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Children's Centres: what difference do they make?

NatCen Social Research
University of Oxford
Frontier Economics

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Agenda

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- Aims and evaluation design
- Use of children's centres

Kathy Sylva

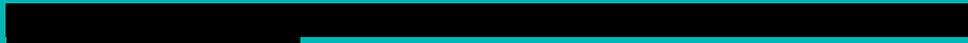
- Children's centre provision

Pamela Sammons

- The effectiveness of children's centres on family and child outcomes
-



Aims and evaluation design



Aims of ECCE

To understand the effectiveness of children's centres in improving outcomes for children and parents in relation to:

- management approaches
- delivery of services
- patterns of service use
- cost of provision.

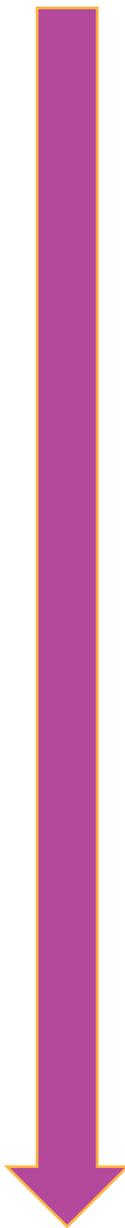
Milestone: assessment of child and parent outcomes at 3 years.

Purpose of children's centres

“...to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in:

- child development and school readiness;
- parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and
- child and family health and life chances.”

(DfE, 2013)



National survey of 500+ centre managers in disadvantaged areas

- Profile of services, staff, location, users and finance
- 128 centres in next stages
- Follow up survey to assess change over 2 yrs

Longitudinal study of children and their families

- Families registered with centres
- Interviewed face2face when children 1, 2 and 3
- Final sample of 2,600 followed to end of Foundation Stage
- Data on service use, family circumstances, health and well-being

Service delivery, multi-agency working and centre 'reach'

- Detailed data collection over 3 days
- Investigation of activities and services, leadership, evidence-based practice, parent support services and partnership working
- Assessment of the reach of centres

Cost case studies in 24 centres

- Assess costs of different services

Impact analysis

- Analysis explores outcomes at ages 3 and 5 (including social-emotional and cognitive) in relation to different types of centre services and patterns of use

Cost benefit analysis

- Combines cost data with impact analysis to assess effectiveness and benefits of centres in relation to cost

Use of children's centres

The services families used

- Most commonly used services (pre-natal to age 3): stay and play/play and learn groups, midwife/HV clinics.
- Some services were used by very low proportions such as relationship support, ESOL and first aid courses.
- Similar services accessed outside of children's centres (midwife/health visitor drop in 31%, baby sport/exercise 26%, stay and play 25%, antenatal classes 21%).

Reaching the most disadvantaged

- Use of services reduced as children got older. 85% registered families used a service at age 1, falling to 54% at age 3.
- Early education / childcare and speech / language therapy - the only services used more at age 3 than age 1.
- Low income and non-working families more likely to stay engaged and more likely to use targeted services and early ed/childcare.
- Disadvantaged families (non-working parents and those with poorer mental health) used more services directly provided by the children's centre or signposted by the centre.

Parents' use of childcare and early education

- Shift from full day childcare and early ed to part-time targeted places.
- Survey of managers showed decline in FT childcare (77% 2011 – 51% 2013) and increase in part-day sessions (34% 2011 – 62% 2013).
- Reflects emphasis on offering funded two year old places to disadvantaged families.
- 74% attended childcare between birth and age 3. Mostly day nurseries and playgroups.

Reports so far

Published reports:

- A baseline survey of children's centre managers (2012)
- First report on costs of delivering different services (2012)
- A baseline survey of children and families using children's centres (2013)
- First report on children's centre delivery (2013)
- Reach of children's centres and their neighbourhoods (2014)
- First report on parenting services (2014)
- Synthesis report on organisation, services and reach of children's centres (2015)
- Follow up survey of children's centre managers (2015)
- Follow up survey of children and families using children's centres (2015)
- Impact of children's centres at age 3 (2015)
- Changes in resourcing and characteristics (2015)

Still to come:

- Value for money report (2016)

Links to reports

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/evaluation-of-childrens-centres-in-england-ecce>

Thank you

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