20%
Leaflets/Posters	49	9.60%
Not Answered	10	2.00%

Parent Involvement and Engagement

- There were 492 responses received to question 6: *Which of these would you/do you find most supportive for parent involvement and engagement?* Respondents were able to click more than one option. E-newsletters, E-Learning Journals, Drop-in Sessions, and Social Media were the most popular options.
- There were 485 responses to question 7: *Do you have opportunities to volunteer within your child's ELC setting?* 43.8% responded that they did not know if there were opportunities available to them, 29.6% answered no, and 25.6% answered yes.

Children Aged Under Age 3 Years Old

Overall, 117 respondents opted to answer questions for this age group. Only 27 respondents indicated that their child currently accesses a funded Strong Start place in ELC. More information about Strong Start Places for two year olds can be found at [Funded early learning and childcare for 2 year olds \(Strong Starts\) - Perth & Kinross Council \(pkc.gov.uk\)](http://pkc.gov.uk)

Of those 27, six respondents agreed to identify the impact the Strong Start place had been on their individual circumstances. Respondents could tick as many items as was relevant to their circumstances:

- One respondent had been able to pursue a new employment opportunity.
- Three respondents were able to return to previous employment.
- Three respondents agreed that their childcare costs were reduced.
- One respondent had used the time to plan for the future and look for work or education opportunities.
- Two parents agreed that it had enabled them to cope better at home.
- Three parents agreed that they were better able to focus on their own wellbeing.
- One parent had been better able to access other services and attend groups/appointments.
- Two parents had experienced an improvement in their mental health.
- One parent advised that none of the above was relevant to their circumstances.

Parents and carers choosing to respond to questions for children under 3 years old were asked to respond to questions around family learning opportunities:

- 119 responses were received to the question: *Have you accessed any family learning groups or activities at your child's setting?* Of those 119, 37 (18.6%) responded yes; 82 (81.4%) responded no.
- Of those who responded no, 69 advised why they had not attended. Most respondents (58 or 84%) had not heard of the offer or were unaware the sessions were available. Seven respondents were unable to attend the day or time offered, and 4 were not interested in attending.
- 37 rated their experience at these groups on a scale of 0 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). 33 respondents rated the experience as 4 or 5; three respondents rated the experience as a 3; and one rated a 2. No respondents rated the experience as a 0 or 1.

There were a range of answers to the following question: *The Parenting and Family Learning Team currently run a wide range of family learning opportunities, could we offer anything else that would be beneficial to you or your family?* Common themes included:

- Baby sensory
- Children's First Aid
- Potty training
- Sleep sessions
- Arts & crafts sessions

Respondents were asked if they use paid-for childcare for their child aged under 3 years old. There were 117 responses, with 68 responding yes, and 49 responding no.

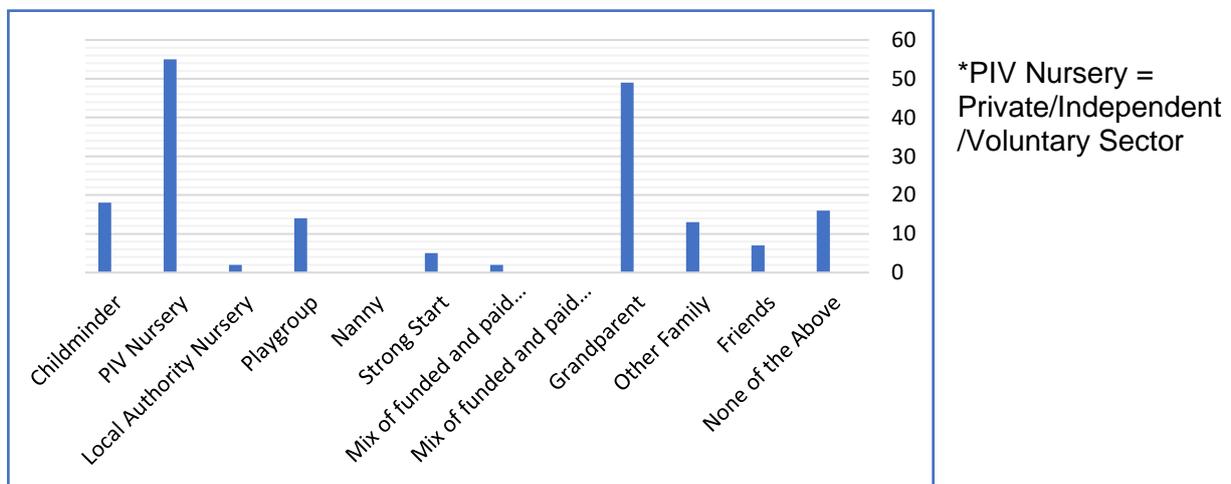
- Of those responding no,
 - 19 cannot afford to

- Five would prefer to look after their child themselves.
- Three responded there was no suitable childcare available.
- 12 responded that friends and family provide childcare instead.
- Five advised that they do not require childcare.
- The remaining five did not provide an answer.

The majority of respondents (110 of 117, or 94%) advised that they would be interested in using funded childcare for a child aged under 3 years old if it was available to them.

Respondents were asked to identify *Which childcare provision [both paid and unpaid] is currently accessed by their child under 3 years old?* There were 116 responses to this question (Fig 4.)

Fig 4: Childcare Provision Accessed by Children Under 3 Years Old



Children Aged 3-5 Years Old

Overall, 174 respondents opted to answer questions for children aged 3-5 years old.

The following responses were provided to indicate which factors are considered most important when choosing an ELC setting or attendance pattern for an ELC funded place (Fig.5). 168 respondents chose to answer this question and there was the option to select more than one answer.

Fig 5: Factors of Importance in Choosing an ELC Setting

Option	Total
The ELC setting is close to my child's home address	136
The ELC setting is close to a parent/carer's workplace or further education site (e.g., college/University/training facility)	28
The availability of public transport links between my child's home address and the ELC setting	10

The availability of public transport links between a parent/carer's place of work or study and the ELC setting	5
The attendance pattern offered at the ELC setting is best suited to a parent/carer's working pattern or education/training hours	88
The ELC setting is located within my child's primary catchment school	82
The ELC setting is located within the primary school where older siblings attend	57
The ELC setting offers an attendance pattern that works best with other sibling's school/childcare attendance patterns or daily routines	43
The ELC setting offers the option to purchase further hours of childcare to support parent/carer's working pattern or education/training	55
The ELC setting offers an attendance pattern that aligns well with another form of childcare used before or after funded sessions (e.g., childminder, family member, wraparound care)	28

- Respondents advised that accessing the ELC setting closest to their home address was the most important factor (136)
- the second most important factor was that the attendance pattern best suited a parent/carer's work or education patterns (88)
- the third most important factor was that the ELC setting is located within their child's catchment primary school (82)
- Least important factor was the availability of public transport links

There were 174 responses received to the question: *have you accessed any family learning groups or activities at your child's setting?* These were split evenly between yes (87 responses or 50%) and no (87 responses or 50%).

When asked to rate the experience from 0 (Poor) to 5 (excellent) of 87 responses:

- 63 respondents rated 5
- 10 respondents rated 4
- 11 respondents rated 3
- Three respondents rated 2
- No respondents rated the experience 1 or 0.

Of those who had not accessed a family learning group or activity at their child's setting, 85 respondents agreed to advise why not.

- 37 (43%) were unaware or did not know these were available to them
- 37 (43%) were unable to attend on the days or times offered
- 11 (14%) are not interested in the offer

There were 59 responses amongst those answering questions for children aged 3-5 years old to the question: *There is a wide range family learning opportunities available, however could we offer anything else that would be beneficial to you or your family?* Common themes included:

- Learning sessions with older siblings
- Children’s First Aid
- Family Cooking sessions

In response to a question to measure interest in Gaelic Medium Education in ELC, nine respondents advised they would be interested in accessing Gaelic provision at City of Perth Early Childhood Centre at Goodlyburn Primary School Nursery. Four respondents advised they would be interested in accessing Gaelic provision at Breadalbane Academy Nursery.

Respondents were asked if their 3-5 year old currently accesses their full 1140 hours of funded ELC. Of 174 respondents to this question, 131 (75%) responded yes, and 43 (25%) responded no.

Of those who responded no,

- the majority (33 or 76%) said that this was down to personal choice.
- Four respondents advised they were unable to access the full 1140 hours in the setting of their choice.
- Two respondents were unaware of their child’s funded entitlement
- There were single responses that indicated a parent was unable to access the preferred childcare provider or attendance pattern, and one person was unsure how to access the funded hours of ELC.

Respondents were asked to rate the 1140-hour ELC offer in Perth and Kinross to establish if families are satisfied that the offer meets vision set out by the Scottish Government in their publication, ‘A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland’ (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/blueprint-2020-expansion-early-learning-childcare-scotland-2017-18-action/>). Under this vision are four critical elements of the expansion:

- Affordability
- Flexibility
- Accessibility
- High-Quality

Each element was rated by 174 respondents from 0 (Not Satisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied) and were rated as follows (Fig. 6-9) :

Fig 6: Affordability

Option	Total	Percent
0 = not satisfied	10	5.7%
1	8	4.6%
2	11	6.3%
3	32	18.4%
4	25	14.4%
5 =very satisfied	88	50.6%

Fig 7: Flexibility

Option	Total	Percent
0 = not satisfied	21	12.1%
1	10	5.7%
2	21	12.1%
3	34	19.5%
4	33	19%
5 =very satisfied	55	31.6%

Fig 8: Accessibility

Option	Total	Percent
0 = not satisfied	10	5.8%
1	5	2.9%
2	11	6.4%
3	29	16.8%
4	40	23.1%
5 =very satisfied	78	45.1%

Fig 9: High-Quality

Option	Total	Percent
0 = not satisfied	2	1.6%
1	1	0.6%
2	10	5.8%
3	22	12.7%
4	46	26.6%
5 =very satisfied	92	53.2%

Respondents were given the opportunity to expand on their response if they were unsatisfied. There were 45 responses given and many of these were positive comments about members of staff and family learning opportunities available within their ELC setting. Other themes included

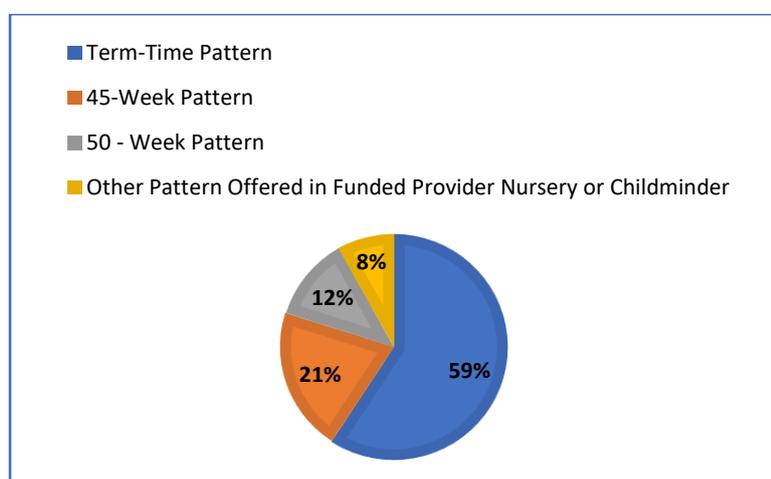
- the need for more hours to support working patterns before and after funded hours and throughout the holidays,
- requests for family learning activities to be offered at different times and days to support working parents to attend,
- offering family learning activities in the setting where siblings can be involved,
- sharing messaging beyond PKC towns and villages,
- some ideas to develop learning within the ELC setting such as more focus on family diversity, environmental sustainability, health promotion, and sports activities.

In response to the question: *Which of the following do you feel your child is benefiting from or could benefit from by attending early learning and childcare setting/s? (Select all that apply)*, the following responses were given:

- 150 respondents (89.9%) believed that their child is improving their social development
- 139 respondents (83.2%) believed that their child is improving their emotional and communication development
- 149 respondents (89.2%) believed that their child is increasing in confidence
- 134 respondents (80.2%) believed that their child is increasing in curiosity and creativity.

Different attendance models of ELC are offered in settings in Perth and Kinross, and respondents were asked to specify which attendance pattern their child currently accessed. 174 responses were received with the distribution as follows:

Fig 10: Attendance Patterns Accessed for Funded ELC



Respondents were also asked to advise why they decided upon the attendance pattern their child currently accesses. Of 174 responses:

- The most popular reason was that the attendance pattern fit parent/carer's working pattern (80 responses or 46%).
- The second most popular reason was that the pattern accessed was the only one available at the preferred ELC setting (62 responses or 35.6%).
- An older child attending the school the ELC setting is located (45 responses), preparing the child to attend school (46 responses), and having family members who could accommodate drop-offs and pick-ups at these times (33 responses) were also popular choices.

There were 174 responses to the question, *Would you be interested in paying for non-funded hours in a Perth & Kinross Council ELC setting?* 94 (54%) answered yes, and 80 (46%) no. Of those who chose no, 63 provided a response to elaborate on why they would not:

- 15 responses indicated that there is no suitable childcare available for them to do so
- 13 respondents cannot afford to pay for additional ELC
- 10 respondents currently pay for and access non-funded ELC in a private nursery or childminder.

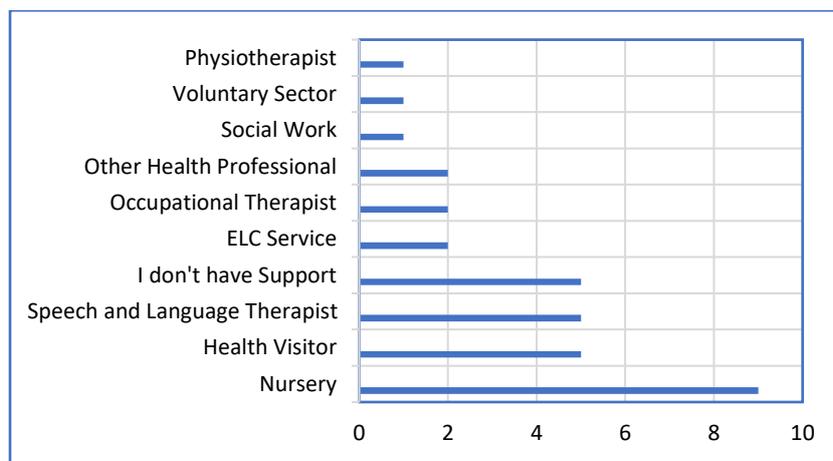
- Of those who selected other and provided a reason, most respondents advised that they did not think the offer of non-funded hours would be adequate to meet their childcare needs around working patterns and during school holidays.

Children Aged 0-5 Years Old with an Additional Support Need

There were 14 respondents who chose to answer questions regarding a child aged 0-5 years old with an additional support need.

Respondents were asked to identify where they were receiving support from and could click as many options as relevant:

Fig 11: Support Accessed for Children with ASN



Of the 14 respondents, 11 advised that their child was accessing their funded ELC hours at a local authority setting, three at a PVI nursery setting, and one at a childminder. One respondent advised that their child was not attending any setting.

Primary School Aged Children

Respondents were asked to rate how important childcare availability is to them when considering which school their child should attend. There were 295 responses with 216 (73.2%) stating that it is very important or important.

In response to the question, *Did you know you could use the Kids Clubs or Wrap Around Care listed below during holiday periods for childcare, even if you do not use it during term-time?* 189 (64.1%) responded yes, and 63 (21.4%) responded no. The remaining 43 (14.6%) responded that they were somewhat aware of this.

Of 293 respondents, 127 (43%) are currently using out of school care for their child(ren). Ways in which respondents felt their child(ren) is benefitting from accessing the service are outlined below (Fig. 12).

Fig 12: Benefits For Child Accessing Out of School Care

Option	Total
A safe place to spend time	102
Providing opportunities for my child to mix with different ages of other children	91
Access to a wide range of play experiences	70
Increased confidence	53
Increased creativity and curiosity	45
Improved emotional and communication development	36

There were 12 further responses under 'other', of which five respondents did not believe that the childcare offer was beneficial to their children.

Regarding before school clubs, 87 (29.5%) of 295 respondents use this service and a further 93 (31.5%) would if it was available to them. For after school clubs, 94 (31.9%) of 295 respondents use this service and a further 114 (38.6%) would if it was available to them. During the school holidays 66 (22.4%) of 295 respondents use a childcare service and a further 112 (38%) would if it was available to them.

Common themes in response to what family learning opportunities would be beneficial for respondents of primary school aged children included support for specific additional support needs, and an offer of groups during weekends and holidays.

Respondents were asked if there were any further comments regarding childcare provision for primary school children. There were 134 responses with the most common themes being:

- Interest in funded childcare for children aged 0-2.
- Concerns around the lack of financial support for families.
- Lack of childcare provision and wraparound care.

Secondary School Aged Children

There were 61 responses to questions regarding childcare provision for secondary aged children.

Respondents were asked the question, *Which of these childcare options would you consider for your secondary school aged child?* And could choose more than one option.

- 44 would consider activity clubs.
- 12 would consider out of school childcare.
- 24 would consider drop-in services.
- 12 would not consider any of these offers.
- Two respondents offered further suggestions of "Breakfast Clubs", "Study Support" and "Internet Safety".

Of 60 respondents, 11 (18.3%) said they would consider a Kids Club for their secondary aged child, 30 (50%) respondents advised they would not, and 19 (31.7%) were unsure or said it was not applicable to their circumstances.

Common themes in response to what family learning opportunities would be beneficial for respondents of secondary school aged children included support for specific additional support needs, and support and information for parents regarding subject choices.

Respondents were asked if there were any further comments regarding childcare provision for secondary school children. There were 20 responses with the most common themes being:

- Workshops for studying/homework and to support school-leavers such as CV writing and completing higher learning applications.
- Childcare for young people with ASN.

Digital Learning

This was a new section included for the first time in the ELC Consultation as Perth and Kinross Council seek to deliver Education Scotland’s strategy towards ensuring that all of Scotland’s educators, learners and parents take full advantage of the opportunities offered by digital technology. Further information can be found at [Enhancing Learning and Teaching Through the Use of Digital Technology: A Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy for Scotland - English Summary \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of access to a digital communication platform to keep up to date with their child’s progress and events in the ELC setting. Most parents (412 of 480, or 85.9%) rated it as important or very important.

Of 483 respondents, 397 (82.2%) stated that it was important or very important that their child is provided opportunities to develop digital skills throughout their education career.

Other Services and Support

This was a new section included in the ELC Consultation in order to identify further community and family needs and target support and services where they are needed most across Perth and Kinross.

Respondents were asked what services they or their child had engaged with over the last year and could choose as many as were relevant (Fig. 13).

Fig 13: Services Accessed in the Last Year

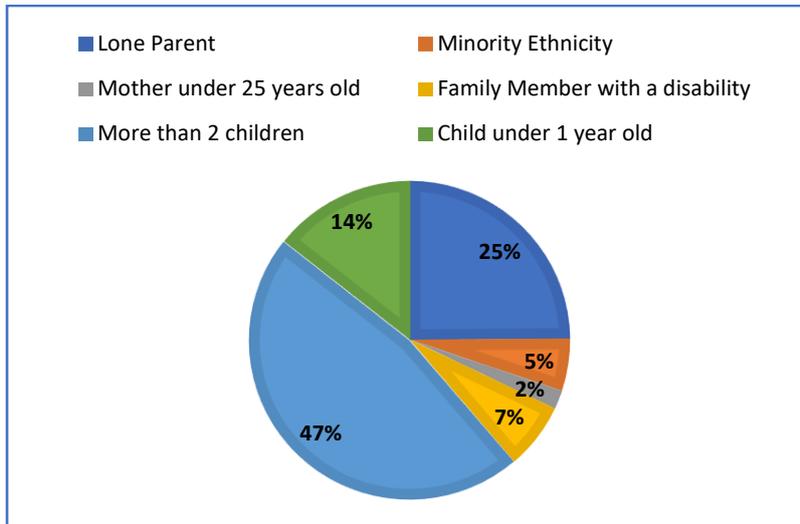
Option	Total	Percent
Mental Health support	49	9.80%
Parenting and Family Learning	68	13.60%
Parent and toddler groups	148	29.60%
Youth groups	19	3.80%
Housing	7	1.40%
Welfare/Financial Support	24	4.80%
Voluntary organisation/Community groups	61	12.20%
None of the above	228	45.60%
Prefer not to say	9	1.80%

When asked for elaboration on the experience of these services, 101 responses were given of which 87% were positive. Of the remaining responses, an inability to access services

needed or for long enough were the main themes. Other services accessed by respondents not available on the above list included counselling services, libraries, sports clubs, and children’s activity clubs such as Beavers and Scouts.

There were 460 responses to a question which aimed to identify further the profile of respondents, of which 283 (61.5%) selected “none of the above” to the categories given. Of the remaining 177 respondents, the following options were selected:

Fig 14: Profile of Respondents



Respondents were then asked to answer a question around income. There were 47 responses:

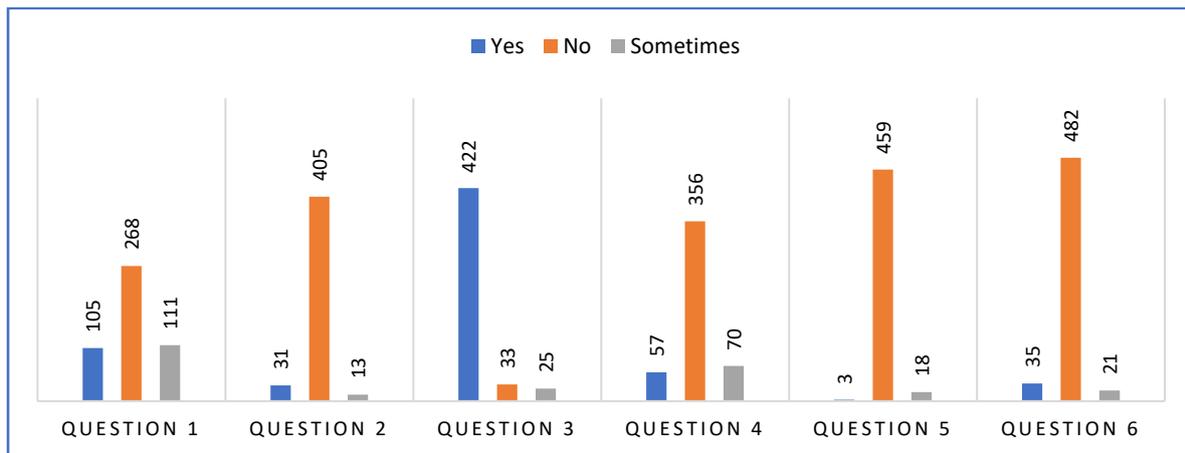
- 11 respondents identified that as a lone parent with one child, their income was less than £446 per week
- Nine respondents identified that as a lone parent with two children, their income was less than £446 per week
- Eight respondents identified that as a couple with one child, their income was less than £569 per week
- 19 respondents identified that as a couple with two children, their income was less than £595 per week

There was an option to answer yes, no, or sometimes to the following 6 questions:

- Question 1: Do you have difficulty making ends meet in the week/days before payday?
- Question 2: In the past year, was there any day when you or someone in your house went hungry because you did not have enough food?
- Question 3: Does your home have enough internet access/devices to enable all your school age children to learn from home?
- Question 4: Do you struggle to pay energy bills (electricity/gas or fuel to heat your home)?
- Question 5: Do you think you are at risk of becoming homeless?
- Question 6: In the last 12 months has lack of transportation kept you from medical or other appointments, work or getting things for daily living?

The responses received to each question are outlined below (Fig 15).

Fig 15: Responses to Cost of Living Questions



Optional Comments

All respondents were offered the chance to provide any further comments or information before the consultation ended. There was a total of 88 responses to this offer with the main themes as follows:

- 11 respondents mentioned that they would appreciate funding for childcare for children aged under two years old
- 27 respondents were concerned at the lack of childcare options and the impact of this. The lack of childcare in rural areas was mentioned by eight respondents.
- 18 respondents were concerned that there is a lack of financial support available to working families.
- 10 respondents requested more wraparound care for school age children to be offered in each school.

Initial Key Findings and Next Steps

Due to the low number of responses, any conclusion and analysis should be treated with caution.

New Findings

- One quarter of respondents utilising ELC are aware of volunteering opportunities available in their child's setting.
- Although responses from parents and carers with a child accessing a Strong Start place were low (27 respondents), all except one respondent had experienced a benefit from accessing the funded place.
- Almost all parents of children under 3 years old would access funded ELC opportunities for their child if it was to become available.
- Of respondents of children aged 3-5 years, 57% are aware of family learning activities offered by the Early Years Family Learning Practitioners.
- Over 80% of respondents think that digital literacy and learning opportunities are important for children to access.
- Up to 44% of families who responded to the consultation are struggling to make ends meet and this is impacting some families' ability to pay energy bills, buy food, make appointments, and putting them at risk of losing their home.

Similarities in Data with Previous Findings

- The PKC website, word of mouth and social media remain the most common way for parents and carers to find out information regarding ELC.
- In 2021, 2022, and in 2023/24 Consultations, preferences of attendance patterns for funded ELC places are similar, with the term-time option most popular. As was found previously, parents and carers still make the choice of attendance pattern based primarily on working pattern, preparing a child for school, and older siblings attending the same school.
- As in previous consultations, parents would like the option of paying for additional hours of ELC in their child's setting.
- In accordance with previous consultations, for most children who are not accessing their full funded entitlement of ELC this is down to parent preference.
- Most respondents are still satisfied that the funded ELC offer in PKC provides affordability, flexibility, accessibility, and quality. The percentages have fallen slightly, although this should be treated with caution as the option to respond was changed from agree/disagree in 2022 to a 5-scale rating system in this consultation.
- Similar to the 2021 ELC Consultation, approximately three quarters of respondents of primary school aged children feel that access to childcare is important or very important.
- Key benefits of accessing out of school care remained consistent with the 2021 ELC Consultation with parents commonly agreeing it is a safe place to spend time and an opportunity to mix with children of different ages.
- As in the 2021 ELC Consultation, for secondary aged children, activity clubs would be the most popular option for childcare

Actions

Due to the low response rate, Perth and Kinross Council's Early Learning and Childcare team will move cautiously towards making any decision for change and will consult further on specific themes if deemed necessary. The following actions have been drafted following an initial analysis of the data provided through the consultation:

- Develop further an ELC charging policy to extend the offer of additional hours of ELC that parents and carers can buy into at their child's ELC setting.
- Analyse the data by responses from each ELC community to determine if there are themes and challenges in particular communities regarding access to ELC or school-aged childcare that can be addressed.
- During year one of the Parental Involvement and Engagement (PIE) Strategy, gather information on volunteering opportunities currently on offer to parents and families. Schools and ELC settings will also be asked to review and broaden the volunteering opportunities they have available to parents and families.
- In year two of the PIE Strategy, create and promote a directory of family learning experiences. We will also share the importance and expectations around family learning with schools and settings in relevant documentation and during development sessions.
- Should the Scottish Government publish guidance regarding the expansion of Wraparound Care of School Aged Childcare the noted interest of parents in this consultation will be used to strategise within Perth and Kinross Communities.
- Share the data collected with the relevant PKC officers to support relevant workstreams and highlight findings.
- Consider how to increase participation in the next ELC consultation to improve the reliability of the data collection.
- Promote the use of Tax-free childcare to support families with the costs of registered childcare.