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Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare  
Towards a New Funding Model

Working Paper 8:  
Shared Delivery Models for Early Learning and Care and School-Age  
Childcare

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## Table of Contents

Glossary .....	4
Executive Summary .....	5
Introduction.....	5
Methodology .....	6
Findings .....	6
1. Introduction .....	10
1.1 Background and objectives .....	10
1.2 Methodology .....	11
1.3 Caveats on the evidence .....	12
1.4 Report structure .....	13
2. Shared delivery models.....	14
2.1 The benefits and types of shared delivery models .....	14
2.2 Influences on the use of shared delivery models.....	16
3. Examples of models of shared delivery .....	20
3.1 Shared business and administrative services .....	20
3.2 Shared frontline inputs and staff training .....	24
3.3 Childminder agencies and centres .....	28
3.4 Shared learning.....	32
3.5 Shared care.....	36
4. Conclusions .....	39
References .....	41

## Glossary

Childcare	Broadly used to mean ELC and/or SAC.
Childminders	See home-based provision.
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	Activities designed to develop an individual's skills, knowledge and expertise as an ELC or SAC staff member, leader or head of a setting (or more generally, a professional). These activities are formal and can include courses and workshops, as well as formalised collaboration and participation in professional networks. Professional development activities do not refer to every-day experiences and practice even though they may also be developing staff professionally.
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)	Programme in Ireland providing free hours of ELC for children aged between 2 years, 8 months and 5 years, 6 months.
Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)	All regulated arrangements to provide care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content. Includes ISCED 0 and ECEC services without a defined educational component. Also called Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).
Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)	All regulated arrangements to provide care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content. Includes ISCED 0 and ECEC services without a defined educational component. Also called Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).
Home-based provision	Arrangements to provide education or childcare within the home. Also called family-based provision, family childcare or childminders.
Quality	Characteristics of ELC and SAC which have effects on children's development, learning and wellbeing. Includes process quality (the nature of the daily experiences of children) and structural quality (distal factors that are typically regulated, such as children-to-staff ratio, group size and staff training/education, and create the framework for the experiences of children).
School-Age Childcare (SAC)	Arrangements to provide childcare outside of normal school hours for school-going children, whether provided in formal or home-based settings. This includes before school, after school and school holidays, but excludes weekend.

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

As part of the First 5 Strategy to improve outcomes for children in Ireland from birth to age five, a commitment has been made by the Irish Government to at least double public spending on Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) in Ireland by 2028. An Expert Group was tasked to deliver a report containing proposals for a new funding model which will help ensure that this additional funding can be used in the best way to deliver safe, high quality, affordable and accessible ELC and SAC. This report is the eighth in a series of working papers delivered by Frontier Economics in the role of Research Partnership to provide research support to the Expert Group.

Progressing collaborative initiatives and integrated service development and delivery is a core intent of the new funding model. In order to help understand how existing models of shared delivery approaches across ELC/SAC services in Ireland and in other jurisdictions contribute to affordability, quality and sustainability of provision, the aims of this paper are to:

- Present a summary of the discussion around shared delivery across ELC and SAC services, including the benefits of this type of collaboration and the facilitators of and barriers to this type of collaboration between settings.
- Describe the identified instances of this type of collaboration between ELC and SAC services in Ireland and other jurisdictions.
- Summarise the available evidence on the effectiveness of these arrangements.

The scope of this evidence review includes models of shared delivery across ELC and SAC services or settings which are independent, individual settings without shared governance. This paper does *not* cover chains of services or settings where one organisation operates provision on multiple sites with shared governance and a single legal entity and does *not* cover collaboration between ELC and SAC settings on the one hand and other early years services or the local community on the other.

## Methodology

A desk-based evidence review of publicly available evidence, including academic publications and grey literature from government agencies and third-sector organisations, was undertaken for evidence on the use and effectiveness of shared delivery ELC and SAC. Following a general search without a named country, the search focused on eight case study countries (Canada, England, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and New Zealand), in line with evidence presented in earlier working papers, and Australia. The collated sources were then analysed to identify different types of approaches to shared delivery and an assessment was made of the evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches.

One caveat on the evidence is that many of the evidence sources were webpages rather than published documents. References to webpages are simply listed within the text and all were as accessed in February 2021. Published documents are referenced and listed in the usual manner in a list of references.

It should be noted that the research for this report was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic and that some information may have subsequently changed as a result.

## Findings

In theory, shared delivery models could offer providers benefits through economies of scale (reducing costs), economies of scope (improving delivery or quality) or enhanced visibility or reputation (building competitiveness). Different types of shared delivery for ELC and SAC could include:

- Shared business and administrative services;
- Shared frontline inputs (such as contact staff, premises or other venues, equipment or materials);
- Shared training or staff development;
- Shared learning;
- Joint marketing to promote reputation; and

- Shared care (when a child attends two different settings or services managed by different organisations).

Only a small number of examples of shared delivery models for ELC and SAC settings were identified in this review:

- Rapidly growing use of shared business and administrative services (Shared Services Alliances) across the US with the support of substantial public funding. The context of a large number of small independent providers suggests that these shared services may be yielding sizeable benefits and there are several reports of Shared Service Alliances delivering substantial financial savings to their members. However, there are few firm assessments of the precise magnitude of cost savings. Moreover, government funding has supported the development of services and promoted their benefits, and it would be surprising if the substantial public investment did not result in some type of saving for the providers themselves.
- Several networks supporting shared resources, primarily for training in England and the *Kāhui Ako* network in New Zealand, and some examples of shared venue spaces in Scotland. This may reflect substantial policy changes, including that the considerable focus on providing childcare for disadvantaged children and those with additional needs has increased the benefits from sharing training in this way. Alternatively, it could reflect the absence of the organisation of shared learning through public funding or support at the system level. The benefits of these networks are reported to include reducing costs and allowing limited funding to go further; improving access to training and CPD; supporting an exchange of experience across staff and settings; and facilitating shared purchases such as for specialist staff and occasionally used equipment.
- Relatively successful shared delivery models for childminders in the Netherlands and in France, and childminder agencies in England, which have not flourished. The agencies in the Netherlands are highly rated by parents for quality, affordability and flexibility. In France, the agencies are reported to benefit childminders by reducing their isolation and increasing business through referrals. Elsewhere, networks of family day care providers are reported to enhance professional identity and

community, supporting longer-term commitment to the role. However, the use of childminder agencies may not be so prevalent in England because the financial and other benefits do not outweigh the additional costs or because the childminding workforce in England values independence to a greater extent than elsewhere.

- Several types of shared learning approaches in England, including setting-run networks and system leaders in the form of Maintained Nursery School (MNS). Again, this could reflect a greater need for shared learning in the face of substantial policy developments and other delivery challenges or the absence of system-level support for shared learning. Government and third-party support for shared learning organised at the setting level have also been specific facilitating factors. Shared learning has been reported to include benefits for good practice and effective business management. It is seen as a quick and efficient way for staff to develop professionally, including through visits to other settings and through network participants cascading knowledge back to setting staff.
- Examples of shared care in Germany and England in response to specific policy needs. Shared care in Germany has been advocated because of its benefits for childminders, who can use the facilities and training of day care centres and have coverage if they are sick or on vacation, and its benefits for parents because childminders can provide care for very young or unwell children or at atypical times. However, shared care in England is still largely viewed as a necessary compromise when other options are not available.

This review has identified only a very small number of examples of shared delivery models, for which there may be several explanations:

- Shared delivery is a relatively rare occurrence because the overall benefits are small, particularly if any benefits are already captured in system-level organisation supported by public funding or are better captured through chains of settings with shared governance.
- The identified collaboration tends to be “low level” in that the shared activities do not have substantial impacts on frontline delivery. It is possible that the identified



examples are actually quite widespread but are not considered of sufficient importance or interest to be reported.

- Evidence has been focused on countries or on recent specific developments where research in the area receives greater support and funding.

Although the benefits of shared delivery models are widely listed, robust evidence on the effectiveness of the shared delivery approaches is absent. There are no assessments or measurements of reduced cost, enhanced scope of provision or quality improvements. Some of the benefits would be challenging to measure in a robust way, but the absence of monetary estimates for cost savings is most obviously lacking.

Overall, the evidence indicates that shared delivery is likely to be beneficial only for auxiliary supporting activities such as administration or training rather than for the primary activity of day-to-day frontline care and education. This suggests that promoting this type of collaboration between settings may be able to achieve more for the quality of provision than for substantially reducing costs.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and objectives

As part of the First 5 Strategy to improve outcomes for children in Ireland from birth to age five, a commitment has been made by the Irish Government to at least double public spending on Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) in Ireland by 2028. A new funding model is required to help ensure that this additional funding is used in the best way to deliver safe, high quality, affordable and accessible ELC and SAC which meets families' diverse needs. An Expert Group was tasked to deliver a report containing proposals for a new funding model which includes the costs, risks and implementation plans for different options.<sup>1</sup>

Frontier Economics was appointed as the Research Partnership for this Expert Group to provide research support and advice to the group. This report is the eighth in a series of working papers summarising the evidence in several key areas.

Progressing collaborative initiatives and integrated service development and delivery is a core intent of the new funding model. This includes piloting the development of models of local collaborations to better address governance and sustainability in ELC, in partnership with community and private ELC (and SAC) providers. In order to help understand how existing models of shared delivery approaches across ELC/SAC services in Ireland and in other jurisdictions contribute to affordability, quality and sustainability of provision, the aims of this paper are to:

- Present a summary of the discussion around shared delivery across ELC and SAC services, including the benefits of this type of collaboration and the facilitators of and barriers to this type of collaboration between settings.
- Describe the identified instances of this type of collaboration between ELC and SAC services in Ireland and other jurisdictions.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms of reference for the Expert Group are available at <https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Terms-of-Reference-1.pdf>

- Summarise the available evidence on the effectiveness of these arrangements.

The scope of this evidence review includes models of shared delivery across ELC and SAC services or settings which are independent, individual settings without shared governance. It includes shared delivery that is organised by the services or settings themselves or by an external organisation (including government-sponsored agencies). This paper does *not* cover:

- Chains of services or settings where one organisation operates provision on multiple sites with shared governance and a single legal entity.<sup>2</sup>
- Collaboration or shared delivery between ELC and SAC settings on the one hand and other early years services or the local community on the other.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Methodology

A desk-based evidence review of publicly available evidence, including academic publications and grey literature from government agencies and third-sector organisations, was undertaken for evidence on the use and effectiveness of shared delivery ELC and SAC. A broad search for evidence was undertaken based on a set of key search terms, followed by more focused searches for the case study countries and Australia. These searches were constructed to seek references to combinations of the following terms for ELC and SAC and for shared delivery:

- The terms for ELC and SAC included ECEC, ELC, early learning and care, early years education, early years, nurseries, pre-school, childcare, centre care, family day care, and childminders.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of such chains in Ireland include StartBright (<https://www.startbright.ie/about/>), which resulted from a merger of four community-based early learning centres in the Dublin West area in 2011; Finglas Community Playgroups Association Ltd. (<https://www.finglascommunityplaygroups.com/>), which has six playgroups in the Finglas and Glasnevin area; and Cooperative Childcare Ireland (<http://cooperativechildcare.ie/>), which has three settings in and around Dublin.

<sup>3</sup> Several studies from Australia have considered collaboration between ELC and Early Years Services (Wong et al. 2012; Flottman et al. 2011) or between ELC and the local community (see <https://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/tag/collaboration/>). A comprehensive review of inter-agency working with young children and their families in Europe can be found in Barnes et al. (2018).

- The terms for shared delivery included shared delivery, shared services, sharing resources, pooling resources, collaboration, cooperation, networks, partnership, hubs and clusters.

Following a general search without a named country, the search focused on eight case study countries (Canada, England, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and New Zealand), in line with evidence presented in earlier working papers, and Australia. Further searches were undertaken using the format described above, adding the name of a particular case study country to ensure completeness for this set of countries<sup>4</sup> and an additional search with the name of the relevant government department.<sup>5</sup> In addition to Ireland, the seven comparison jurisdictions were selected on the basis that their early education systems include some form of childcare market. They were also selected to cover a range of contexts, including public and private provision; split and integrated systems; centralised and decentralised governance structures; and levels of public funding and regulation.

The collated sources were then analysed to identify different types of approaches to shared delivery and an assessment was made of the evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches.

### **1.3 Caveats on the evidence**

The available evidence on models of shared delivery for ELC and SAC was found to be extremely limited. This may be because shared delivery is rare or because reporting and evaluation of shared delivery is rare. Consequently, this paper uses a relatively small number of examples to describe a variety of approaches rather than providing a comprehensive review of the prevalence of different models of shared delivery.

In addition, many of the evidence sources were webpages rather than published documents. References to webpages are simply listed within the text and all were as

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<sup>4</sup> The country-specific searches using the term “childminder” were only undertaken for the countries with significant proportions of childminders (England, Ireland, France, Germany and the Netherlands).

<sup>5</sup> In addition, some searches were undertaken using translations into the national language for France, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway.

accessed in February 2021. Published documents are referenced and listed in the usual manner in a list of references.

Finally, it should be noted that the research for this report was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic and that some information may have subsequently changed as a result.

#### **1.4 Report structure**

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. **Chapter 2** describes different types of shared delivery models, together with their potential benefits. It also considers the factors that may help facilitate or may hinder shared delivery. **Chapter 3** presents examples of shared delivery models, together with any available evidence on their effectiveness. **Chapter 4** concludes with the key findings.

## 2. Shared delivery models

This chapter presents an initial overview of the shared delivery models in order to set the examples from ELC and SAC within a broader collaboration framework. The first section presents the different types of approaches, together with their potential benefits, while the second section considers the factors which may help facilitate or form barriers to shared delivery.

### 2.1 The benefits and types of shared delivery models

Collaboration across ELC and SAC services or settings can take a wide variety of forms, ranging from chains operating under a single legal entity to joint ventures of cooperative agreements (with more limited legal ties), to looser arrangements such as consortiums or cooperatives or quite specific arrangements limited to marketing such as franchising or licensing. This paper focuses on the middle elements of this potential range, that is, collaboration where settings retain legal independence but jointly manage or control some aspects of delivery and share the benefits. However, many of the features and benefits of these selected types of arrangements also apply more broadly to the full spectrum of collaborative models.

There are three key types of benefits that collaborations (in any sector) can offer:

- Economies of scale (or supplementary alliances): a sharing of similar assets, resources, skills or expertise to support cost reduction and improved efficiency through volume;
- Economies of scope (or complementary alliances): a sharing of different assets, resources, skills or expertise to give access to a new capability and improved delivery driven by variety; and
- Enhanced visibility and reputation which builds product or service demand (or competitive position for market-based provision) through association with a larger group of prestigious organisations.

These concepts underlie the different types of shared delivery models identified in the evidence review for ELC and SAC. Although there are some overlaps in the benefits,<sup>6</sup> economies of scale which reduce costs primarily contribute to affordability for parents; economies of scope primarily contribute to quality (both in terms of the child's experience and in terms of convenience or reliability for parents); and enhancing demand primarily supports sustainability for providers. In addition, economies of scale and of scope can support risk-sharing and innovation, allowing the group greater protection against disruptions to services and enhancing the capacity to expand.

The approaches for shared delivery identified in this review can be categorised into the following broad groups:

- (a) **Shared business and administrative services:** These services can include human resource administration (payroll, benefits, etc.); finance and accounting services; record management; compliance with regulations and guidance; and risk management. Centralisation of these services across multiple services or settings not only reduces their cost (economies of scale) but may also improve their reliability and provision quality. In addition, these shared services may enable lower-cost procurement through bulk buying.
- (b) **Shared frontline inputs:** These inputs can include shared venues for some activities (such as swimming pools or specialist play areas); staff for specialist activities (such as music or gym); relief staff to cover regular staff absences; and group purchasing of materials. The sharing of inputs may reduce costs for some inputs (economies of scale for relief staff or group purchasing) or may improve quality by making some of these activities viable (economies of scope in activities using specialist venues or staff).
- (c) **Shared training or staff development:** The substantial economies of scale in training and staff development activities (as per-head costs decline with group sizes) and occasional need for them offer considerable cost savings from sharing these

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<sup>6</sup> For example, in addition to reducing fees paid by parents, cost reduction could also enhance provider sustainability or allow the provider to offer higher quality.

activities. In addition, the quality of training can be improved through the exchange of experience and problem-solving between staff from different settings.

- (d) **Shared learning:** Shared experience (outside of formal training) between senior and managerial staff can potentially reduce delivery costs and enhance the quality of provision (an economy of scope in sharing different expertise).
- (e) **Joint marketing to promote reputation:** Demand for places can be enhanced by an association with a group of settings with a good reputation (benefits of association with a larger group). This can be particularly beneficial in ELC provision where word-of-mouth is important in parental choice of provider.
- (f) **Shared care:**<sup>7</sup> Settings can co-ordinate with each other to offer parents a combined package of care when they cannot independently meet parental requirements (an economy of scope). If such collaboration is in response to a change in government policy or other shock to demand patterns, the motivation may be short-term financial viability or longer-term protection against new entry by competitors who can meet parental demand independently.

The examples of models of shared delivery presented in the following chapter vary in several dimensions:

- In the scale of shared delivery, that is, the number and size of settings involved;
- In the scope of the shared delivery and the complexity of the arrangements; and
- In the organisational structures employed, specifically whether there is a separate or jointly governed external organisation creating shared utilities.

## 2.2 Influences on the use of shared delivery models

Although there are many potential benefits of shared delivery, the relative rarity of shared delivery in ELC and SAC provision identified in the evidence review suggests there are also

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<sup>7</sup> Shared care means when a child attends two different settings or services managed by different organisations, either transferring between settings or services within a day or attending different services or settings on different days of the week.



many drawbacks and barriers to collaborating in this way. This section reviews some of the possible influences on the use of shared delivery, drawing from the broader literature on collaboration in conjunction with an understanding of ELC and SAC delivery.

A key set of influences on the use of shared delivery are those related to the size of the potential benefits:

- The benefits of shared administration and shared inputs to reduce costs may be larger if there are a large number of relatively small settings.
- The benefits of centralised human resources management may be larger if there are workforce hiring and retention challenges.
- The benefits of centralised administration may be larger if administrative needs are increased by substantial regulation or if public funding is an important income source.
- The benefits of shared training and experience may be larger if settings offer specialist provision to some children such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with additional needs.
- The benefits of shared experience may be greater when there are substantial policy innovations or the sector landscape is evolving.
- The benefits of joint marketing or collaboration on packages of care may be greater in conditions of changing demand.

Set against the benefits of shared delivery, this type of collaboration has potential costs and drawbacks:

- The vast majority of costs for ELC and SAC provision are frontline staff costs and the benefits of savings in other areas are likely to be proportionately small relative to total costs.
- Organising staff and space resources within a single setting can be challenging and extending that organisation across several settings may be prohibitively difficult.

- A group reputation and branding carries a joint risk as well as a joint benefit: a detrimental incident for one setting could tarnish the entire group's reputation.
- Successful collaboration requires a willingness and agreement on the part of a substantial number of settings located within a reasonable proximity of each other.
- Initiating a collaboration may be costly: staff may need to be made redundant; accounts and administrative processes may need to be standardised; management approaches may be disrupted; and there are time costs from implementing changes.

Contextual factors may also play a role in influencing the use of shared delivery. These include:

- A shared or complementary purpose and shared needs with agreement on the division of inputs and distribution of benefits (including any expansion in provision) may help facilitate collaboration. Relatively equal financial positions between the potential collaborators could also support reaching an agreement.
- Private provision may inhibit collaboration because other settings are competitors. Collaboration between childminders may also be inhibited by a desire to work alone and to be able to work flexibly according to personal preferences. School-based (often maintained or state-run) settings may be inhibited from working closely with other early years settings because they are likely to already be deriving many similar benefits from being part of a much larger school organisation.
- Settings in rural or isolated areas may be less able to collaborate on shared frontline inputs for reasons of distance.
- There may be preferable alternatives to models of shared delivery. For example, generic financial services may offer the benefits of low-cost accounting or payroll services, or human resource agencies may reduce workforce costs. Or third-party venues may offer shared space with other types of users. Another alternative could be for settings to simply merge into a chain with a shared governance.

Finally, there are a set of factors which may support the process of setting up new shared delivery arrangements:

- The initiation of collaboration may benefit from the presence of a leader (individual or setting) to bring together or stimulate change by understanding the benefits and being able to implement the changes. Government policy could play such a role in supporting the initiation of new shared delivery arrangements.
- Evidence documenting the magnitudes of potential cost savings and quality improvements (including monitoring of whether objectives have been achieved from previous collaborations) can enhance understanding of the benefits.
- A model of shared delivery which begins with just two or three settings and can be easily extended to include more would help build larger collaborations.
- Settings may be more amenable to testing shared delivery models which are less permanent and can be more easily “undone”.

As an overall guiding principle, it is important to keep in mind that collaboration is rarely an end in itself but is typically only a means to an end. Settings will act in their own interests rather than those of the collaboration, and a successful shared delivery model will need to deliver benefits for all those involved.

### 3. Examples of models of shared delivery

This chapter describes several examples of models of shared delivery identified in the evidence review. Each section describes a collection of related policies, together with any evidence on their effectiveness.

#### 3.1 Shared business and administrative services

Two examples of shared business and administrative services were identified in the evidence review.

In **Ireland**, the **Crann Support Group** provides a range of support services to social enterprises and voluntary and community groups covering management, human resources and accounts.<sup>8</sup> Crann has a total of 21 members who avail themselves of some or all of their shared business services, including 11 community childcare centres in County Meath and County Dublin. A recent study (Trinity Business School 2020) collected data on Crann's impact using interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders and a survey of Crann Group members. The survey indicated that the most important areas of impact for its members were financial savings, improved operational efficiency, help in maintaining organisational reputation, improved customer impact, help in complying with regulatory requirements and procurement advantage in the form of bulk buying. Moreover, 93 percent of the survey respondents reported that it would be extremely hard or a big challenge to sustain their activity without the support of Crann services. The study concluded that:

*“Shared service models help community childcare organizations to be more efficient, affordable and in the end sustainable. Crann makes childcare affordable for the vulnerable families in the community. The monetary savings achieved through using Crann support services is reflected in the overall cost of childcare and means these resources can be invested in the core work, skills and facilities to accommodate more children in future.”* (Trinity Business School 2020, page 80)

However, it is important to note that Crann, as an organisation, is heavily reliant on government funding, with 57% of all funding in 2018 coming from community service

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.crannsupportgroup.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Crann-2015.pdf>

projects and grants and only 30% from support services fees.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the service is heavily subsidised by government funding and the benefits do not entirely arise from the use of shared business and administrative services.

In the **US**, many states have developed **Shared Services Alliances** for Early Care and Education (ECE) in response to the dual pressures of constrained parent fees in the face of rising childcare costs and increasing demand for better quality from early childhood leaders. These alliances are a means to give services access to professional business support that functions at an efficient scale while allowing them to maintain their status as independent providers (ELCTA 2016). Most Shared Services Alliances are supported by a combination of members' management fees, philanthropy and government funds. It is assumed that programmes will offset the membership management fee by reducing business costs and increasing income as a result of improved quality. As members benefit from reduced purchasing and services costs, they are typically asked to re-invest those savings back into quality initiatives for their programme.

Shared Services Alliances can offer varied services and support to their members. Some approaches have been designed with a specific focus (such as professional development or nutrition) for a specific clientele (such as family childcare) or for specific goals (such as to support low-income families). Services generally have two purposes: reduction of costs and shared capacity. These approaches include cost-saving support (such as shared support or specialist staff, and organising bulk buying and joint purchasing); staff and human resources support (such as coordinating a substitute pool, assisting recruitment, centralised coaching, mentoring and professional development); and administrative support (including for enrolment, billing, payroll, and government regulation and funding).

Shared Services Alliances can operate at a national, state or local level:

- At the national level, services can include tools that offer research information and collaborative learning activities.

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<sup>9</sup> Figure on page 8 in Trinity Business School (2020).

- At the state level, the services can offer tools that align to the state’s data and fiscal reporting management systems with links to the state’s early learning standards, childcare licensing requirements or quality improvement rating programmes. As of April 2020, 30 states had web-based ECE Shared Resources sites.<sup>10</sup>
- At the local level, alliances can offer shared staffing support, substitute staffing pools, professional development events and local staff networking.

The Shared Services Alliances for ECE have been supported by federal grants. The Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) programme is a \$250 million competitive federal grant designed to improve states’ early childhood systems by building upon existing federal, state and local early care and learning investments.<sup>11</sup> PDG B-5 was established in 2015, and the first year of the PDG B-5 grants in December 2018 awarded 46 states one-year funds to conduct a state-level needs assessments and create a strategic plan that optimises existing ECE resources. Subsequent renewal funding has been given to 23 states, and six further states and territories have been awarded initial grants. The current funding level for financial year 2021 is \$275 million.

The benefits of Shared Services Alliances for ECE are widely cited across the US,<sup>12</sup> but robust evaluation of these benefits or estimates of their value are rare. For example, one source reports that the San Francisco Early Learning Alliance (founded in 2015) is already paying returns to the providers who joined it, including that the outsourcing function has enabled centres to diversify their revenue streams so that they can accept families of varying socioeconomic status. In addition, the savings that centres have made through the Alliance

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<sup>10</sup> See Opportunities Exchange at <https://opportunities-exchange.org/alliances-in-action/>

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/BT5%20PDG/BUILDPDGB-5BriefFINAL.pdf> and <https://www.ffyf.org/issues/pdg/>

<sup>12</sup> For example, see <https://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/programs/weessn/>, <https://www.tqee.org/newsroom/solutions-series-shared-services-networks/>, <http://opportunities-exchange.org/wp-content/uploads/SharedServicesBrief-BUILD.pdf>, <http://opportunities-exchange.org/wp-content/uploads/Shared-Services-Introduction-and-Examples-rev.pdf>, [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/shared\\_services\\_alliances\\_part\\_three\\_early\\_learning\\_ventures\\_alliances](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/shared_services_alliances_part_three_early_learning_ventures_alliances), <http://www.cafc.ca.gov/pdf/commission/meetings/handouts/Commission-Handouts-2020-08-19/Item-6-Shared-Services-Alliances-for-Small-Early-Learning-and-Care-Settings.pdf>, or <https://childrenatrisk.org/shared-services/>

have enabled it to move toward a membership model based on a sliding-scale fee for the service.<sup>13</sup> An earlier account (from 2015) reported that the New Hampshire Alliance had combined member savings of over \$100,000 annually, with \$5,200 annual savings on commercial insurance, 17-24 percent on food costs and 12 percent annual savings on trash removal, as well as significant administrator time savings, more robust professional development and stronger relationships with funders and the state.<sup>14</sup>

This lack of robust evidence may reflect the relatively recent development of Shared Service Alliances for ECE. The widespread support and rapid expansion in these alliances suggests that they are effective, but there is no assessment of the magnitude of the benefits, particularly in relation to total provider costs or in relation to the amounts of public funding being invested in the alliance supports. Indeed, it would be puzzling if the substantial public investment did not result in some types of savings for the providers themselves.

## **Discussion**

A major driver of the growth of Shared Service Alliances in the US is the large number of small independent providers. As stated by Easterling and Stoney:

*“One of the best things about child care programs in the U.S. is that most are small, independent entities with the ability to meet the unique needs of families in the communities they serve. One of the most challenging things about child care programs in the U.S. is that most are small, independent entities with limited capacity for operational efficiencies and coordination with multiple programs in a mixed delivery system.”<sup>15</sup>*

This context means that Shared Services Alliances are a good match to address the specific issues faced by providers in the US. In addition, the substantial amounts of government funding employed to help support their development has played an important role, both in

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<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/case-study-shared-services-alliances>

<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.earlychildhoodwebinars.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Slides-for-Shared-Services-2.11.15.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/BT5%20PDG/BUILDPDGB-5BriefFINAL.pdf>

the use of the funding itself and in highlighting the benefits of the use of shared services. The setting-up of such shared services may also be aided by the fact that they can be initiated with a relatively small number and that they are relatively less permanent and so can be “undone”.

It can be hypothesised that several inhibiting factors may have reduced the development of the same types of services elsewhere. First, use of these services would involve small-scale staff cuts which may be harder to undertake in contexts of less flexibility in employment laws. Second, maintained or school-based provision which is embedded in other organisations’ administrative processes would find it more challenging to integrate administrative processes. Third, generic financial services may provide a suitable alternative for reducing some of the costs of administration. Finally, understanding of the benefits of shared business and administrative services may not yet be well understood elsewhere.

### 3.2 Shared frontline inputs and staff training

Four examples of shared frontline inputs and staff training were identified in the evidence review.

In **England**, the Department for Education highlighted some case studies of **pooling of resources**, supported by the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA):<sup>16</sup>

- A setting in Lincolnshire is proactive in identifying training needs and regularly organises high quality training master classes for itself and other early years settings in the surrounding areas which would also like to access the training. This enables all the settings to have expert training that is affordable and manageable. The lead setting found that there was not much administration involved and that sharing the cost meant that their funding for training would go further. Opening the training to other providers has also increased the opportunities for networking within the community.

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<sup>16</sup> See examples of pooling resources at [https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/Need\\_to\\_know/DfE/Department\\_for\\_Education.aspx](https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/Need_to_know/DfE/Department_for_Education.aspx)



- The Kirklees network is open to all providers in the area and had 62 active members (in 2015). In order to make training more affordable, the network shares training events, jointly selecting the most relevant training to meet their collective needs and using providers, venues and timings for the training to ensure the maximum number of people can attend. Attendees at the training events are owners, managers and nursery staff, who then cascade the training to their teams. A small network subscription subsidises the training and other learning events and materials. Sharing the funding of training enables providers to access affordable CPD.
- The Early Years Foundations Stage Community Partnership group in York collaborates to secure training locally and more cost effectively. The settings pool the funding contributed to the network to purchase training and then agree how much each can afford to add if that funding does not cover the full costs. The flexibility of joint purchasing of training means that more people can attend; it is easier to access as the venue is within the community and everyone gets a say in the dates, times and topics. The partnership also started its own resource library. Working in partnership with the other settings also allows each to share their expertise, which the childminders and play groups find particularly helpful. The Community Partnership also facilitates the pooling of resources to purchase large or expensive items that are not used every day, such as seasonal items, those to support a child with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and soft play. In these cases, the partnership bought the item and shared it around the settings as needed using a booking system. As most of the network are independent nurseries and often struggle financially, being part of a large group helps to provide purchasing power for both training and larger items.

In **Scotland**, there are examples of **shared use of outdoor spaces** for ELC:

- Aberdeen City Council has developed a network of “Wee Green Spaces” to provide outdoor settings for ELC providers to use either alone or at the same time as neighbouring providers. This programme demonstrates how venues can be used collaboratively, facilitating the opportunity for pooling resources and allowing for site visits by more than one setting at a time. As well as the financial savings arising

from the pooled resources, this introduces children to larger groups and allows for practitioners to exchange ideas on service delivery (Harrison et al. 2020).

- The Castlemilk Jeely Piece Club in Glasgow is a community-based outdoor learning space which is being further developed in a collaborative model to be accessed by all local nurseries and the public, private and voluntary sectors.<sup>17</sup>

In **New Zealand**, *Kāhui Ako* (**Communities of Learning**) were introduced in 2018.<sup>18</sup> *Kāhui Ako* are clusters of schools, from early childhood through secondary schools, that collaborate, pool resources and share best practice, supported by government funding. Each *Kāhui Ako* has a salaried leader position and a separate expert partner to guide the administration of funds. In the first year of the programme, *Kāhui Ako* received substantial funding for CPD and this helped establish networks of practitioners who continued to co-ordinate on CPD after the funding was reduced. It is reported that a key advantage of the *Kāhui Ako* is in organising large-scale CPD days, which means that costs are reduced because CPD fees can be spread among many participants, every teacher can experience the material first hand and teachers can mix across schools for small group work.

The *Kāhui Ako* experience indicates some important lessons for collaboration related to the composition of the network:

- It can be challenging to co-ordinate the network if the *Kāhui Ako* includes many schools.
- *Kāhui Ako* can find it difficult to meet if they are based in rural areas or where schools are spaced far apart geographically.
- Schools that typically compete with one another can face barriers to collaboration.

Additionally, there is anecdotal evidence of challenges that are specific to early childhood settings:

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<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=36485&p=0>

<sup>18</sup> This paragraph draws on Ministry of Education (2018) and a key informant interview undertaken for Working Paper 7 in this series.

- Collaboration with schools can be challenging for early childhood settings that need different specialised resources from schools, for example, a different kind of CPD training.
- It can be difficult for early childhood settings to collaborate if they have different funding models (e.g. kindergartens versus education and care services).

In **England**, the **Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)** is a policy which can encourage settings to pool resources. The EYPP provides additional public funding of approximately £300 per year for each child who meets the eligibility requirements of taking up the free entitlement and their parents receiving certain benefits and earning less than £7,400 per year.<sup>19</sup> Because of the small amount of funding (especially for settings with small numbers of eligible children), providers are encouraged to pool the funding, for example, to jointly commission bespoke training to meet CPD needs or to purchase shared services such as those of an early years graduate or speech and language therapist.<sup>20</sup> A study by the Department for Education (Roberts et al. 2017) found that providers were able to pool EYPP funding across settings locally or within a group of managed nurseries to support more strategic expenditure, for example to fund a new staff post. Several providers reported pooling all of their funding to enable the money to be spent more efficiently, although there did not seem to be any particular differences in how these providers spent EYPP money in comparison to providers that did not pool funding. Others, who had not had experience of pooling, thought it could potentially enable them to do more with the money or access additional resources. There is no assessment of whether the pooling increased the effectiveness of the use of the funding.

## **Discussion**

Almost all of these examples focus on shared training or staff development and almost all are drawn from the UK. This may reflect substantial policy changes, including that

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<sup>19</sup> See Butt and Ratti (2020) for further information.

<sup>20</sup> For example, see the British Association for Early Childhood Education at <https://www.early-education.org.uk/working-partnership> or First4Adoption at <https://www.first4adoption.org.uk/adoption-support/education-support/early-years-pupil-premium-pre-school-support-funding/>

considerable focus on providing childcare for disadvantaged children and those with additional needs has increased the benefits from sharing training in this way. It may also reflect that training and staff development are better addressed by other means elsewhere, including by processes within maintained provision or publicly provided or funded training at the system level. It may also be the case that documentation and research on this collaboration has simply been greater in England than elsewhere.

The absence of the sharing of resources for frontline delivery (outside of the two small examples for outdoor spaces in Scotland) may reflect that organising resources within a single site is challenging in itself and that coordination across sites requires a degree of control and governance which can only be achieved within formal chains of shared governance. The need for agreement on purpose and how best to use limited resources may also inhibit the sharing of frontline resources, particularly where delivery choices involve trade-offs between achieving affordability and maximising quality.

### 3.3 Childminder agencies and centres

Three examples of shared frontline inputs and staff training for childminders were identified in the evidence review.

Introduced in **England** in 2014, **childminder agencies** are “one-stop-shop” organisations that register childminders and provide them with training, advice, administrative support and marketing to families. They are also intended to provide parents with matching services to help them find a childminder and access occasional cover, to raise the quality and professionalism of the childminding workforce, and to attract new childminders to the profession.<sup>21</sup> Agencies are self-funded and determine the services they provide and the associated charges to the childminder, parent, employer or others. Any organisation can apply to be registered by Ofsted as a childminder agency and, as a minimum, applicants are required to register childminders, undertake the necessary quality assurance visits and provide the prescribed number of CPD and support hours to their childminders. Childminder agencies are required by law to register with and be inspected by Ofsted. Inspectors visit a

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<sup>21</sup> See Foundation Years at <https://foundationyears.org.uk/2019/08/childminders/>

sample of childminders on the agency's books (normally 10%) to assess the effectiveness of the agency's arrangements for assuring the quality of its childminders and the accuracy of the agency's evaluation of quality. Following their inspection, childminder agencies will receive a grade of "effective" or "ineffective".<sup>22</sup>

Prior to implementation, there were concerns about the impact that joining an agency would have on the quality and safety of the childcare provided. Survey data suggested that parents would be less likely to use a childminder if they were regulated by an agency rather than directly by Ofsted. Childminders' concerns included that agencies would confuse parents and create a two-tiered system of childminding regulation; damage parental confidence in registered childminding; lower standards of care; create a potential conflict between an agency's drive to make profit (by retaining childminders on its register) and ensuring quality of care; and lead to greater costs for their business.<sup>23</sup>

Since their introduction, childminder agencies have commanded little interest. As of 1 September 2018, 11 childminder agencies were registered with Ofsted. Of these, seven had childminders on their roll and were therefore eligible for inspection. Four childminder agencies have been inspected to date and all have been judged "effective".<sup>24</sup> No further evidence on numbers or effectiveness was identified.

In the **Netherlands, childminder agencies** also act as a one-stop-shop for parents and childminders, but all childminders are required to be registered with an agency. The agencies act as a proxy for the regulator and operate either locally or nationally, competing with one another for business. All agencies must fulfil a wide range of registration requirements including registration of all childminders and everyone working or living in a location. Other requirements include having a pedagogical policy plan and regulations for a parents' committee. In addition, it is the responsibility of the agency to ensure that all

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<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/childminders/becoming-a-childminder/childminder-agencies/#whatis>

<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.pacey.org.uk/Pacey/media/Website-files/PACEY%20general/Childminder-agencies-Briefing-for-LAs.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> From <https://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/childminders/becoming-a-childminder/childminder-agencies/#whatis>

childminders and agency inspectors meet set qualification requirements.<sup>25</sup> Agencies are regulated by the local authority, which carries out annual, unannounced inspections of the agency and inspects childminders on a random basis (between 5 and 30 percent of the total annually) to verify that agencies are meeting the national standards. Agencies also help childminders with their business plans (as they tend to be self-employed) providing insurance and legal cover. Childminding agencies take a percentage of the childminder's fee (reported to be between 5 and 20 percent in 2012<sup>26</sup>) to cover the costs of training, inspection and administration. One study found that childminding in the Netherlands was highly rated by parents compared to other types of provision: childminders were rated higher than nurseries in every category including quality, affordability and flexibility. The system has also proved to be very transparent, with childminders registering their different qualifications on their website, thereby providing parents with greater information about prospective providers (Truss 2012). However, there is no evidence on whether the agencies have reduced costs or delivered other benefits for childminders.

In **France**, approved childminders have been able to come together and practise their profession away from their home in premises called "Houses of childminders" (***Maison d'assistantes maternelles*** or MAM) since 2010.<sup>27</sup> As a professional place, the MAM premises cannot be located at the home of one of the childminders. A maximum of four childminders can each accommodate a maximum of four children simultaneously (sixteen children in total). The childminders must hold the required qualifications and authorisation from the maternal and child protection services, while the premises must meet safety and health requirements. Parents are the direct employers of the childminders and the childminders have the same rights, advantages and obligations as those working in their own home.

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<sup>25</sup> See <https://business.gov.nl/starting-your-business/checklists-for-starting-a-business/checklist-for-starting-a-childminding-agency/>

<sup>26</sup> Also reported in <https://www.pacey.org.uk/Pacey/media/Website-files/PACEY%20general/Childminder-agencies-Briefing-for-LAs.pdf> as well as Truss (2012).

<sup>27</sup> The material on MAMs is drawn from <https://mon-enfant.fr/l-accueil-en-maison-d-assistantes-maternelles> and <https://www.devenir-assistante-maternelle.fr/mam-maison-assistante-maternelle.php>

Before a MAM can be opened, a needs study must be completed showing that the municipality is in need of additional childcare for children aged under five. Other administrative requirements include establishing a provisional budget to see if the project is reliable. However, financial support of a bonus of €300 per childminder and a loan of up to €10,000 to improve the premises is available from the Family Allowance Fund (CAF) to help set up a MAM.

MAMs are reported to be booming in France, partly due to a lack of reception places in the early childhood sector, but also because parents increasingly want more flexible care than that offered by a municipal crèche. For the childminders, a MAM provides collective support and less isolation than working alone at home and can increase business through referrals from other childminders who are unable to meet requests for places. However, there is no evidence on whether MAMs reduce the cost of care.

More broadly, it was previously reported that **groups of family day care providers** (childminders) have been organised into networks, supervised and supported by a local professional centre or specialised agency in **several countries** (including Denmark, France, Germany, etc.) (OECD 2006). A weekly or fortnightly session at the local pedagogical or childcare centre is reported to bring professional development to family day carers and reduce their isolation in the community. This is seen as an important achievement as so many family day carers withdraw from the occupation owing to lack of support and contact with other professionals (and also because of inadequate work conditions, remuneration and social protection). Linkages across services give family day carers the sense of belonging to a profession and help to provide service replacements whenever a family day carer is unwell or unavailable for some days.

## **Discussion**

The number of examples of collaboration on shared delivery between childminders is naturally limited by the fact that childminder provision is only a substantial proportion of ELC and SAC provision in a limited number of countries. However, it is interesting that shared delivery models for childminders have been relatively successful in the Netherlands and France but not in England. Aside from the fact that this collaboration is compulsory, the collaboration appears to have been successful in delivering good quality care in the

Netherlands, while the arrangements in France appear to have benefits for parents and childminders themselves. In contrast, childminder agencies have not flourished in England, possibly because the benefits do not outweigh the additional costs (possibly due to relatively simple administration for independent childminders or because of uncertain impacts on quality reputation) or because the childminding workforce in England values independence to a greater extent than elsewhere.

### 3.4 Shared learning

Shared learning as a form of settings' shared delivery across ELC and SAC services is more challenging to distinguish from approaches which facilitate learning across ELC and SAC professionals (without the specific involvement of settings).<sup>28</sup> Hence, the examples presented in this section focus on cases which clearly involve collaboration on learning at the setting level rather than purely the individual level.

One study from **England** found that informal **partnership working** across settings was seen as a valuable means for settings to share learning about curriculum planning; strategies and approaches for dealing with child-specific issues; use of resources; and good practice (Callanan et al. 2017). It was reported that partnership working was a quick and efficient way for settings to learn and develop professionally because it could simply involve an informal visit to another setting or a phone conversation following a networking event:

*“... sometimes visiting other practices is the best thing you can do ... if you're on a network meeting and someone's in a similar setting to you, and maybe has a solution to a problem you've got, you can share some good practice with them. The best thing*

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<sup>28</sup> Examples of support for shared learning across professionals includes the Early Years Leaders Programme in London, which is based on a coaching model and supports participants to lead high quality, successful early years provision with coaches recruited from organisations across the sector (Mayor of London 2018). Another example is the Early Years System Support in Waltham Forest (London) using funding allocated by the Schools Forum to facilitate system support to allow early years professionals to work with their peers to share knowledge and best practice, support each other and receive or deliver the advice and training required (<https://thehub-beta.walthamforest.gov.uk/earlyyears-systems-support>). In the US, Mowrey and King (2019) examined the patterns and characteristics of collaboration for public pre-school educators within and across sectors in a Midwestern state to understand the available collaborative networks of *educators* serving children in one community.



*to do is say, 'Come and see me. You know, I can show you this in ten minutes', rather than a two-hour training session picking out the bit that would help you."*

Managers, staff and local authority respondents felt that partnership working with other settings not only improved provision at individual settings but supported the sector more broadly by fostering continuity when children moved between settings

Another study in **England** highlighted how effective teamwork and strong **collaboration with other settings** and a range of early years professionals could result in high quality teaching and learning (Ofsted 2015). The beneficial ways in which leaders and staff work with other providers include:

- Sharing information and good practice which helps them be aware of the professional development opportunities available to them and keeps their professional knowledge current;
- Visiting other settings so they can see a range of different practice for themselves and considering whether their own current practice would benefit from change;
- Welcoming practitioners into their own setting to support fellow colleagues and receiving informal feedback on their own work from a fresh pair of eyes; and
- Working collaboratively with the outstanding on-site provider. Staff from both settings regularly come together to share good practice and access a greater range of training.

Also in **England**, shared learning in the form of **local nursery networks** has been supported by the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), as illustrated by the following examples:

- The Kirklees network is open to all providers in the area and had 62 active members (in 2015) with an “executive committee” of six members. It was established by the local authority in partnership with the NDNA to give early years managers and owners an opportunity to come together at regular intervals to discuss local and national early years topics. This gathering enables them to share best practice ideas, discuss issues and to tackle solutions together, with the participants cascading information back into their own settings to develop and support good practice. The

network members not only share their best practice knowledge but also learn about the business techniques of their peers.<sup>29</sup>

- The time-saving benefit from sharing information about local policy was highlighted in the example:

*“... you may find your workload actually reduces from being part of a network – for example, someone can read that 300-page document from the local authority and report back, and each member of the network agrees to go to a different event and share feedback.”<sup>30</sup>*

In **London**, the Mayor's three **Early Years Hubs**, launched in January 2018, aim to improve access to high quality early education for London's less-advantaged families in the boroughs of Barnet, Newham, Wandsworth and Merton.<sup>31</sup> The hubs provide an opportunity for schools, childminders, private, voluntary and independent nurseries and others to work together over a three-year period. All three hubs are committed to achieving the Healthy Early Years London award and are working to improve routes into careers in early education. In Newham, the hub is building on the work of the Learning Without Limits programme, which created seven “networks” to support collaborative quality improvement around nursery schools in the borough. The Wandle Early Years Hub works with early years providers and local families across both Wandsworth and Merton, with a particular focus on improving early intervention for children with SEND.

Finally, **Maintained Nursery Schools** (MNS) are expected to act as “system leaders” in **England** by supporting quality across early years provision. Indeed, local authorities are subject to statutory guidance which requires them to ensure that MNS fulfil this collaborative leadership role in sharing learning:

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<sup>29</sup> See examples on pooling resources at [https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/Need to know/DfE/Department for Education.aspx](https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/Need%20to%20know/DfE/Department%20for%20Education.aspx)

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/nursery-management/view/joining-a-nursery-network>

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/education-and-youth/support-families-and-early-years/early-years-and-childcare/early-years-hubs>

*“Local authorities should... ensure that the early years expertise and experience of their maintained nursery schools, if they have them, are used to benefit the whole local area. Maintained nursery schools (MNS) are almost exclusively good or outstanding, the majority are located in disadvantaged areas and local authorities should ensure that they have a role in the pedagogical leadership for the local early years system. What this means in practice will depend on local need, but it might include for example: commissioning nursery schools to develop and deliver a quality improvement strategy for the area; having nursery schools work with other providers to share their experience and expertise to raise the overall quality of provision across the area; helping nursery schools to work in partnership with other providers to offer parents who choose a MNS the 30 hours entitlement.”* (Department for Education 2018)

A survey of MNS across the UK in 2013 (Early Education 2014) highlighted the leading role they played in developing the early years workforce: 80% were involved in offering training and placements, and 20% were involved in system leadership activity with the National College for Teaching and Leadership in England. The survey also showed that MNS had responded enthusiastically to the drive for early years system leadership, building up broad and wide-reaching partnerships, including working with:

- Other nursery schools and children’s centres locally and nationally;
- Supporting staff in local private, voluntary and independent early years providers through local forums and cluster groups;
- Offering support and development opportunities for childminders; and
- Supporting visits from other settings.

A more recent report (Paull and Popov 2019) which undertook a wide-ranging review of the role of MNS reported that local authority staff often view MNS as centres of excellence and as catalysts for spreading best practice in different areas (such as how to make best use of outdoor resources or SEND support). On the other hand, some local authority staff expressed some scepticism as to whether MNS are really so different from other provider types.

## Discussion

These examples of shared learning are drawn exclusively from England, possibly for reasons similar to those for the pattern in shared delivery for training. Again, this could reflect a greater need for shared learning in the face of substantial policy developments and other delivery challenges, or the absence of the organisation of shared learning through public funding or support at the system level, or simply that documentation and research in this area are more prevalent in England. Government support for shared learning to be organised at the setting level (both in guidance on partnership working and through the formal role of MNS in some areas) and the work of the NDNA have also been specific facilitating factors.

### 3.5 Shared care

Two examples of when shared care arrangements were promoted by policy were identified in the evidence review.

In **Germany**, cooperation between **childminders and centre-based care** has been promoted since the Day Care Expansion Act (TAG) came into force in 2005:

*“Of particular importance is ... the cooperation between childminders and daycare facilities – here I would like to see greater cooperation so that both types of facility with their specific advantages can grow together into a real network from which children and families can benefit.”* (Federal Minister Renate Schmidt cited in Hahn 2005)

The aim of the Act was to address a need for a quantitative and qualitative expansion of childcare, but one which could offer compatibility with family and work and the qualitative assurance of the educational needs of children (and possibly also offer childminding as the cheapest option in the face of tight budgets). Hence, the Act emphatically called for the development of networks and cooperation between day care centres and childminders to meet these dual objectives (Hahn 2005). Subsequent projects have sought to enhance the networks between day care centres and childminders,<sup>32</sup> while the Federal Childcare

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<sup>32</sup> For example, the Networked Child Care project in Hamburg between 2009 and 2011 (see <https://www.kita-fuchs.de/ratgeber-paedagogik/beitrag/modellprojekt-kitas-und-kindertagespflegepersonen-ernetzen-sich/>) and the deepening cooperation between day care centres and childminders element in the federal programme

Handbook advocates striving for cooperation between day care facilities and childminders because it is profitable for everyone involved.<sup>33</sup> Among the benefits are that childminders can use the facilities and training of the day care centres, and day care centres can provide coverage for them during sickness or vacations; that childminders can provide care for very young children, children who are unwell or at atypical times; and that the package offers more reliable and flexible care for parents.

No evidence was identified on the extent to which the policy support for this use of shared care has increased its use in Germany.

In **England**, the national rollout of the 30 Hours Free Childcare in 2017 increased the free entitlement from 15 hours each week to 30 hours each week for children of working parents. Consequently, demand for childcare offering the higher number of hours suddenly increased. One solution to this new demand was for settings to create partnerships to support the use of a “**blended offer**” or “**shared care**”, whereby fewer hours with a school-based or voluntary provided can be topped up with additional hours with a childminder (or possibly private day care). Considerable guidance on successful approaches to blended offers followed the DfE's 30 Hours Mixed Model Partnership project.<sup>34</sup>

An evaluation of the national rollout of 30 Hours Free Childcare (Paull and La Valle 2018) found that the extended offer had resulted in more providers sharing funded hours, but this was primarily among parents who were already using or planned to use shared care: the extended hours had not resulted in a substantial increase in the use of multiple providers for the combination of funded and unfunded hours. Moreover, shared care arrangements remained largely parent led rather than being the result of providers offering the extended

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“Daycare: Because the little ones need close proximity” which ran from 2016 to 2018 (see <https://prokindertagespflege.fruehe-chancen.de/programm/rueckblick-bundesprogramm-kindertagespflege/>).

<sup>33</sup> See <https://www.handbuch-kindertagespflege.de/4-tipps/43-kooperationen-zwischen-kindertageseinrichtungen-und-kindertagespflege/>

<sup>34</sup> For example, guidance was provided by the Family and Childcare Trust ([https://www.egfl.org.uk/sites/default/files/Topics/Early\\_years/Family%20and%20childcare%20trust%20toolkit.pdf](https://www.egfl.org.uk/sites/default/files/Topics/Early_years/Family%20and%20childcare%20trust%20toolkit.pdf)), PACEY (<https://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/business-smart/partnership-working/>), Achieving for Children ([https://www.achievingforchildren.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Doc-EY\\_30hour-case\\_study-childminder.pdf](https://www.achievingforchildren.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Doc-EY_30hour-case_study-childminder.pdf)) and by local authorities such as Gateshead Council ([https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/10892/Transition-Booklet-Advice-for-Childcare-Providers/pdf/1896b-SS-Childcare Transition Booklet A4.pdf?m=636796221905370000](https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/10892/Transition-Booklet-Advice-for-Childcare-Providers/pdf/1896b-SS-Childcare%20Transition%20Booklet%20A4.pdf?m=636796221905370000)).

hours in partnership. Where shared care was common, it typically reflected the fact that parents could not get all the provision they needed in one place: the most prevalent reason given for using more than one formal provider was that the arrangements fitted with work needs (reported by 42 percent of those using multiple providers), while 30 percent reported the reason was that there was no single provider option that would give them the hours they needed. This suggests that the new policy did not lead to a substantial increase in shared care arrangements and highlighted that parents tend to prefer care for their child to be with a single setting.

## **Discussion**

These two examples of shared care were in response to specific policy initiatives, but they had contrasting approaches. While shared care in Germany has been advocated on the grounds of benefits for providers and parents (and appears to have been relatively successful in achieving complementary and somewhat equal care), shared care in England is still largely viewed as a necessary compromise when other options are not available. In the case of England, it should also be noted that the policy did not greatly increase the use of shared care, although the associated guidance may have improved the experience of shared care.

## 4. Conclusions

The examples of shared delivery models for ELC and SAC settings identified in this review can be broadly summarised as:

- Rapidly growing use of shared business and administrative services across the US in the context of a large number of small independent providers;
- Networks supporting shared resources for training in England and New Zealand and several mechanisms of shared learning in England;
- Shared delivery models for childminders in England, the Netherlands and France; and
- Two examples of shared care in Germany and England in response to specific policy needs.

This constitutes a very small number of examples, for which there may be different explanations:

- Shared delivery is a relatively rare occurrence because the overall benefits are small, particularly if any benefits are already captured in system-level organisation supported by public funding or are better captured through chains of settings with shared governance.
- The identified collaboration tends to be “low level” in that the shared activities do not have substantial impacts on frontline delivery. It is possible that the identified examples are actually quite widespread but are not considered to be of sufficient importance or interest to be reported.
- Evidence has been focused on countries or on recent specific developments where research in the area receives greater support and funding.<sup>35</sup>

Although the benefits of shared delivery models are widely listed, robust evidence on the effectiveness of the shared delivery approaches is absent. There are no assessments or

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<sup>35</sup> This is a plausible explanation for the large number of examples from England, although the support for research is driven in turn by policy developments or specific challenges in the sector.

measurements of reduced cost, enhanced scope of provision or quality improvements. Some of the benefits would be challenging to measure in a robust way, but the absence of monetary estimates for cost savings is most obviously lacking.

Overall, the evidence indicates that shared delivery is likely to be beneficial only for auxiliary supporting activities such as administration or training rather than the primary activity of day-to-day frontline care and education. This suggests that promoting this type of collaboration between settings may be able to achieve more for the quality of provision than for substantially reducing costs.



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