
Report on uptake and survey comments relating to the Early Years Sustainability Grant 2021

Report being considered by: Schools' Forum on 19th July 2021

Report Author: Avril Allenby

Item for: Information By: All Forum Members

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the group on the take-up and impact of the Early Years Sustainability Grant 2021 and share the comments of the Early Years providers survey.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Early Years providers have given useful financial information through a Survey Monkey questionnaire that was completed as part of the sustainability grant application process. This can be used alongside looking at other areas of support we have offered providers and identifying any continuing gaps and sustainability.

Will the recommendation require the matter to be referred to the Council or the Executive for final determination?	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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3. Introduction/Background

- 3.1 In February 2021, Gold Group agreed to fund one of two proposals put forward by Avril Allenby, Service Manager Early Years, Access, Vulnerable Learners & Families to support Early Years providers impacted by COVID-19.
- 3.2 An in year Early Years Sustainability Grant for Early Years providers was agreed by the group with funding of £226,200 per the table below:

Funded Providers	Number of Providers	Proposed Tiered Payment
> 32 funded children	21	£3,000
< 32 funded children	45	£1,800
Total Group Providers	66	£144,000
Childminders	62	£600
Total Childminders		£37,200
> 32 funded children	9	£3,000
< 32 funded children	10	£1,800
Total Schools & MNS	19	£45,000

Total All Providers	147	£226,200
(1 school not claiming)		

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 The grant was announced to providers on 15th February by Andy Sharp and the application process launched at the beginning of March.
- 4.2 To date a total of £198,000 in grants has been paid to 130 providers through three tranches of payments as providers have applied.

The high level of take-up can be seen below.

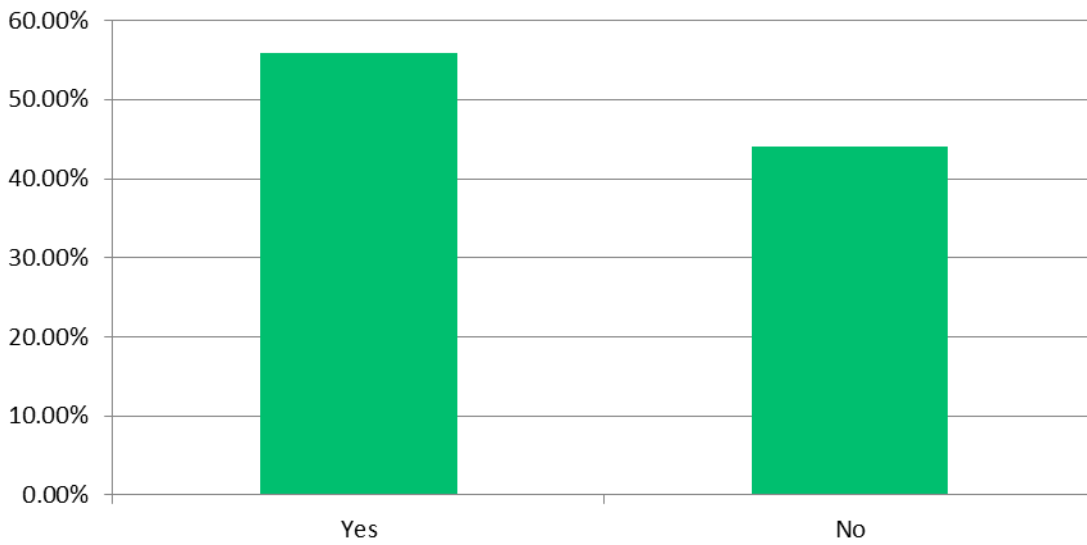
Summary of Take-Up and Spend

Funded Providers	Proposal Agreed by Gold		Actual take-up		
	Number of Providers	Proposed Tiered Payment	Number of Providers	Total Payment	Take-up %
> 32 funded children	21	£3,000	20	£60,000	95
< 32 funded children	45	£1,800	36	£64,800	80
Total Group Providers	66	£144,000	56	£124,800	85
Childminders	62	£600	58	£34,800	94
Total Childminders		£37,200		£34,800	
> 32 funded children	9	£3,000	8	£24,000	89
< 32 funded children	10	£1,800	8	£14,400	80
Total Schools & MNS	19	£45,000	16	£38,400	84
Total All Providers	147	£226,200	130	£198,000	88
(1 school not claiming)					

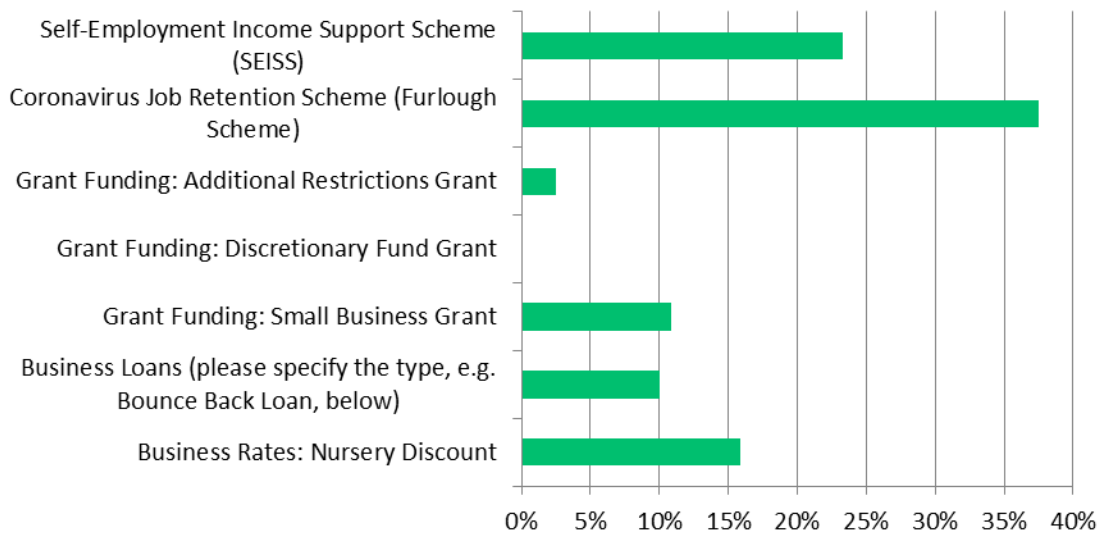
4.2 Provider Comments and Feedback

Below is a selection of the responses to questions received from providers completing the questionnaire.

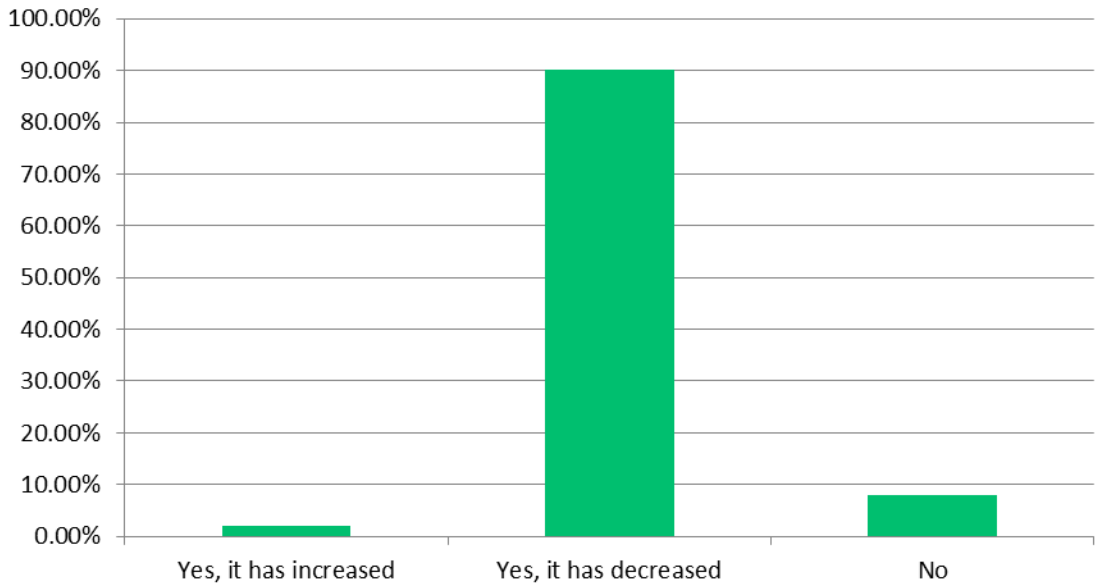
Have you accessed any of the government financial support available to Early Years providers?



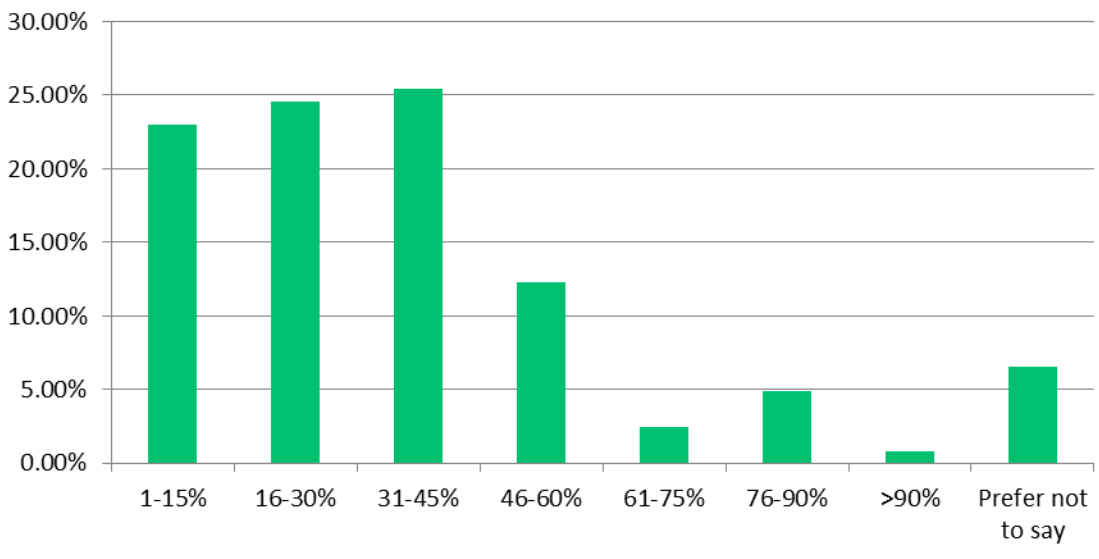
What government financial support have you accessed?



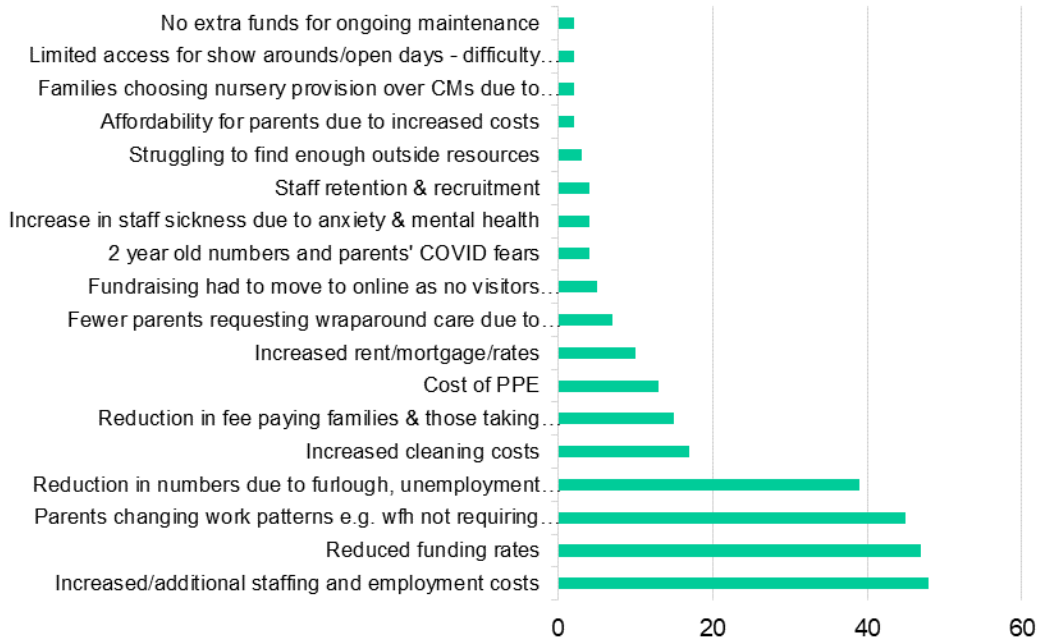
Has your setting's income been affected?



In percentage terms, how much has your setting's income decreased in the last financial year?



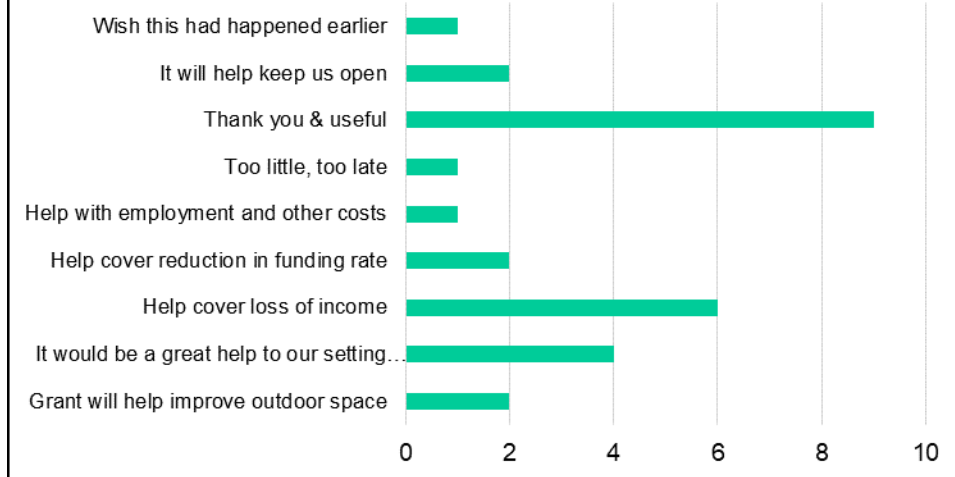
On-going areas of concern for Early Years providers



5.3 Comments about the Grant

Early Years providers were also asked for any other comments or observations about the grant and Early Years sustainability generally.

Provider comments about the Grant



5.4 Comments from Early Years Providers about Sustainability

I am concerned. Before the pandemic last year I was very busy with a waiting list and had that security. Now there's so much uncertainty but I want to continue what I'm doing. The pandemic has taught me so much about children's social skills and how that is the most crucial area of development and it is vital to continue to be part of the children's routine and security

The funding value is inefficient in comparison to paying for high quality staff, pensions etc. It should be reworded from free childcare so we can charge a top up to allow for our increasing outgoings.

The reduction in rates announced to handle the deficit, the increase in staff costs, will all have an effect on our preschool. Our ethos is to offer affordable childcare to our village, and as a charity not for profit preschool we do not take top ups on our funding leaving us with much higher staff costs than income. While we mitigate against this as best we can by fundraising and cost cutting, purchases of extras that are vital to our running like laptops and hardware are being avoided to ensure we don't end up in a deficit. Funding for this would be much appreciated

I am very concerned about future of my business particularly wrap around care. My local school now offers a breakfast club and after school which has taken a lot of my business and now with less demand from parents working from home this has made things worse for Me. Additionally with the current economic situation I feel some new mums are delaying their return to work and this is effecting the demand for care of babies and very young children

Very concerned about the impact the deficit recovery plan will have. Really we are hoping for the Govt to review funding and hope that the LA continues to push for a full review of how early years funding and funding is calculated in the long term.

I am extremely concerned about financial sustainability, each month I struggle to pay rent and wages and have had to use personal savings to subsidise the nursery
Early Years sustainability is extremely precarious owing to the difficulty in predicting take up for places by families going forward, the position regarding the Covid virus and the cuts in funding across the next 5 years which is a big concern for us as to our ongoing financial viability. We anticipate a drop in take up of places owing to parents losing employment once the furlough support is ended meaning that they will be at home to provide childcare. Our costs continue to rise due to increased prices of cleaning materials and the forthcoming increase in the minimum wage will also affect us.

As a childminder I feel we have a lot to offer to help reduce infection levels whilst maintaining required standards. Small settings such as mine can offer quality care to a small number of families, keeping bubbles far smaller than they would be in a nursery. I am registered with another childminder, but we have both worked separately from our own settings to further reduce risk, and have incurred more costs in doing so.

My only other comment is about funding. It is my opinion that the funding levels are too low and the rules too tight around requests for additional payments from parents. Approx 1/3rd of my income is expenses, in basic terms that means that I would be working for less than minimum wage on the current funding level (if I had three funded children in my care) To properly ensure early years future the payments need to rise significantly or the rules around additional payments need to be loosened.

We can't carry on with the low funding rates, and the way that early years is the forgotten sector!! I have been in childcare for 30+ years and have never felt so disillusioned and disappointed, not to mention stressed and overworked!! This isn't what I signed up for, and I know I'm not alone!!

Support and transparency are vital, childminders have on the whole been unrecognised for the work they have put in through this situation. There are many key workers that have had it far worse than us but through this it has been a particularly lonely and often frustrating time, the more (realistic) support we can get to help us going forward would benefit early years workers so much.

Staff in Early Years work for very modest incomes and show a great deal of commitment. The cost effectiveness of supporting Early Years is very high but at present the rising costs and poor funding means groups run on considerable goodwill which is obviously not sustainable. Our setting celebrates its 50th year this April and I would like to see adequate funding to enable it to continue for the next 50.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The Sustainability Grant was on the whole well received and appreciated by Early Years providers and take-up was high.
- 5.2 The comments and responses to the questionnaire do raise providers concerns about long term sustainability in the sector as a result of the pandemic and funding rates paid to providers.