Sharing the ambition

Play and parental interest in Scottish early years education

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AUTHOR

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- design, implement and evaluate a response to the issue identified
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- develop a strategy to sustain curriculum investigation/inquiry within the school/college
- contribute to research and scholarship in the study of the curriculum.

For more information about the Curriculum Investigation Grant and the research projects and reports it has supported, see bera.ac.uk/award/bcf-curriculum-investigation-grant.

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Summary

Sharing the Ambition (STA) aimed to determine parental perceptions of the atmosphere, approach and actions of early years education in Scotland. A multi-modal survey and focus groups were used to capture opinion from the nursery 2, nursery and primary 1 parent populations of 10 settings in Edinburgh: 763 surveys were distributed and 268 were returned.

The results show that parents[1] prioritise equally the development of a child's psychosocial and academic attributes (attitudes, skills and knowledge). They place greatest weight on relationships and the social climate of the early years setting as having the greatest impact on their child's education. Parents maintained a 'combined' perspective of their child's early years learning environment – spaces, experiences and interactions – preferring a combination of 'traditional' and 'all play' elements. When considering their role within education, parents favoured academic communication and family learning support, to ensure consistency between setting and home approaches.

Data collection and analysis were extended to include practitioners working within early years education, who were found to exhibit similar play perceptions.

A two-pronged programme for improving parental interest[2] was developed and trialled based upon the survey and focus group results.

This included professional enquiry projects across Scotland to improve channels of communication between families and settings, and a national, interactive resource to share the why, what and how of play. During their initial trial, both programmes have been shown to improve parental interest with those families involved.

In-depth assessment, evaluation and feedback – on both approaches and involving all stakeholders – is ongoing as the project continues.

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1   The word 'parents' is used throughout to refer to parents, carers, guardians and/or persons with parental responsibilities (Scottish Executive, 2006).
2   The term 'parental interest' is used to encapsulate both parental engagement and involvement.

1. Introduction

Play and its importance, as a developmentally appropriate approach to the curriculum, imbues every early years policy from the Scottish government. Its publication, *Realising the Ambition* (RTA) (Scottish government, 2020), is Scotland's national practice guidance for early years education and has been accepted as giving schools permission to incorporate play, beyond nursery.

RTA focuses on three aspects of child development: individual, environment and surrounding culture (Scottish government, 2020). Whether these facets, Bronfenbrenner's five levels (see Parenta, 2018) or another model is subscribed to, every part of a child's development is undergirded by parental engagement and involvement. This parental interest has also been proven to have a direct causal effect upon a child's educational attainment (Gorard et al., 2012).

In this way, both play and parental interest are lauded as a means of transmitting cultural capital, boosting academic achievement and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. As such, the focus of this study is to put play at the heart of early years family life in the hopes of explicitly unifying the two.

While 'learning through play' is mentioned in *Learning together: National action plan on parental involvement, engagement, family learning and learning at home 2018–2021* (Scottish government, 2018), there is no centralised, context-specific guidance. Although similar to other early years initiatives published by the Scottish government (*Growing Up in Scotland*, 2012; *Building the Ambition*, 2014a; *Raising Attainment for All*, 2014c; *Play Strategy for Scotland*, 2013) in offering family-centred, relationship-focused support, there is comparatively little guidance on embedding rich, meaningful play within family life. This project hopes to address the attainment gap and to provide an equitable start to children's education by harnessing parental engagement and involvement as early as possible, through play. Framed around sharing the guidance of RTA with families, the project was titled Sharing the Ambition (STA) and designed as a practical, hands-on approach to ensuring that high-quality play experiences are valued and facilitated at home.

STA has the potential to use major contributors in the early years (parents and play) to address the attainment gap when it is easiest to close (McCluskey,

2017) and to improve educational outcomes. In this way, STA can be viewed as another mode of early years intervention, setting solid foundations and maintaining effective parent–practitioner relationships over a child's entire educational journey.

The notion of 'school readiness' is now considered archaic for its traditional perspective and checklist approach. However, even when considering a child's development holistically there is still, fundamentally, a need to prepare children for life outside their home: to provide them with the habitus they need to become 'successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens' (Scottish government, 2009). The difference between families, in this preparation, comes down to experiences, without which children are unable to access the curriculum: the first sign of the attainment gap. Play, as a means of ensuring that every aspect of education and the curriculum is accessible, is one answer.

STA took root in my master's dissertation, entitled *Parental Perceptions of Scottish Early Years Education* (Bowes, 2020), sharing its aims and methodology, as discussed in this report. My study found that parents maintain an 'uncertain' perspective towards their child's early years education, favouring play-based and traditional elements of practice equally. That is, in considering the early years environment (detailed in RTA as spaces, interactions and experiences [Scottish government, 2020, p. 25]) parents appreciate the importance of play but do not appear to fully understand its true value as a function of learning. While the MEd study simply sought to understand (Ozanne & Hudson, 1989) as opposed to explain (Tubey et al., 2015) parental perceptions of early years education, STA has been underpinned by a contextualist position seeking to both reflect and unpick reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). That is, STA aims to not only collect and analyse the data but also to act upon it.

There are three phases to the project:

1. data collection and analysis
2. professional enquiry
3. family learning.

2. Data collection & analysis

STA's first aim is to discover the parental perceptions of families in Scotland about the aims, ethos, pedagogy and curriculum of their child's early years[3] education, and their pivotal role within this. It poses three sub-questions, broadly based upon the four elements that Christenson and Sheridan (2001) specify for optimising successful parental interest.

1. Atmosphere: what do parents hope their child will achieve through early years education?
2. Approach: how do parents believe their child will learn best in early years education?
3. Actions: what role do parents believe they should play in supporting their child's early years education?

A pragmatic, mixed-methods approach (appreciated for its compatibility with research concerning demographic behaviours [Staveteig et al., 2017]) was chosen to increase the comprehensiveness of the study (O'Cathain et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2019). Allowing for the concurrent use of both qualitative and quantitative data techniques in this way (Johnson, 2001), a survey was selected as the method of data collection. A survey's production of empirical data, and its utility in targeting a large sample population, were also found to be beneficial.

For the purpose of triangulation, in allowing for a cross-validating analysis of the study's findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Litwin, 1995), follow-up focus groups were also used to ensure that the rich and detailed qualitative responses that can be missed in surveys (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), were still collected for meaningful interpretation and analysis (Richards & Morse, 2012).

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3   Although the early years are typically characterised as pre-birth to eight (Scottish government, 2013), the term 'early years' is defined here as spanning a child's education from a family's first interaction with their school/setting (at two-years-old for eligible families), to the end of primary 1 and the Curriculum for Excellence's early level, usually age five (Scottish government, 2014b).

In determining the study's population, purposive sampling was used (Wellington, 2015).

1. Typical sampling – parents of nursery 2, nursery and primary 1 children within Edinburgh were targeted as representative of the early years parent population in Scotland.
2. Convenience sampling – data were collected from the families (children and parents) of 10 settings linked to STA working party members, within Edinburgh.
3. Maximum variation sampling – data sets were extended to include a broad and varied demographic (table 2.1).

Considering this population-based approach to sampling (Duncan, 2008), characteristics often associated with parents who require additional support with engagement and involvement – typically labelled 'hard-to-reach' – were used to create a descriptive overview of the 10 participating settings (Gorin et al., 2008).

Of the 16 characteristics that Osgood et al. (2012) impute to these families, four were chosen for comparison, including the following.

1. Poverty: pupil equity funding (PEF) statistics, defined as 'additional funding allocated directly to schools and targeted at closing the poverty-related attainment gap' (Scottish government, 2021, p. 1), were chosen as indicative of the school's level of poverty. They are presented according to annual grant amounts, which have then been ranked for comparison.
2. Language: the number of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) can be seen to capture one facet of the cultural make-up of the setting (Demie, 2018).
3. Educational attainment: reading attainment is offered as mirroring the setting's academic profile.
4. Setting structure: the setting size, as reflected in its structure, is an important ecological element affecting a child's habitus within their educational setting (Ready et al., 2004).

Table 2.1
Comparative setting profiles

Setting		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
2020/2021 PEF award[4]		£62,264	£56,390	£39,943	£116,305	£59,915	£38,768	£101,033	£18,797	£69,313	–
2020/2021 PEF ranking for schools within the City of Edinburgh Council		54/88	51/88	37/88	79/88	53/88	36/88	73/88	11/88	56/88	–/88
EAL population[5] (% of the school population)		30–40%	10–20%	0–10%	20–30%	0–10%	20–30%	10–20%	0–10%	0–10%	10–20%
Reading attainment[5] (% of children achieving early level at the end of P1)		70–80%	70–80%	90%+	70–80%	70–80%	90%+	50–60%	90%+	70–80%	70–80%
School structure (no. children)	N2	14	0	39	0	0	0	0	30	0	0
	N	60	60	112	0	40	48	64	60	60	38
	P1	46	49	0	55	65	40	41	72	60	–
	Total	129	109	151	55	105	88	105	162	120	38

2.2 CODEBOOK ANALYSIS

It was decided that the survey results would undergo codebook thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019), chosen for its ability to analyse culture through the identification of key themes (Opler, 1945).

First, as part of the research design process a codebook was created (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This initial codebook was recognised as tentative (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), accepting that data from the survey results could not be forced to fit its a priori issues (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). Instead, a 'combination of induction and deduction' (Neuendorf, 2001, p. 12) was employed. In order to increase its reliability (Boyatzis, 1998), the codebook remained open to revision throughout the research design process (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017).

Thirteen codes were created in the hope of allowing detailed measurement while ensuring that the codebook remained user-friendly (Tracy, 2018): pre-survey, expected buzzwords/phrases found with high-frequency in Scottish government literature (particularly *RTA* [Scottish government, 2020], *How Good is Our School* [Education Scotland, 2015] and *How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare* [Education Scotland, 2016]) were used as examples to aid analysis. Post-survey, these buzzwords were selected from the staff and family results, including encapsulating quotes (tables 2.2 and 2.3).

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4   Statistics from Scottish government, 2020
5   Statistics from Scottish government, 2019

Table 2.2

Final codebook of analytical themes

Domain: Teaching and learning			
Code label	Description Families reference…	Example	
		Quote	Buzzwords
Attitudes A	The development of dispositions, whether positive or negative, towards and within education (Nieswandt, 2005) which can include affective, cognitive and behavioural learning (Simpson et al., 1994).	'I hope my child builds on their confidence, resilience and independence to help achieve their goals.'	independence self-belief curiosity enthusiasm
Knowledge K	The content of their child's education (Brown, 2018) in relation to their child's understanding of and capacity for the curriculum.	'[I would like to see my child] learning about the world around and how it relates to them.'	literacy numeracy alphabet numbers facts
Skills S	Generic, transferable mechanisms that, in contributing to human capital, allow for the optimal application of knowledge (Skills Development Scotland, 2018).	'[I would like my child to develop] transferrable skills: effective communication, independence, problem-solving…'	life skills communication problem-solving experimenting creativity
Setting focus SF	The effectiveness of the setting's staff in relation to the methods, expectations, organisation and resources (Ko et al., 2014) they employ in providing a child's education.	'[I would like to see] my child being challenged and encouraged.'	communication supported feedback shared learning/resources
Family Focus FF	The effectiveness of families in relation to the methods, expectations, organisation and resources they employ in providing a child's education.	'[I help my child to learn at home by] spending time together doing lots of creative activities, drawing, building Lego, puzzles etc.'	homework practice family time consolidate experiences
Traditional T	The classroom environment and organisation, learning activities and support associated with a 'traditional' perspective of early years education.	'[I would like to see my child] learning to spell their name, writing words and numbers.'	structure academic worksheets formal milestones
All play AP	The classroom environment and organisation, learning activities and support associated with an 'all play' perspective of early years education.	'Children need to play with no limits on times apart from routine. They need to spend time learning through play.'	child-led following interests fun indoors/outdoors free play
Combination C	Aspects of the classroom environment and organisation, learning activities and support associated with both 'traditional' and 'all play' perspectives on early years education.	'[I would like my child to have] a good combination of time to play independently indoors and outdoors and a more co-ordinated time in group learning activities participating in something like storytelling or art.'	learning and play balance variety of activities structured and flexible adult-led and child-led

Table 2.3
Final codebook of analytical themes

Domain: Teaching and learning			
Code label	Description Families reference...	Example	
		Quote	Buzzwords
Social climate SC	Factors influencing their (or their child's) thoughts, attitudes and behaviour towards (Schaffer, 1996) different setting stakeholders in terms of the nature of the social interactions between them (Sanson et al., 2004). This can include positive and negative relationships.	'[At my child's setting I would like to see] high-quality social interactions with other children and adults, [so my child can] learn to relate to different personalities.'	making friends co-operation relationships socialising communication skills
Emotional climate EC	Factors influencing their (or their child's) emotional transactions with the setting, in terms of cognitive processes (Sroufe, 1997) (recognition of initial triggers and use of emotional vocabulary) and behavioural response (body feelings, reaction and regulation) (Murray, 2012).	'[I would like my child to develop] a strong sense of self-worth and [learn] the value they bring to each element of their life.'	nurturing loving happy safe empathetic
Behavioural climate BC	Factors influencing their (or their child's) cultural experiences within the setting, in terms of ethos and expectations, classroom management, feedback, intervention and response (Närhi, et al., 2017).	'[I would like my child to develop] self-discipline, kindness, patience, to know right from wrong, risk management...'	good manners boundaries rules expectations responsibilities
Setting focus SFR	Evaluating the setting's (or, as representative, their child's) performance through the lens of setting accountability (Figlio & Loeb, 2011).	'[I would like to] know what the [setting] focus is, with tasks, information, learning materials, set expectations...'	equality accessibility support homework communication
Family focus FFR	Evaluating the setting's (or, as representative, their child's) performance through the lens of parental accountability.	'[At home] we create conditions for successful learning, e.g. lots of sleep, fresh air, exercise, a fresh and varied diet.'	confidence knowledge consistency involved ideas

2.3 RESULTS

For the closed-ended questions, results were split into responses from nursery 2 (N2), nursery (N) and primary 1 (P1) families (n=268), with an additional distinction made for 'childcare and other' (practitioners working with children outwith N2 to P1, n=130) for staff results.

For the open-ended questions, the final pre-survey codebook was used to generate analytical themes, ready for interpretation (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Due to the length of responses, line-by-line coding was chosen to analyse their content. In addition, some codes were assigned based upon the essence of the whole response

(MacQueen et al., 2008), particularly when assessing the nature of a participant's answer as reflective of their 'traditional', 'all play' or 'uncertain' (re-labelled 'combined') perspective (Fisher et al., 2008). These three perspectives are used throughout to categorise responses. Direct quotes from each open-ended question are also included to illustrate key findings.

The results have been further broken down according to the research sub-question they were designed to answer, within the context of parental interest.

Atmosphere: Family survey open-ended responses

The atmosphere in which children, parents and the setting interact is driven by their understanding of and commitment to the aims of early years education.

1. Thirty-six per cent of parents believe that early years education aims to teach their child knowledge. For example, one parent encapsulated education as aiming to 'build on and increase knowledge and understanding' while many parents made specific reference to 'numeracy', 'writing' and 'reading'. Skills (for example, to 'develop social skills, working with others, sharing, problem-solving') and attitudes (both personal attributes – for example, to be 'more confident with increased self-esteem' – and learning dispositions, 'lifelong curiosity for learning with fun and fascination') were found to be of equal, but slightly less importance (33 per cent and 34 per cent respectively).

2. Forty-five per cent of parents referred to the social climate of their child's setting in 'building friendships, understanding respect for children and adults' or helping them to develop appropriate 'social and communication skills'. This was often linked to behavioural skills such as 'listening' or 'sharing' and the overall ethos of 'learning right from wrong'.

3. When framing these aims, most parents described an 'all play' perspective (9 per cent) with a focus on 'learning experiences through play', although many discussed the need to 'follow routines' and for 'structured learning environments'. Some parents also made reference to providing an 'introduction to the ways of the school system, with preparation of the expectations at school' and traditional elements of education such as 'exceeding their primary school milestones academically'.

Figure 2.1

Responses to the question, 'In your opinion, what do you hope your child will achieve through their early years education?' (proportion of parents who gave each response, coloured by 'domain')
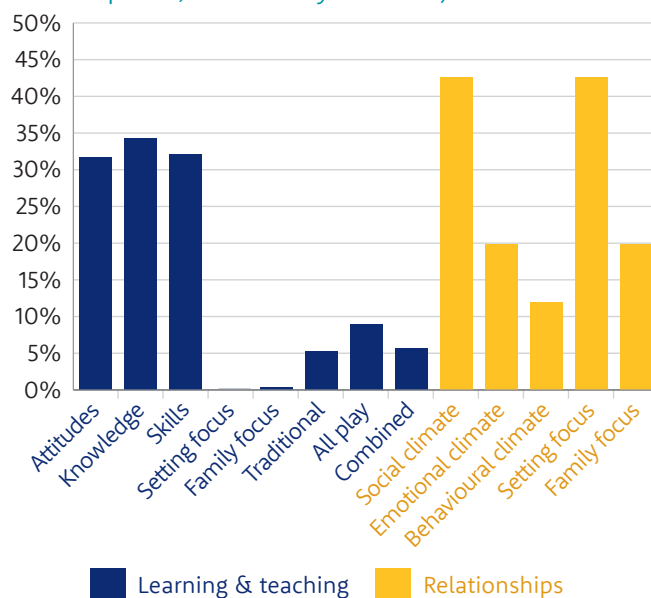
Note: for full results in tabular form, see also table A.1 in the appendix to this report.

Atmosphere: Family survey closed-ended responses

The results of the open-ended question differed to those of the closed-ended questions.

1. While parents initially referenced the development of knowledge more frequently in discussing the aims of early years education, when provided with a direct choice including examples, 64 per cent of parents favoured the development of skills such as 'communication, problem-solving and creativity' (figure 2.2).

2. Considering their children's holistic development (figure 2.3), the most popular attribute parents hoped for their child to develop was kindness (73 per cent), reflecting the previous focus on social climate. There was no distinguishable difference observed between families with pre-school (N2 and N) and school-aged (P1+) children. Second and third choices overall were curiosity (67 per cent) and creativity (49 per cent).

3. This choice can also be measured in terms of the balance between preferring the development of personality traits versus learning dispositions. This shows a more noticeable divide: P1 parents assigned a greater importance to developing learning dispositions over personality traits (59 and 27 per cent respectively) while N2 and N parents preferred them more equally (46 and 51 per cent

respectively). This is consistent with the increased emphasis of P1 parents on more 'traditional' elements of early years education.

Figure 2.2

Responses to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes your view on the aims of early years education?'
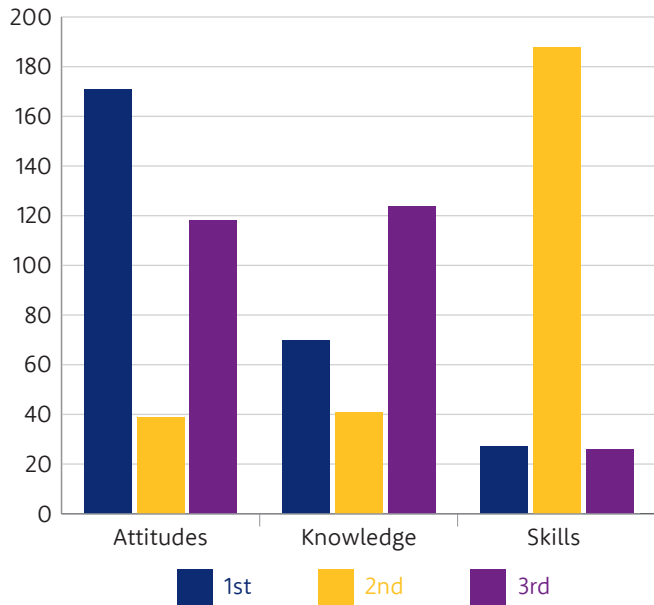
See also table A.2.

Figure 2.3

Responses (%) to the question, 'Which of these characteristics would you choose as most important for your child to develop through their early years education?'
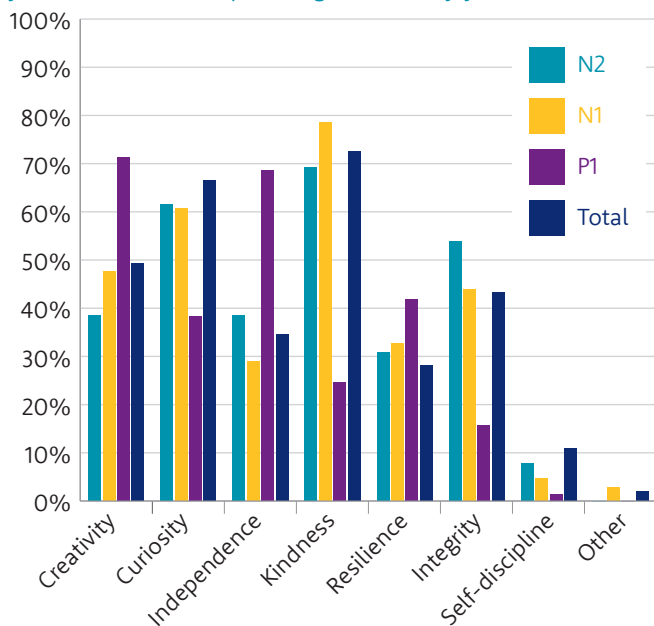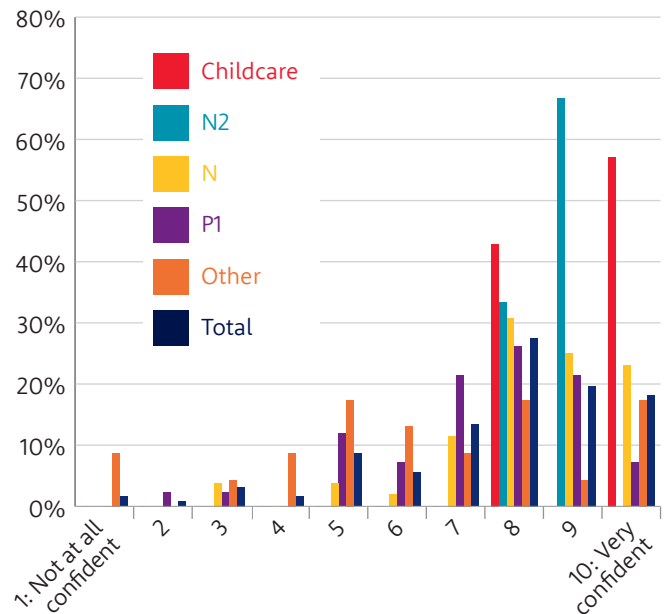

Note: respondents were able to choose more than one answer to this question.
See also table A.3.

Atmosphere: Staff survey closed responses

Experiences of the contextual roots of this study were captured.

Figure 2.4

Responses (%) to the question, 'How confident do you feel in employing a play-based approach to teaching and learning?'

See also table A.4.

Figure 2.5

Responses (%) to the question, 'How familiar are you with the Scottish government's *Realising the Ambition* publication?'
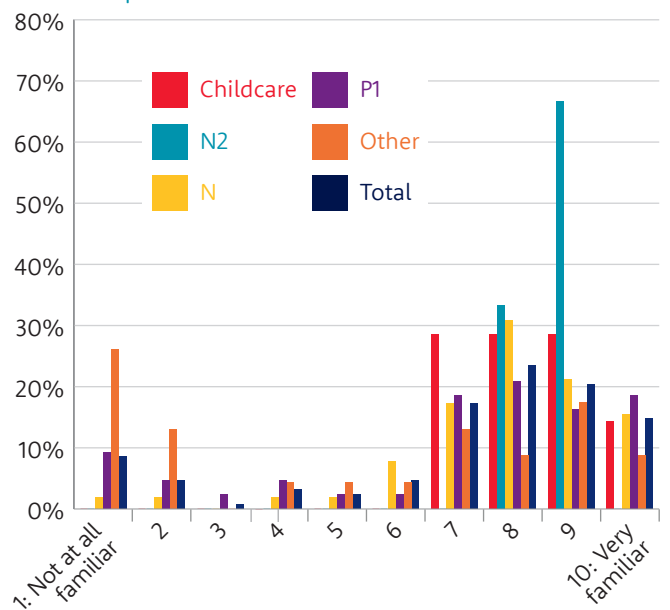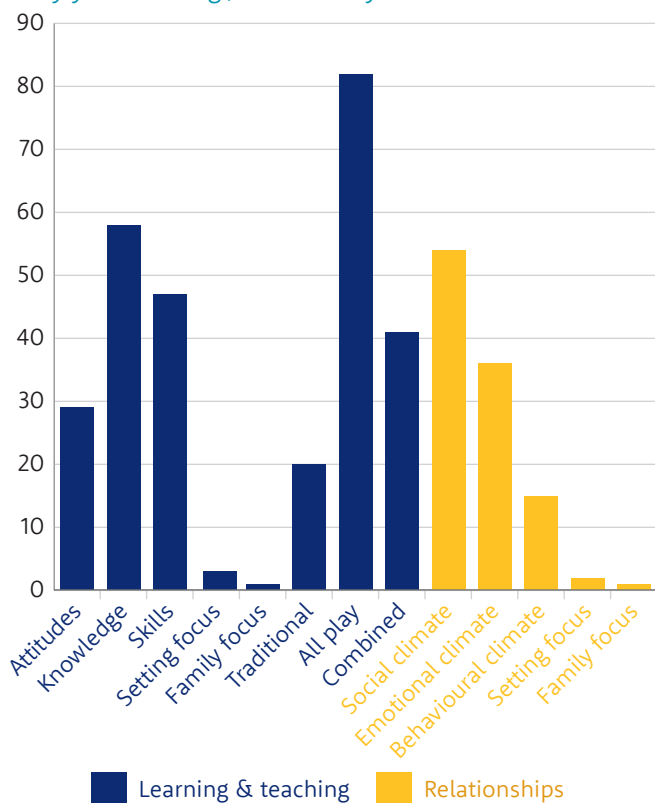

See also table A.5.

Staff confidence in using a play-based approach was significantly higher among pre-school staff than among those working in schools: an average of nine out of 10 nursery staff professed confidence, compared to six out of 10 for staff working outwith the early years (categorised as 'other' in figure 2.4). This trend was appears to be related to with staff's familiarity with RTA (figure 2.5).

Approach: Family survey open responses

Parents offer a unique perspective on the approach that schools take to achieving the aims of early years education, in the learning environment created – spaces, experiences and interactions.

Figure 2.6
Responses to the question, 'Please describe what you would like to see your child doing day-to-day in their early years setting', coloured by domain

See also table A.6.

1. When asked to describe their preferred approach to early years education, 'knowledge' took precedence for parents (24 per cent), with a continued spotlight on learning to 'read and write', 'numbers and letters' and 'literacy and numeracy'.

2. There was no mention of aspects associated with 'traditional' learning: 34 per cent of parents preferred to see settings adopt an 'all play' approach. This included reference to 'learning

through play', 'child-led' experiences, 'variety in learning, for example in different settings, using all areas of the classroom and outdoors and with different resources' and 'having [the children's] interests nurtured and new ones realised'.

3. The social climate continued to be highlighted as most important (22 per cent of parents), although comparative focus on the emotional climate also increased (to 18 per cent), with parents expressing a desire to see their child 'having fun', 'being happy' and 'enjoying time at school'. The behavioural climate continued to be referenced in terms of a child's approach – for example, 'understanding basic behaviour', 'good habits', 'respectful manners' and 'sticking to boundaries'. This is in-keeping with the popularity of integrity, which incorporates qualities such as respect, honesty, manners (43 per cent), as a desirable attribute (figure 2.3).

Approach: Family survey closed responses

The results of the closed-ended questions confirmed the themes of the open-ended question in their assessment of a setting's approach to early years education. Parents valued play equally at home and at their child's early years setting (figures 2.7 and 2.8). The average response of pre-school parents was 9.1/10, and of school parents 8.6/10.

Parents valued the 'all play' and 'combined' learning environments equally.
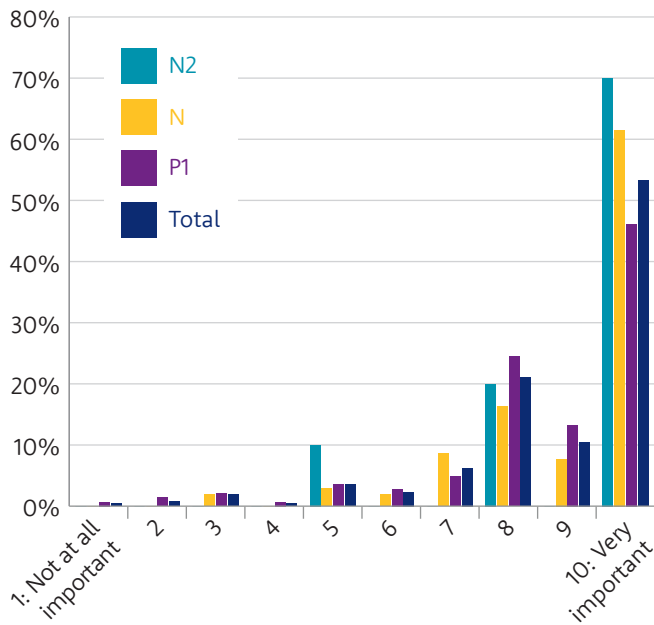
Figure 2.7
Responses (%) to the question, 'How important is play at your child's home?'
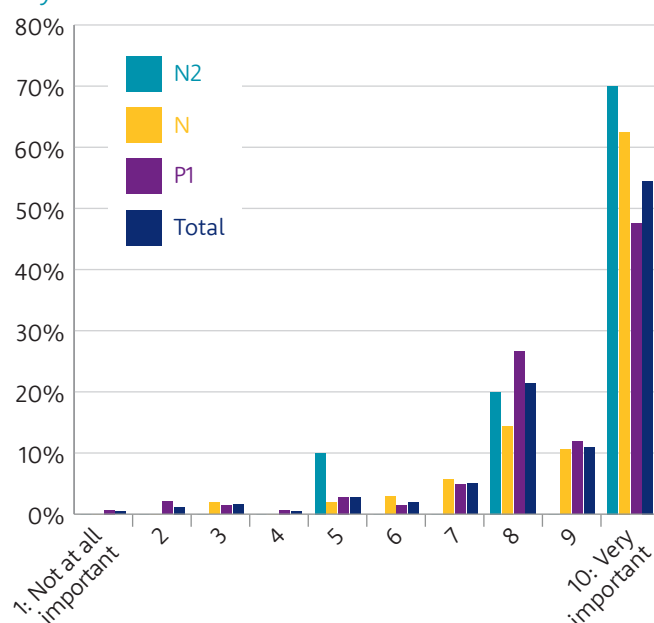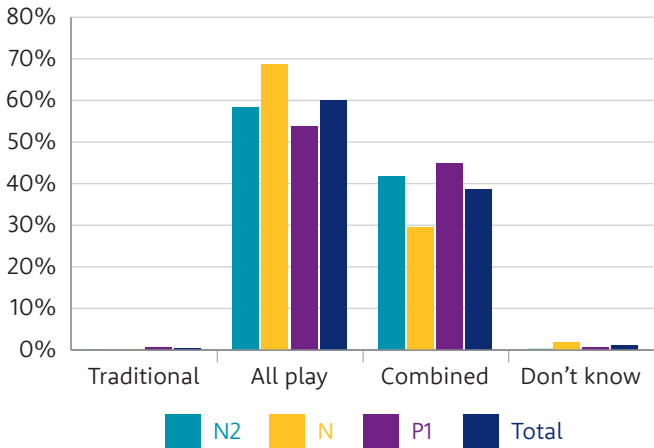

See also table A.7.

For example, when considering their setting's spaces (figure 2.9) 60 per cent of parents preferred environments with flexible, open design. While 87 per cent of parents agreed that play should be fully embedded within their child's early years setting, 84 per cent of parents chose a 'combined' approach to learning activities, and 77 per cent of parents chose a 'combined' approach to teaching methods (figures 2.10 and 2.11).

Figure 2.8
Responses (%) to the question, 'How important is play at your child's early years setting?'

See also table A.8.

Figure 2.9
Responses (%) to the question, 'For your child, which of these statements best describes your preferred spaces within an early years setting?'
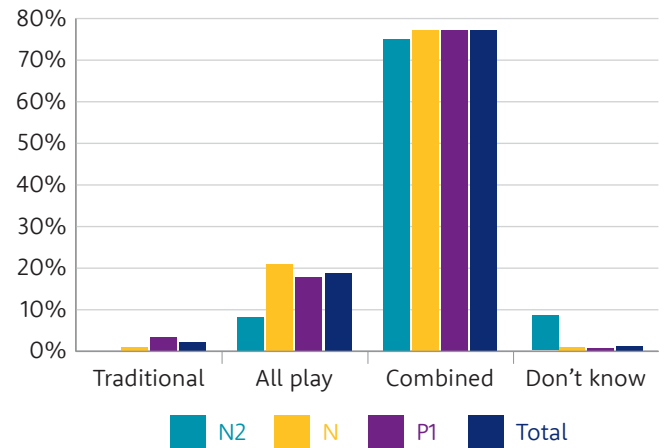

See also table A.9.

Figure 2.10
Responses (%) to the question, 'For your child, which of these statements best describes your preferred experiences within an early years setting?'
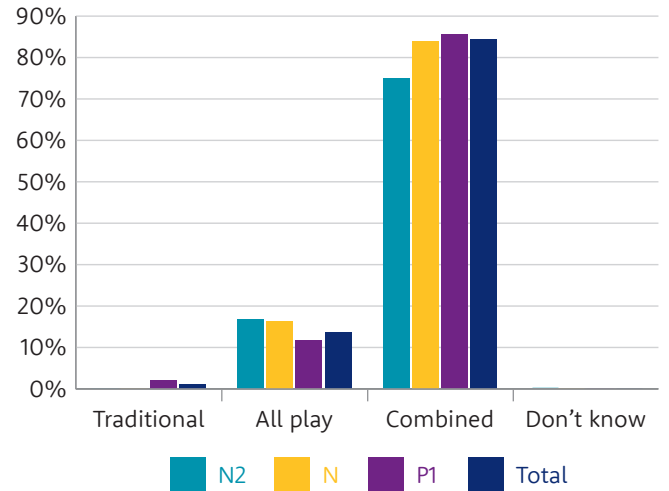
See also table A.10.

Figure 2.11
Responses (%) to the question, 'For your child, which of these statements best describes your preferred interactions within an early years setting?'
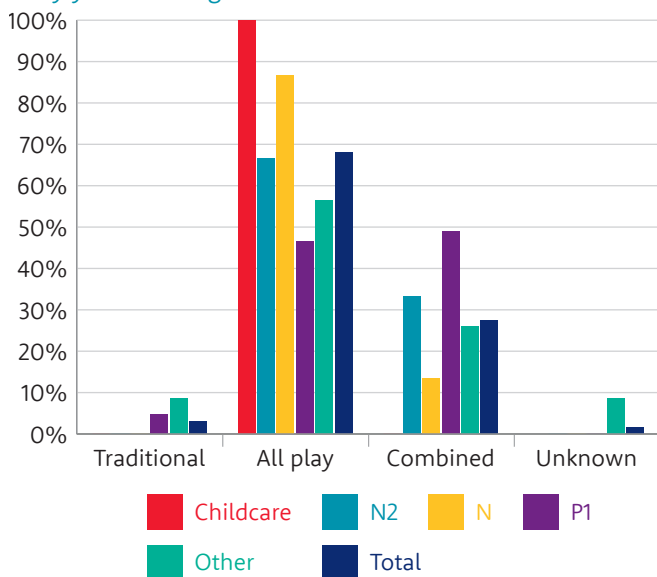

See also table A.11

Approach: Staff survey closed responses

Staff results echoed those of families. Overall, practitioners favoured an 'all play' approach to spaces (67 per cent) and a 'combined' approach to experiences (67 per cent) and interactions (72 per cent) (figures 2.12–2.14).

However, there were significant differences between the perspectives of pre-school and school staff. For example, pre-school practitioners preferred 'all play' to 'combined' spaces by a ratio of 5:1, while for school practitioners this ratio was 1.4:1.

'Combined' experiences were favoured over 'all play' experiences at ratios of 1.4:1 among pre-school practitioners and 11:1 among school practitioners.

Figure 2.12
Responses (%) to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes the spaces within your early years setting?'
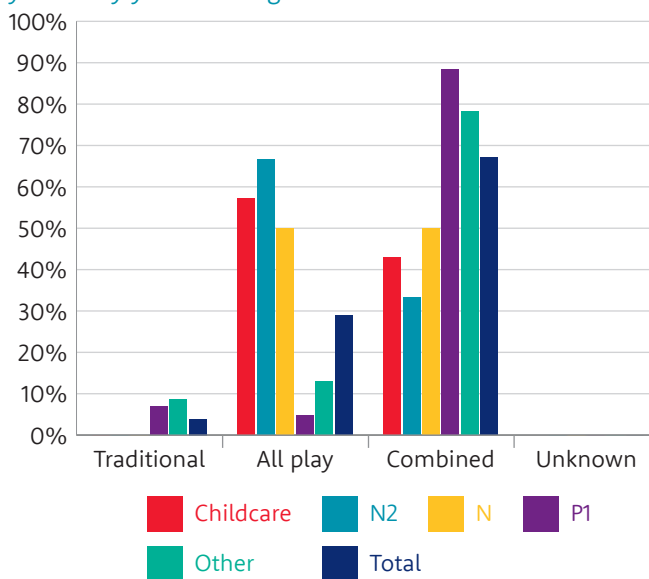

See also table A.12.

Figure 2.13
Responses (%) to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes the experiences within your early years setting?''
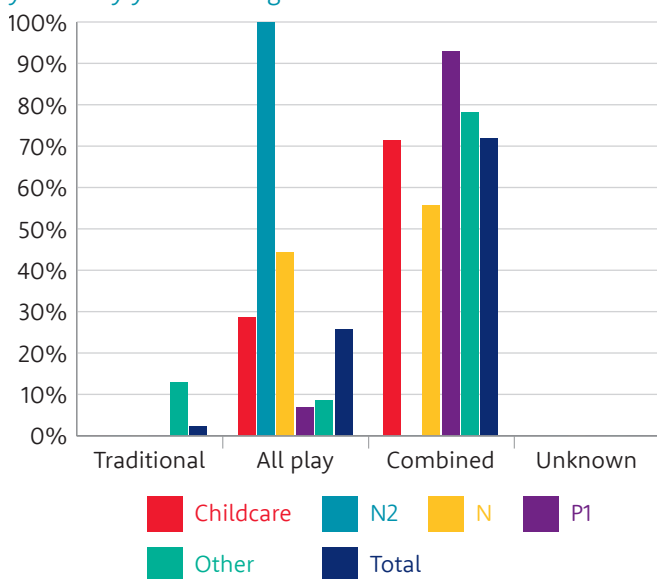
See also table A.13.

Figure 2.14
Responses (%) to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes the interactions within your early years setting?'

See also table A.14.

Actions: Family survey open responses

Reflecting their attitudes towards the atmosphere and approach of early years education, parental interest manifests in the actions that parents take to support their child at home and in their educational setting.

1. In supporting their child's education at home (figure 2.15), parents make specific reference to imparting knowledge (26 per cent) with a focus on learning 'colours', 'letters and numbers', 'facts about the world' and so on. Only 2 per cent of parents mention developing children's attitudes in the context of education at home, compared to 33 per cent in the context of learning in educational settings. 'Skills' were mentioned explicitly by 18 per cent of parents, although few examples were provided of the type of skills that families support at home such as 'life skills' or 'social skills'.

2. Parents showed an 'all play' preference (an average of 33 per cent) in supporting their child's learning at home. This included offering 'play [in] lots of different ways to encourage and stimulate the children's learning both indoors and outdoors' and giving children the 'freedom to choose play/activities and [for families to] join in when they can'. Only 20 of the 268 parent responses mentioned 'traditional' elements of learning such as 'worksheets', while most made sure not 'to worry or put pressure on [the children] to engage with formal learning from home or school'.

3. This 'all play' perspective of support was framed with a family focus (23 per cent) as opposed to a setting focus (4 per cent), in directing the types of activity that children engage with at home. Parents with a focus on the setting were more likely to reference 'traditional' elements such as 'making [children] practise what they learn at school' and 'homework'. Parents with a focus on family preferred an 'all play' approach reflected in family-initiated activity such as 'we spend lots of time together, doing life and chatting through everything we do together'.

Many families took inspiration from their child's setting and embedded the learning into family life.

'We take what is being worked on at school and look at what interests our child at home and try to combine the two elements in play to engage them.'

Figure 2.15
Responses (%) to the question, 'As a parent, carer or guardian, how do you support your child's learning at home?'
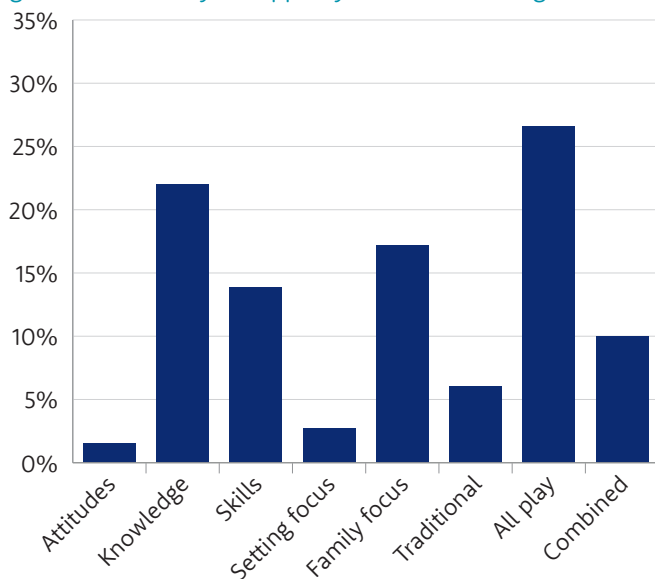
Actions: Family survey closed responses

1. A less significant difference between setting and family focus was revealed by the fact that 53 per cent of parents recognised setting factors and 41 per cent of parents recognised home factors as having the greatest impact upon their child's education (figure 2.16). This is reflected in the fact that 97 per cent of parents assigned equal responsibility for a child's education to parents and settings (figure 2.17). Relationships were the biggest concern (74 per cent) for parents of both pre-school and school-aged children.

2. Parents said that supporting their children to learn while isolating or in lockdown due to Covid-19 had improved their confidence in and awareness of their role in early years education:

    [Our involvement] 'has been significantly impacted by our experience during lockdown… we both feel much more confident and have a much better understanding of how to support what is being provided by the school'.

    'Prior to lockdown I felt OK leaving the formal educating to the professionals, but now see how beneficial it can be if we engage and understand more about how to support the kids' learning.'

There is a decline in confidence as parents move from supporting pre-school to school-aged children (figure 2.18).

3. Parents were asked how they would like to be involved in their child's educational setting. Their preferred option was academic communication (62 per cent) followed by volunteering (32 per cent) and family learning (28 per cent) (figure 2.20). The least popular option, by a significant margin, was parenting support (4 per cent).
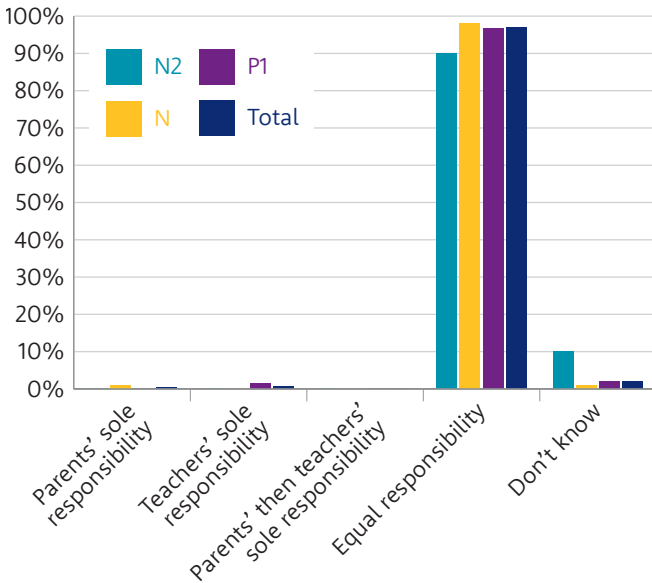
Figure 2.16
Responses (%) to the question, 'Which of these factors would you place as most important in impacting upon your child's early years education?'
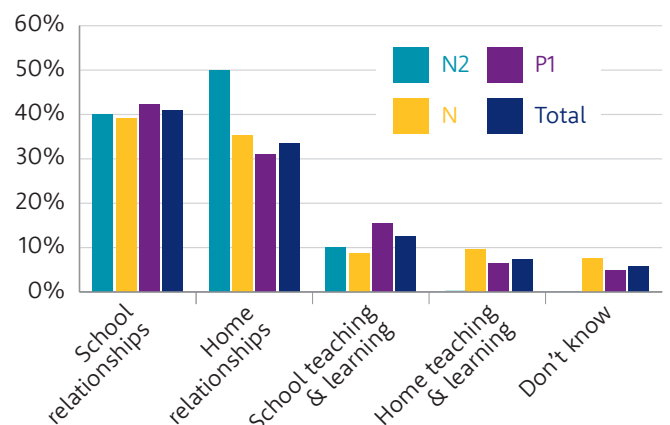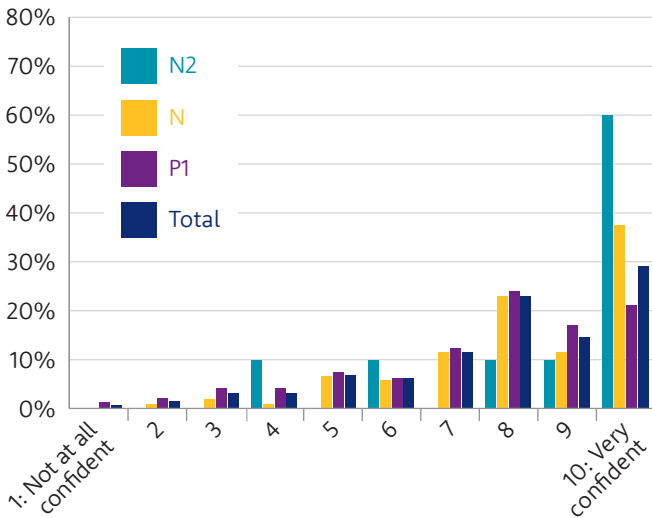

See also table A.16.

Figure 2.17
Responses (%) to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes your views on the different roles that teachers and parents play in education?'

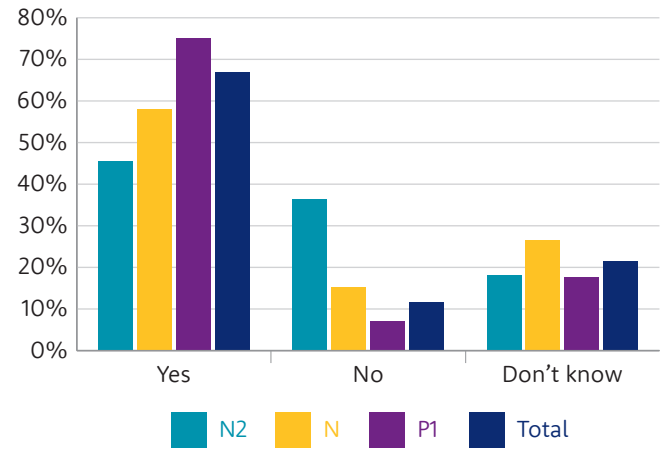
See also table A.17.

Figure 2.18
Responses (%) to the question, 'How confident do you feel in supporting your child's learning from home?'

See also table A.18.
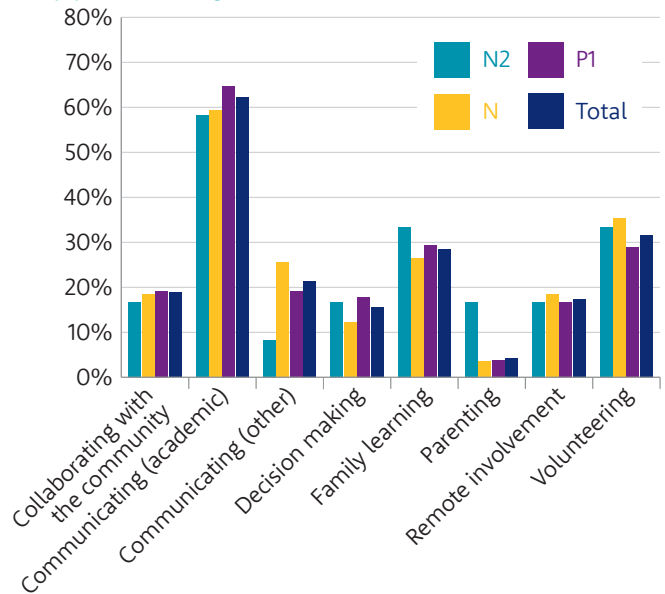
Figure 2.19
Responses (%) to the question, 'Should early years settings support your child's learning at home?'

See also table A.19.

Figure 2.20
Responses (%) to the question, 'In what ways would you like to be involved in your child's learning at their early years setting?'
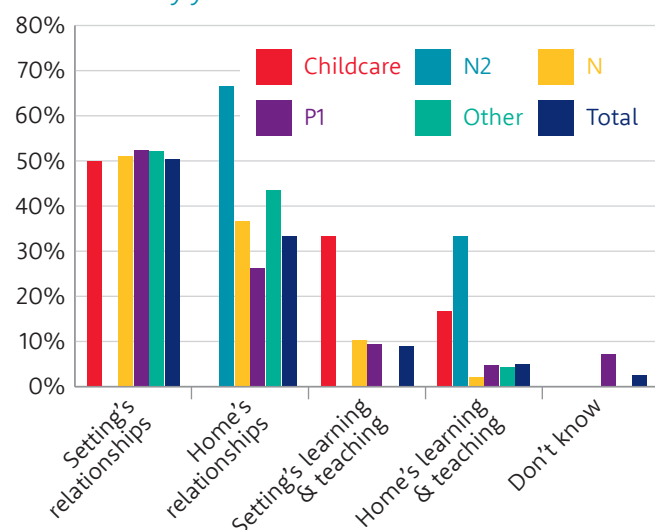

Note: respondents were able to choose more than one answer to this question.
See also table A.20.

Actions: Staff survey closed responses

1. Of the 130 staff surveyed, 83 per cent agreed that relationships have the greatest impact upon a child's education, with settings having more impact (50 per cent) than the home (33 per cent). This view is shared by both pre-school and school practitioners (figure 2.21).

2. Staff confidence in supporting children's learning through play was similar to that of families. Practitioner confidence was significantly greater for supporting pre-school children through play as opposed to school-aged children (figure 2.22).

3. Staff agreed on their focus on 'communication, in as many ways as possible to create bonds with families'. Their favoured approaches to improving parental interest were family learning (66 per cent) and communicating academic information (41 per cent). The third choice for staff was parenting support, the least popular choice for parents themselves (4 per cent).

4. Practitioners from all settings and stages (from N2 to P1+) were keen for more support in boosting their parental engagement and involvement, rating the success of their current strategies an average of 6/10 on a scale of one to 10 where 10 is 'very successful' (figure 1.23). Seventy-eight per cent of staff agreed that a parental interest policy would be used within their setting.

Figure 2.21

Responses (%) to the question, 'Which of these factors would you place as most important in impacting upon children's early years education?'

See also table A.21.

Figure 2.22

Responses (%) to the question, 'In what ways would you prefer families to be involved in their child's learning at your early years setting?'
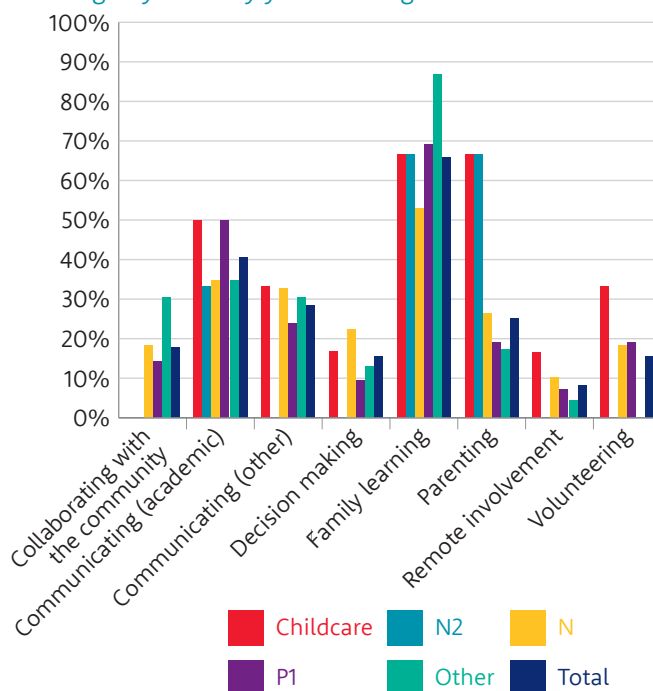
Note: respondents were able to choose more than one answer to this question.
See also table A.22.

Figure 2.23

Responses (%) to the question, 'How successful are the strategies your setting currently employs to facilitate parental engagement/involvement?'
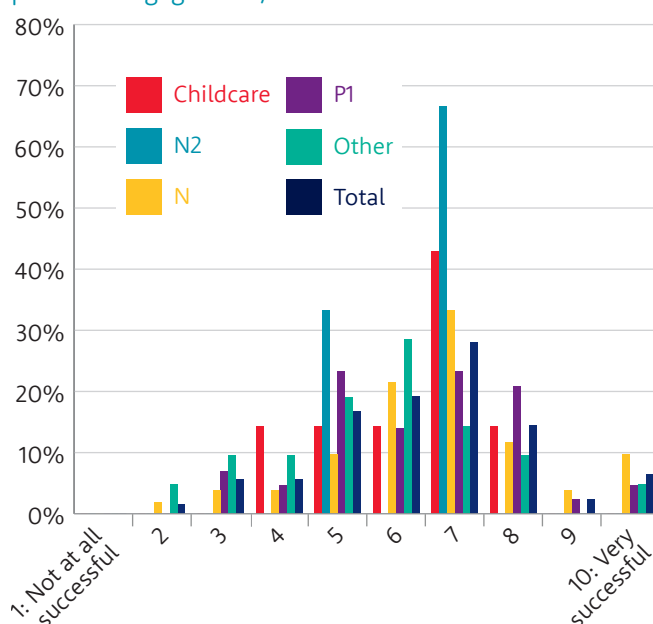
See also table A.23.

Figure 2.24
Responses (%) to the question, 'In your setting, would you use a parental engagement and interest policy aimed at putting play at the heart of early years family learning?'

See also table A.24.

2.4 CONCLUSION

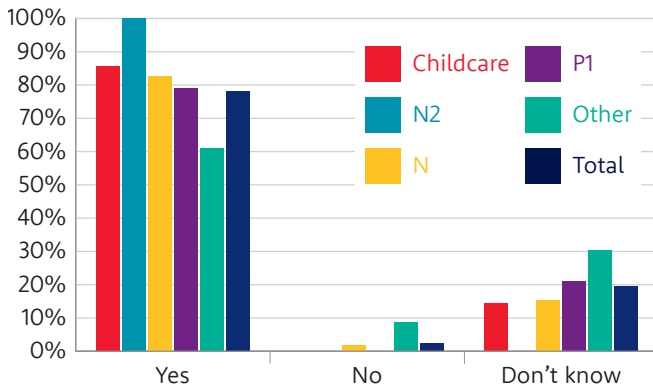The two domains of the final pre-survey codebook can be used to frame a brief, generalised conclusion of the results in answer to the study's three sub-questions.

1. Atmosphere — what do parents hope their child will achieve through early years education?
2. Approach — how do parents believe their child will learn best in early years education?
3. Actions — what role do parents believe they should play in supporting their child's early years education?

STA's second aim is to use this data to create a research-informed resource that is useful for parents, educators and researchers alike (Nowell et al., 2017). That is, in ascertaining parents' understanding (Marsh, 2013) and experience of, as well as motivations for (Green et al., 2007) and barriers to engaging with, their child's education, a symbiotic approach towards 'priorities, goals, roles and expectations' (Patrikakou & Anderson, 2005, p. 34), can be developed between practitioner, parent and child.

In support of these aims it was decided that STA would incorporate an online forum for systematically detailing the study to ensure trustworthiness (Côté & Turgeon, 2005) and for sharing the process with all stakeholders (parents, early years staff and the wider educational community): sharingtheambition.com. The STA website was created in the hope that regular communication with parents would help to build the relational trust that is required for parental interest initiatives like STA to be successful (McKenna & Millen, 2013; Nicolau & Ramos, 1990).

Figure 2.25
An example of a child's response to the open question, 'How do you learn at school/nursery?'

"I think. I learn and think what to do. I learn numbers and letters and playing."

We choose our own learning and we choose something to learn with.

We practice and by playing. We learn from our friends.

By focussing.

The teacher when we are hurt will help us.

We learn about sounds and we learn when we sit on the carpet with the teacher.

I learn from teachers.

Letters. Songs. Numbers. Songs. Play together. Read stories. Look in Books.

By eating cheese and playing.

By being nice.

Learn by reading books and thinking.

Play with everything.

The teacher teaches you how to learn.

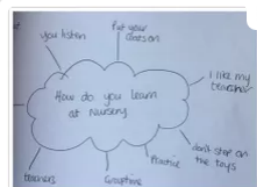When you see other people do things.

Nicely and safely.

Playing and learning at the same time. I learn with my friends.

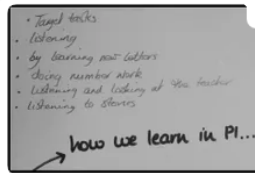We count and do A B C D... I learn numbers and letters and magic moments.

I learn writing.

By climbing trees.

I make things.

We learn how to use our skills to pup bubble paper.

Working together as a team.

how we learn in P1...

Play with toys with the teacher.

Tidy up.

Because I learn very well. Lego and painting and making and juggling.

Letters and numbers.
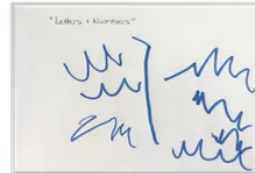
I don't learn I play here. You learn when you go to school.

On the carpet and when I play.

Playing with friends outdoors and inside. I learn quietly.

I actually don't know.

Practising.

Numbers and letters by watching the teacher and practising. Learn about things when we are playing and also our rainbow tasks.

I learn to do letters and numbers when we are playing. And I made a security tag for the robot.

That's why we build something and it grows and that's when we learn. Like making things taller than me.
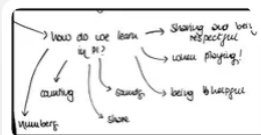
Listen to the teacher.

The teacher makes letters and we have number groups.

I learn about making a number 2 and a sharp point.

Looking at books.

I just think about stuff.

I learn with my teachers and my friends.

The teacher's sing and song.

I learn hot wo read books and remember words and stories.

Good sitting.

By talking about things when we look at our photos.

Table 2.4
A brief summary of staff and family survey results, framed by codebook domain and sub-question

	Domains	
	Teaching and learning	**Relationships**
Atmosphere	Parents hope that, through early years education, their child will develop attitudes, skills and knowledge equally. This is supported by a balanced focus on cultivating personality traits and learning dispositions.	Parents and staff believe that the social climate of a setting's environment and the relationships that it fosters have the most impact upon children's education.
Approach	Parents recognise play as vital to their child's early years education but, in terms of learning environment, prefer a 'combined' approach that draws upon both 'all play' and 'traditional' experiences, interactions and spaces. Staff offer a similar perspective, for children from N2 to P1 and above.	Parents continue to focus on the social elements of education while also recognising the need for their child to enjoy their educational experiences.
Actions	The focus of parental interest, as driven by the school or family, relates to parental confidence in supporting their child's learning at home. This dictates the type of learning experience that parents value most – for example, quality family time over homework. It is also reflected in the levels of staff confidence when employing a play-based approach, with a significant decline in staff confidence as children move from N2 through the school.	Parents believe their relationship with the school should be centred around academic communication, including volunteering and support for family learning. Staff support these approaches too, although they note that the strategies currently employed in their setting are not optimal.

From the survey and focus group results, parents chose a focus on communication and family learning which formed phase 2 and phase 3 of the project (figure 2.26 and table 2.5).

Figure 2.26
Family and staff responses (%) to the question, 'In what ways would you prefer families to be involved in their child's early years setting?'
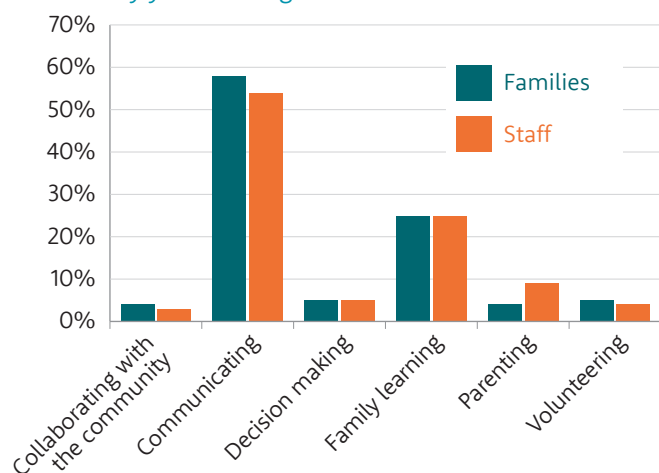
Table 2.5
Family and staff interest strategies: Examples

Family interest category	Examples of suggested strategies Direct quotes from the survey results: Families and staff would like…	
Collaborating with the community	'A coffee area for parents to meet others in the community and have a chat – I can be quite isolated from other parents. Opportunities to get to know each other would be great.'	fundraising coffee mornings BBQ/garden parties community café
Communicating (academic)	'To have more regular and frequent communication with parents rather than just during "more formal" sessions such as parental consultations etc.'	learning journals school blog/website newsletters social media informal conversations parent consultations 'ask me' stickers Google Classroom telephone check-ins email
Communicating (other)	'To build positive relationships and open communication: share information about my child's learning, interests and wellbeing.'	open mornings information sessions information booklets home learning grids behaviour apps sharing jotters reports Microsoft Teams floorbooks individual learning targets
Decision making	'More collaboration and involvement through questionnaires/feedback, e.g. helping to plan the environment.'	parent class reps questionnaires parent council feedback
Family learning	'Prioritise opportunities for parents to come into the classroom to meet the staff and see how children learn.'	stay and play open door policy parent and child sessions literacy and numeracy workshops soft start story sack sessions class open days home learning projects themed events
Parenting	'Have more individual family support along with a variety of workshops such as dads group, mental health support initiatives etc.'	small groups workshops support groups home visits donations family support worker
Volunteering	'Ask parents if they have any skills they could contribute.'	trips clubs outdoor learning in-class support sharing interests

3. Professional enquiry

For phase 2 of the project, 15 practitioners from across Scotland embarked upon their own professional enquiry project to improve communication with their settings' parents. In light of Covid-19, only digital strategies were employed, including online learning journals, virtual floorbooks, Microsoft Teams, SWAY newsletters, class blogs, YouTube videos, interactive setting tours and Google Classroom (figures 3.1–3.3).

The progress of each practitioner's year-long enquiry was shared as an individual project blog on the STA website detailing the format, content and examples of their chosen channel of communication, as well as feedback from parents, children and staff (table 3.1). The means of measuring each project's impact varied according to each practitioner, according to their context and experiences.

Figure 3.1

Examples of professional enquiry project strategies: learning journals

Figure 3.2

Examples of professional enquiry project strategies: interactive setting tour

Figure 3.3
Examples of professional enquiry project strategies:
SWAY newsletters

Table 3.1
Examples of professional enquiry project feedback

Feedback type	Communication channel	Feedback example
Qualitative	Virtual classroom	'I enjoy looking at the observations with my child as it sparks conversations at home about their learning.'
	Learning journals	'It provides visibility of both the play and teacher time. I love going through the learning journal any time I get a notification that something new has been added. The teacher time observation allows us to continue the learning at home.'
	YouTube	'Making the videos with the children in mind and chatting to parents about their children's engagement has supported learning but also strengthened relationships between staff and families.'
Quantitative	Interactive tours	850+ interactions since dissemination.
	SWAY newsletters	Newsletter 2: • 82 views • 2 minutes average time spent • 26 glanced • 12 read quickly • 44 studied in-depth.
	Learning diaries	Week beginning 11/02/21: • 31 parental contributions • 39 likes on posts • 6 comments on posts.

4. Family learning

For phase 3, we created the STA Family Zone as determined by the survey and focus group results (table 4.1) to answer the following three questions.

Why is play important?

The 'why' section shares the rationale and research behind championing a play-based approach to learning. It includes quotes from inspirational play practitioners about the value of play; an FAQs section busting the most common myths and misconceptions about play; a summary of the research in the form of *10 Reasons to Play* (figure 4.1); a lending library for parents to borrow books or find research about play; and videos of children, families and staff explaining what play means to them.

What can play look like?

The 'what' section offers parents skills in observation to understand their child's behaviour — emotions, actions and words — as they join their play. Interactive examples of Bob Hughes' (1966) and Play Scotland's 16 play types (Play Scotland, 2017) were used to make the theory more tangible for parents. Each example include photos and videos of the play; explicit links to the curriculum; detailed accounts of the practitioner's observation; pupil voice both in the moment and when reflecting upon their play at a later date; and additional research where pertinent (figure 4.2).

How can I play at home?

The 'how' section focuses on an interactive calendar called A Year and a Day of Play with resources for parents to inspire play-based interactions and experiences with their children. The resources link to each day's individual celebration — for example, International Bagpipe Day, International Women's Day, Earth Hour (figure 4.3) or 'craft month'. They have been designed to increase parents' confidence in using play for family learning, at home.

Table 4.1
Examples of the data behind the Family Zone

You said… Direct quotes from the survey results	We did… The resulting section of the resource
'I have less knowledge about the power of play and feel bound by old fashioned expectations around learning.'	**The why** section outlining the importance of play.
'Not every household has the tools to support their children nor does everyone know everything about everything. [I would like] a resource where parents can ask questions.'	**The FAQs** section offers families the answers to our most commonly asked questions as well as providing them with opportunities to post anonymously on our board or contact the team with their own queries.
'[We need] opportunities to see how the children play.'	**The what** section provides exemplar play observations.
'Although each child is different, some benchmarking would be useful.'	**The play types** links to the early level curriculum.
'[I would like to know] how to support our children with practical activity suggestions.'	**The how** section gives six different play experiences and interactions to celebrate each day of the year, across a variety of spaces.
'[I want] more opportunities for the community to learn from each other (such as celebrating different cultures, learning how technology helps overcome disability…).'	**The get involved** section helps to build a community of support including opportunities to feed back, collaborate and celebrate play successes.
'Our challenge is to make parents more aware of the benefits of play [and help their] confidence when engaging with children's play.'	**The staff** section allows practitioners to find out more information about STA for their setting.
'[I need] advice/guidance for parents to share tips and ideas.'	**The pearls of play wisdom** section offers advice and encouragement for every step of the play journey.

Figure 4.1
Snapshot of the Family Zone: *The 10 Reasons to Play* document
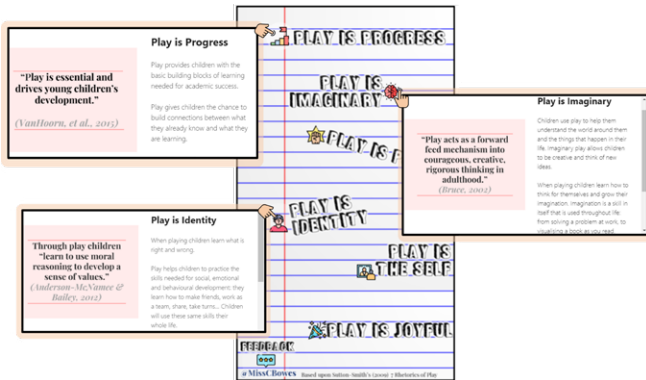
Figure 4.2
Snapshot of the Family Zone: An interactive play observation
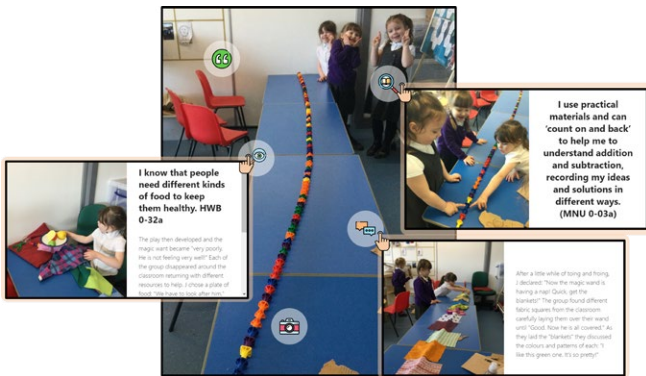
Figure 4.3
Snapshot of the Family Zone: A year and a day of play calendar

The Family Zone was launched for a month-long trial in March 2021: parental engagement was monitored throughout (figure 4.4 and tables 4.2–4.4), and feedback sought from children, parents and staff to improve the provision.

A survey was chosen as the means of gathering feedback. The survey was framed around the seven elements necessary for effective website design – navigation, graphical representation, organisation, content utility, purpose, simplicity

and readability – to ensure maximum engagement (figures 4.5 and 4.6).

Figure 4.4
Website analytics: Views per month
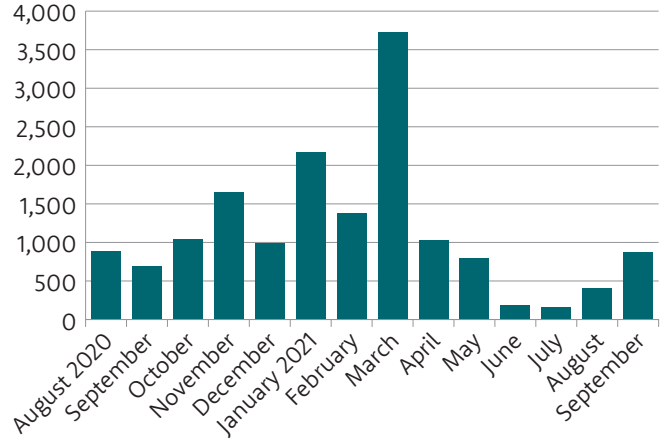
Table 4.2
Website analytics: Total views, August 2020–September 2021, by referrer

Referrer	No. website views
Twitter	3,339
Search engines	1,072
Facebook	763
ThingLink	267
Surveys	145

Table 4.3
Website analytics: Views per country, August 2020–September 2021

Country	United Kingdom	United States	China
Number of website views	15,377	257	126

Table 4.4
Website analytics: Visitors per website activity

	Month	No. visitors	Website activity *Newly published pages*, posts and <u>newsletters</u>	Most viewed page
2020	August	289	*Homepage* *Blog* *Resources* *Contact* BERA funding Project aims Project methodology Project timeline Previous study Survey format Survey content	Meet the team
	September	212	Family survey drafts Staff survey drafts Children's survey drafts <u>Family newsletter #1</u>	Meet the team
	October	483	Family survey results Staff survey results Children's survey results	Family survey results
	November	484	Follow up focus groups Our thematic codebook Professional enquiry projects 1 to 3 Professional enquiry project 2 Professional enquiry project 3 <u>Family newsletter #2</u>	Our projects
	December	312	Follow up focus group results Professional enquiry projects 4 to 9	STA blog
2021	January	1,024	Professional enquiry project 10 to 15	The Family Zone
	February	426	*Lockdown learning*	The Family Zone
	March	1,249	*The Family Zone* *The why of play* *The what of play* *The how of play* *Get involved* *Staff page* <u>Family flyer #1</u>	The Family Zone
	April	363	Professional enquiry updates 1 to 15 <u>Family flyer #2</u>	The Family Zone
	May	319	<u>Family flyer #3</u>	The why of play
	June	86		The how of play
	July	69		The Family Zone
	August	131		The Family Zone
	September	308		The what of play

Figure 4.5

Example of Family Zone feedback survey results:
'Is the Family Zone website easy to use?'
*Think about the site's menu, links, organisation of
information, titles...*

Figure 4.6

Example of Family Zone feedback survey results:
'Is the Family Zone website easy to use?'
Does the Family Zone website look engaging?
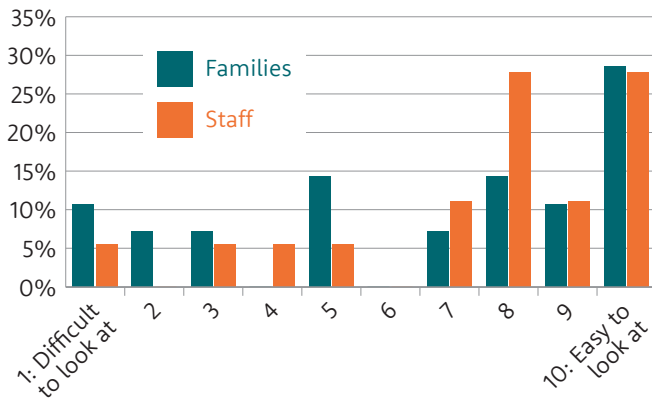
Figure 4.7

Example of Family Zone feedback survey results:
'How useful is the Reasons to Play document?'

Figure 4.8

Examples of Family Zone feedback survey results:
'How useful are the interactive play observations?'

5. Take 2: The relaunch

Based upon the feedback of children, parents and staff, the Family Zone format and content have been amended (table 5.1) in preparation for the relaunch (see figures 5.1 to 5.5).

This feedback will not be viewed in isolation: it is the start of an iterative cycle of co-development, involving all stakeholders, to ensure the Family Zone is successful as a means of family intervention.

Table 5.1
Examples of the data behind the relaunch, informed by project feedback

You said… Direct quotes from the survey results	We did… The resulting section of the resource
'It's got a lot of good stuff in it but the website is hard to navigate – it required too much scrolling.' 'I was a little overwhelmed with information on the site. It was difficult to follow.'	There will be three new ways to access the Family Zone. 1. The feature of the fortnight: a new section of the resource that is released/ advertised every two weeks. 2. The floor plan: an overview of the entire provision, at a glance, to dip in and out of, based upon our most commonly asked play questions (figures 5.2 and 5.3). 3. The story: a progression of resources with bronze, silver and gold levels that build on play attitudes, knowledge and skills (figures 5.4. and 5.5).
'[I liked] having regular updates /ideas sent to me.'	Each chapter is accompanied by an interactive and printable newsletter that summarises the content. This includes thought-provoking reflective questions and eye-catching posters for display at home.
'[I'd like] creative competitions and tasks.'	This will also include everyday play challenges – based, for example, upon Froebel's gifts and occupations (see froebel.org.uk), so that families can put the theory into practice. The suggested play experiences will be accessible to all, especially in terms of resourcing.
'A source to actively share successful play at home, or perhaps see others share – almost like an active/live share.'	A Pride of Play section will allow families and staff to share and celebrate their play successes, helping to build a community of play practice.
'[I'd like STA] to communicate with parents about any useful resources so that children can learn through play at home, too.'	The bulletin board will signpost useful play resources outwith the STA provision. Parents will be able to rate and comment about each resource as well as contribute their own suggestions.
'Keep getting feedback and involving families.'	Opportunities to offer feedback, as discussed above, will be embedded throughout the website.
'[We need] different levels of resources to give those with knowledge more in-depth information.'	Each section of the website will include links to the research that informed its design so that parents can engage in further reading (figure 5.5.).
'[I want] activities organised into topics, types of play etc so parents can look at the activitiesthat interest their children or that they need to practise.'	The interactive play observations will be displayed according to: • their play focus (for example, RTA schema in the What of Play section) • their links to early level experiences and outcomes (in the Cover the Curriculum section). This will allow parents to view our exemplar interactions and experiences based upon their children's needs and interests.
'[Please include] input from families who have tried theseactivities (what worked, what didn't work), hacks, tips, ideas.'	Alongside the pride of play section, the *Pearls of Play Wisdom* document (figure 5.3.) will offer reassuring advice to parents at every stage of their play journey as well as providing a safe space for parents to support each other.
'[STA needs] more advertisement. I have shared this with my colleagues, parents and friends: The majority didn't know about this resource.'	A designated social media presence for STA, on all platforms, will be used to engage a large-scale audience. Social media has already proven to be a popular means of advertising STA (table 4.2).

This will include two forms of feedback.

- Formative feedback: for example, monitoring the website's analytics to assess engagement and embedding interactive polls within each Family Zone resource for instant reactions.
- Summative feedback: for example, continuing to engage with children, parents and staff working parties to trial each element of the resource before it is released, and periodic, large-scale surveys.

Revisions to the Family Zone resource are based on the limitations identified within the MEd dissertation (Bowes, 2020) and the first year of the STA project (table 5.2).

The greatest limitation within Sharing the Ambition has been the survey response rate. To be considered as representative of the Scottish context, a response rate of above 80 per cent would be needed (Fincham, 2008). A response rate of 30 per cent was achieved (an improvement on 16 per cent for the MEd dissertation). Several factors affected the response rate, many of which, when addressed as the project continues, could improve the STA provision (table 5.2).

Table 5.2
Examples of the data behind the relaunch – informed by project limitations

Identified limitation	Resulting action
Although participant break-off is commonly associated with web-based surveys (hence this survey's multi-modal distribution), the online survey itself constituted comparably low rates: 232 participants were lost on the first page of the online survey alone.	Moving forward, more research in survey design is needed in order to reduce participant burden (Lavrakas, 2008).
While barriers to parental interest were viewed as synonymous with barriers to participation in this survey, supports for accessibility were not maximised. The paper survey was translated into the population's most prolific languages (Allmark, 2004), Polish and Arabic, but the online survey remained somewhat inaccessible.	The Family Zone website and all associated STA communication (including online and paper surveys) will be accessible in Scotland's 10 most prevalent languages.
In the same way, although extensive attention was paid to the effect of survey design and content to ensure the content was accessible to the population, the survey should have been pre-tested (Collins, 2003). This would also have highlighted the inevitable response bias (for example, concerning interpretation of question wording) associated with surveying a diverse population (Warnecke et al., 1997).	Pre-testing will be factored into the survey redesign.
Paper surveys were distributed in the hope of accessing the opinions of 'hard-to-reach' families (Brace, 2018). However, due to the anonymous nature of the survey, it is not known whether it was successful in targeting these hidden populations (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).	To improve the engagement of these parents, a targeted approach such as individual invitations to participate face-to-face, or a generalised approach such as offering incentives or rewards (Singer & Bossarte, 2006), could be used to encourage participation in all aspects of STA.
The impact of Covid-19 is widespread, yet difficult to measure. For example, when relying solely on digital means of communication, an entire population of parents – for example, those without access to electronic devices or the internet – is isolated.	Once Covid-19 regulations have been relaxed in early years settings, STA will repeat phase 1 and phase 2. This will allow face-to-face strategies for data collection and analysis, as well as in undertaking further practitioner enquiry to trial non-digital strategies for boosting parental interest. Replicating these phases in a greater number and variety of early years settings will help to strengthen the STA provision and ensure its sustainability.

Figure 5.1
Snapshot of the relaunch: The Family Zone homepage

The Family Zone

Putting play at the heart of family life
by answering:

Why is play important?

What can play look like?

How can I play at home?

Get stuck in with 3 different ways to explore:

The Story
a progression of resources
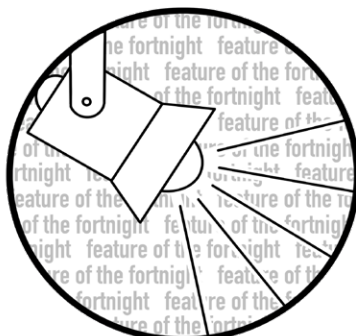
Our Feature of the Fortnight
most recently released resources
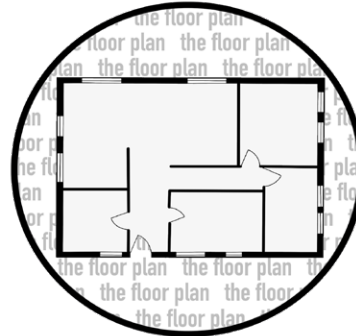
The Floor Plan
all resources ready to explore

Figure 5.2

Snapshot of the relaunch: The floor plan

Click on the flashing stars to jump straight into the resource...
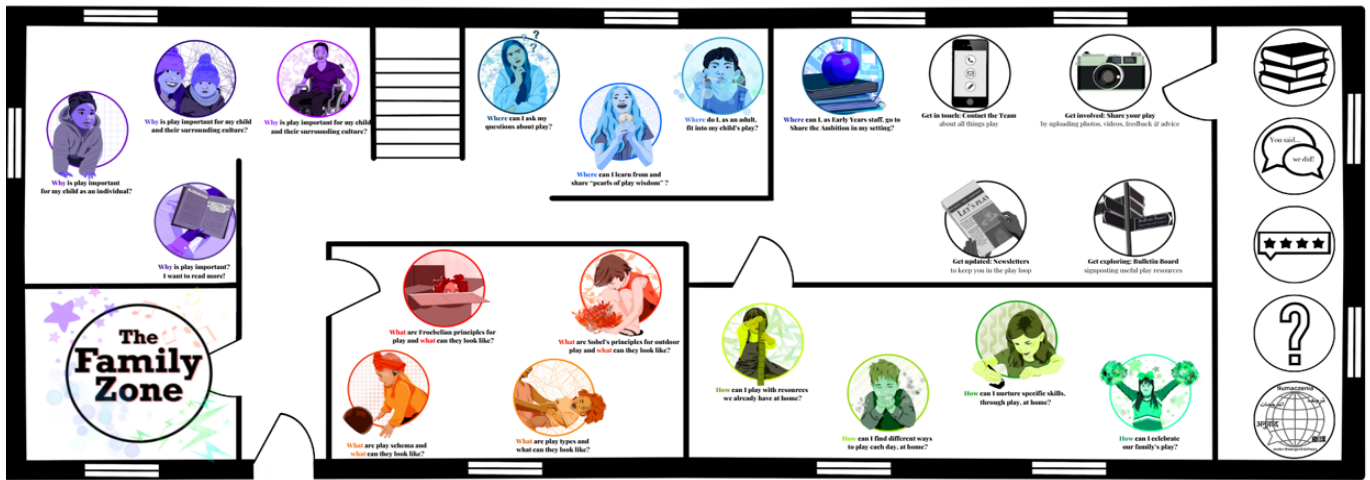
...or keep scrolling to discover each section in turn.

Figure 5.3

Snapshot of the relaunch: The floor plan examples

Where can I learn from and share play advice?

The Sharing the Ambition team have shared their pearls of play wisdom in the hopes of reassuring families at every step along their play journey, including:

◆ Every experience can be an opportunity to learn.
◆ All children are unique.
◆ Let your child take the lead.
◆ Process over product.

Or you can share your play expertise with our play community, anonymously if you choose, by posting on our message board.

← Scroll through the photos for a sneak peek of the section.

Click here!

Where do I, as an adult, fit into my child's play?

The Sharing the Ambition team have created a summary of the 9 different roles an adult can take on during play:

💧 Challenger   💧 Observer
💧 Narrator   💧 Supporter
💧 Role Model   💧 Reminder
💧 Wonderer   💧 Suggester
💧 Encourager

Or you can add your own ideas to our community brainstorm, by posting your thoughts on your role within play, on our message board.

← Scroll through the photos for a sneak peek of the section.

Click here!

Figure 5.4
Snapshot of the relaunch: The story example

Chapter 1

Why is play important?
Discover the research behind championing **play for your child as an individual**.

Click here!

Chapter 2

What can play look like?
Use our **Play Observations** to learn about **Play Scotland's Play Types** and how they can unpick your child's thoughts, words & actions as you join their play.

Click here!

Chapter 3

How can I play at home?
Start simple and put the theory into practice by using **play resources** you already have at home!

Click here!

Chapter 4

Where can I ask my questions?
Read our most **Frequently Asked Questions** to challenge play or get in touch to put your own queries to our Sharing the Ambition team.

Click here!

Figure 5.5
Snapshot of the relaunch: Accessibility icons

As you scout about, look out for...

You Said... We Did!
Take a look at quotes, facts & figures taken from our Sharing the Ambition survey results to discover the inspiration behind the resource.

Questions
Ask the Sharing the Ambition team your questions as you navigate the Family Zone resource.

Feedback
Send your thoughts, ideas, comments & suggestions straight to the Sharing the Ambition team. This is **your** resource so your opinions matter!

Further Reading
Discover the research that has inspired or informed each element of the Family Zone resource.

Translations
Check out our handy hints and video tutorials to learn how to translate our Sharing the Ambition website.

6. Conclusion

The overall tone of participant response was one of partnership, collaboration and community: instead of accepting a loss of control and therefore responsibility over their child's education (Wise Bauer, 2018), parents hope to work together with early years settings to improve the educational outcomes, whether academic or otherwise, of their children.

The appetite for play among Scottish parents and staff is growing. STA's results already show a more substantial focus on 'all play' learning environments – spaces, experiences and interactions. Through play, the priorities, goals, roles and expectations of parents and staff are beginning to align.

In fostering and maintaining successful parent–setting relationships, communication is key and must be bi-directional (Parenta, 2018). For example, the simple action of consulting parents seeks to overcome the deficit lens through which they are often viewed and to create an ethos whereby parents understand their value (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Parents want 'to be asked and to be heard'.

Consistency is also important for families and staff: what is taught at the setting should be reinforced at home and vice versa. In the current societal climate, this includes a holistic view of child development considering all aspects of emotional, social, behavioural and cognitive competencies.

Generally, the focus of parental interest policy should be on family learning. Just as play practitioners use child-led planning, settings should use family-led policy: mind-minded and responsive (Scottish government, 2020). Each early years setting should help parents to understand their individual, context-informed **atmosphere** and **approach**, to improve the quality of parental **action** within their child's education at home and in educational settings. In this way, children's educational outcomes can be secured, one early years setting at a time.

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Appendix

RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS

Table A.1
Responses to the question, 'In your opinion, what do you hope your child will achieve through their early years education?'

Domain: Learning and teaching							
Code label	Attitudes	Knowledge	Skills	Setting focus	Family focus	Traditional	All play	Combined
FoR*	85	92	86	0	1	14	24	15

Domain: Relationships					
Code label	Social climate	Emotional climate	Behavioural climate	Setting focus	Family focus
FoR*	114	53	32	114	53

See also figure 2.4.
*Note: FoR = frequency (number of responses).

Table A.2
Responses to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes your view on the aims of early years education?'

		Attitudes	Knowledge	Skills
N2	Ranked 1st	9	3	5
	Ranked 2nd	2	1	6
	Ranked 3rd	1	8	1
N	1st	65	10	54
	2nd	31	15	47
	3rd	10	81	5
P1	1st	94	26	58
	2nd	36	25	68
	3rd	16	95	20
Total	1st	168	39	117
	2nd	69	41	121
	3rd	27	184	26

See also figure 2.2.

Table A.3
Frequency (number of responses) to the question, 'Which of these characteristics would you choose as most important for your child to develop through their early years education?'

	Frequency (number of responses)			
	N2	N	P1	Total
Creativity	5	51	75	131
Curiosity	8	65	104	177
Independence	5	31	56	92
Kindness	9	84	100	193
Resilience	4	35	36	75
Integrity	7	47	61	115
Self-discipline	1	5	23	29
Other	0	3	2	5

See also figure 2.3.

Table A.4
Frequency (number of responses) to the question, 'How confident do you feel in employing a play-based approach to teaching and learning?'

	Childcare	N2	N	P1	Other	Total
1: Not at all confident	0	0	0	0	2	2
2	0	0	0	1	0	1
3	0	0	2	1	1	4
4	0	0	0	0	2	2
5	0	0	2	5	4	11
6	0	0	1	3	3	7
7	0	0	6	9	2	17
8	3	1	16	11	4	35
9	0	2	13	9	1	25
10: Very confident	4	0	12	3	4	23

See also figure 2.4.

Table A.5
Frequency of responses to the question, 'How familiar are you with the Scottish government's *Realising the Ambition* publication?'

	Childcare	N2	N	P1	Other	Total
1: Not at all familiar	0	0	1	4	6	11
2	0	0	1	2	3	6
3	0	0	0	1	0	1
4	0	0	1	2	1	4
5	0	0	1	1	1	3
6	0	0	4	1	1	6
7	2	0	9	8	3	22
8	2	1	16	9	2	30
9	2	2	11	7	4	26
10: Very familiar	1	0	8	8	2	19

See also figure 2.5.

Tables A.6a & A.6b
Frequency of responses to the question, 'Please describe what you would like to see your child doing day-to-day in their early years setting.'

	Domain: Learning and teaching Code label							
	Attitudes	Knowledge	Skills	Setting focus	Family focus	Traditional	All play	Combined
FoR*	29	58	47	3	1	20	82	41

	Domain: Relationships Code label				
	Social climate	Emotional climate	Behavioural climate	Setting focus	Family focus
FoR*	54	36	15	2	1

See also figure 2.6.
*Note: FoR = frequency (number of responses).

Table A.7
Frequency of responses to the question, 'How important is play at your child's home?'

	N2	N	P1	Total
1: Not at all important	0	0	1	0
2	0	0	3	0
3	0	2	2	0
4	0	0	1	1
5	1	2	4	3
6	0	3	2	1
7	0	6	7	1
8	2	15	38	7
9	0	11	17	10
10: Very important	7	65	68	5

See also figure 2.7.

Table A.8
Frequency of responses to the question, 'How important is play at your child's early years setting?'

	N2	N	P1	Total
1: Not at all important	0	0	1	1
2	0	0	2	2
3	0	2	3	5
4	0	0	1	1
5	1	3	5	9
6	0	2	4	6
7	0	9	7	16
8	2	17	35	54
9	0	8	19	27
10: Very important	7	64	66	137

See also figure 2.8.

Table A.9
Responses to the question, 'For your child, which of these statements best describes your preferred spaces within an early years setting?'

Perspectives	N2	N	P1	Total
Traditional	0	0	1	1
All play	7	72	78	157
Uncertain	5	31	65	101
Don't know	0	2	1	3

See also figure 2.9.

Table A.10

Frequency of responses to the question, 'For your child, which of these statements best describes your preferred experiences within an early years setting?'

Perspectives	N2	N	P1	Total
Traditional	0	0	3	3
All play	2	17	17	36
Uncertain	9	88	124	221
Don't know	0	0	0	0

See also figure 2.10.

Table A.11

Frequency of responses to the question, 'For your child, which of these statements best describes your preferred interactions within an early years setting?'

Perspectives	N2	N	P1	Total
Traditional	0	1	5	6
All play	1	22	26	49
Uncertain	9	81	112	202
Don't know	1	1	1	3

See also figure 2.11.

Table A.12

Frequency of responses to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes the spaces within your early years setting?'

	Childcare	N2	N	P1	Other	Total
Traditional	0	0	0	2	2	4
All play	7	2	45	20	13	87
Combined	0	1	7	21	6	35
Don't know	0	0	0	0	2	2

See also figure 2.12.

Table A.13

Frequency of responses to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes the experiences within your early years setting?'

	Childcare	N2	N	P1	Other	Total
Traditional	0	0	0	0	3	3
All play	2	3	23	3	2	33
Combined	5	0	29	40	18	92
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0

See also figure 2.13.

Table A.14

Frequency of responses to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes the interactions within your early years setting?'

	Childcare	N2	N	P1	Other	Total
Traditional	0	0	0	3	2	5
All play	4	2	26	2	3	37
Combined	3	1	26	38	18	86
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0

See also figure 2.14.

Table A.16[6]

Frequency of responses to the question, 'Which of these factors would you place as most important in impacting upon your child's early years education?'

	N2	N	P1	Total
School relationships	4	41	60	105
Home relationships	5	37	44	86
School teaching and learning	1	9	22	32
Home teaching and learning	0	10	9	19
Don't know	0	8	7	15

See also figure 2.16.

Table A.17

Frequency of responses to the question, 'Which of these statements best describes your views on the different roles that teachers and parents play in education?'

	N2	N	P1	Total
Parents' sole responsibility	0	1	0	1
Teachers' sole responsibility	0	0	2	2
Parents' then teachers' sole responsibility	0	0	0	0
Equal responsibility	9	103	141	253
Don't know	1	1	3	5

See also figure 2.17.

6　There is no table A.15 in this appendix: tables are numbered to match those of the corresponding figures in chapter 2 of this report.

Table A.18
Frequency of responses to the question, 'How confident do you feel in supporting your child's learning from home?'

	N2	N	P1	Total
1: Not at all confident	0	0	2	2
2	0	1	3	4
3	0	2	6	8
4	1	1	6	8
5	0	7	11	18
6	1	6	9	16
7	0	12	18	30
8	1	24	35	60
9	1	12	25	38
10: Very confident	6	39	31	76

See also figure 2.18.

Table A.19
Frequency of responses to the question, 'Should early years settings support your child's learning at home?'

	N2	N	P1	Total
Yes	5	61	106	172
No	4	16	10	30
Don't know	2	28	25	55

See also figure 2.19.

Table A.20
Frequency of responses to the question, 'In what ways would you like to be involved in your child's learning at their early years setting?'

	N2	N	P1	Total
Collaborating with the community	0	4	9	14
Communicating (academic)	1	8	20	32
Communicating (other)	0	3	4	8
Decision making	0	1	2	3
Family learning	0	2	12	15
Parenting	0	1	1	2
Remote involvement	0	3	2	5
Volunteering	1	3	3	7

See also figure 2.20.

Table A.21
Frequency of responses to the question, 'Which of these factors would you place as most important in impacting upon children's early years education?'

	Childcare	N2	N	P1	Other	Total
Setting's relationships	3	0	25	22	12	62
Home's relationships	0	2	18	11	10	41
Setting's learning and teaching	2	0	5	4	0	11
Home's learning and teaching	1	1	1	2	1	6
Don't know	0	0	0	3	0	3

See also figure 2.21.

Table A.22
Frequency of responses to the question, 'In what ways would you prefer families to be involved in their child's learning at your early years setting?'

	Childcare	N2	N	P1	Other	Total
Collaborating with the community	0	0	9	6	7	22
Communicating (academic)	3	1	17	21	8	50
Communicating (other)	2	0	16	10	7	35
Decision making	1	0	11	4	3	19
Family learning	4	2	26	29	20	81
Parenting	4	2	13	8	4	31
Remote involvement	1	0	5	3	1	10
Volunteering	2	0	9	8	0	19

See also figure 2.22.

Table A.23

Frequency of responses to the question, 'How successful are the strategies your setting currently employs to facilitate parental engagement/involvement?'

	Childcare	N2	N	P1	Other	Total
1: Not at all successful	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	1	0	1	2
3	0	0	2	3	2	7
4	1	0	2	2	2	7
5	1	1	5	10	4	21
6	1	0	11	6	6	24
7	3	2	17	10	3	35
8	1	0	6	9	2	18
9	0	0	2	1	0	3
10: Very successful	0	0	5	2	1	8

See also figure 2.23

Table A.24

Frequency of responses to the question, 'In your setting, would you use a parental engagement and interest policy aimed at putting play at the heart of early years family learning?'

	Childcare	N2	N	P1	Other	Total
Yes	6	3	43	34	14	100
No	0	0	1	0	2	3
Don't know	1	0	8	9	7	25

See also figure 2.24