



Cowal

Argyll and Bute Council's Early Years team recently carried out a survey to seek views on the effectiveness of our provision and delivery of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in the Cowal area.

The survey was open to anyone with a requirement for ELC in the Cowal area, and was open for eight weeks, from 22 May – 17 July 2026.

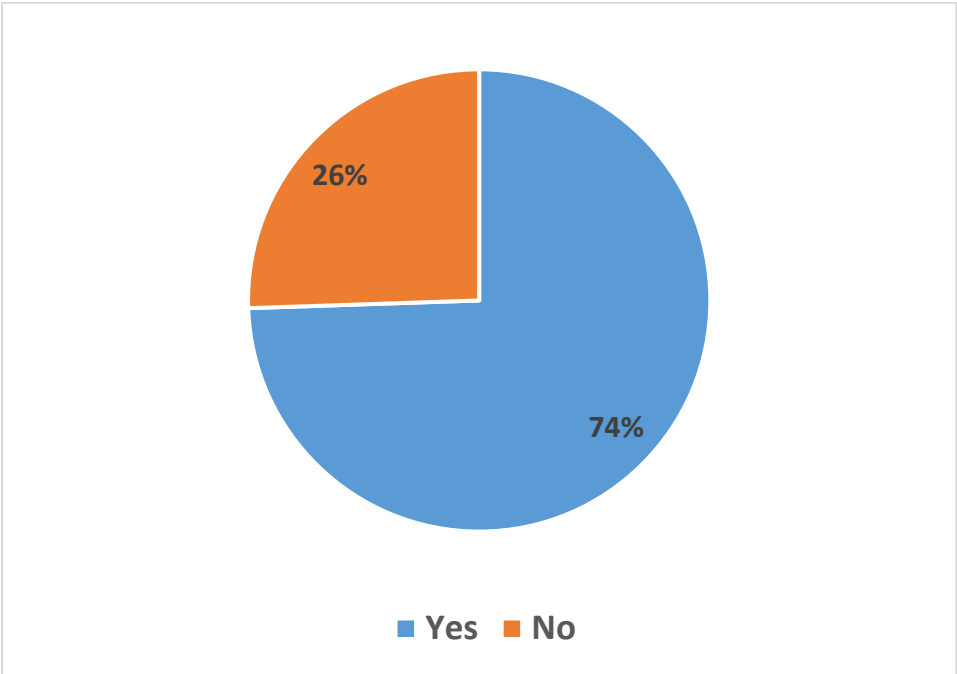
Cowal has 14 funded ELC Providers (10 local authority settings, 3 partner nursery settings and 1 partner childminder).

47 responses were received.

Thank you to everyone who took time to complete the survey and provide comments.

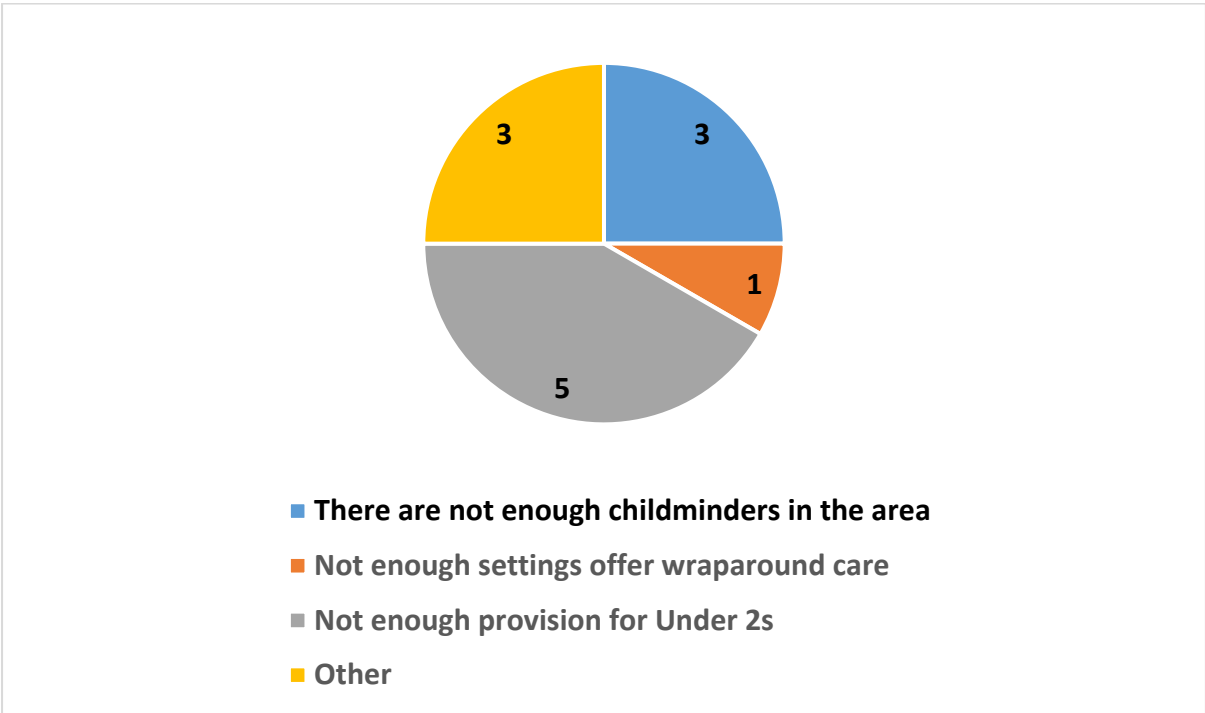
We asked: Are you happy with the choice of ELC settings available in the Cowal area? (ie Local Authority settings, Partner Nursery and Partner Childminder settings)

You said: 74% are happy with choice of ELC settings available.



Those (12 respondents) who expressed unhappiness were asked to say why:

Most (5 people) said there is not enough provision for Under 2s

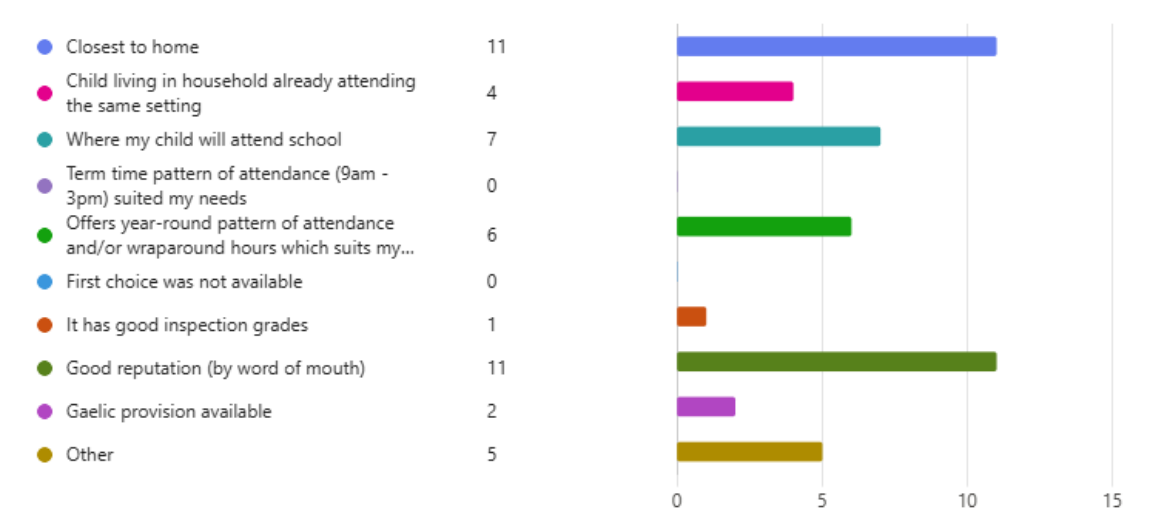


Those who selected “Other” (3 respondents):

Two stated “all of the above” and one stated “No provision for Under 3s in West Cowal”

We asked: Please advise the **main** reason you chose to register your child at your chosen ELC setting:

You said: The top reasons were “Closest to home” and “Good reputation (by word of mouth)”



The five who selected “Other” gave the following reasons:

“Outdoor Learning is the most beneficial for our child at your Nursery” *Silver Birch*

“We chose Clyde Cottage as we need the wraparound care and it has a good reputation. We chose Silver Birch as it is an outdoor setting and we want to encourage/foster a love of nature and being outdoors. It reflects our lifestyle as a family” *Clyde Cottage / Silver Birch*

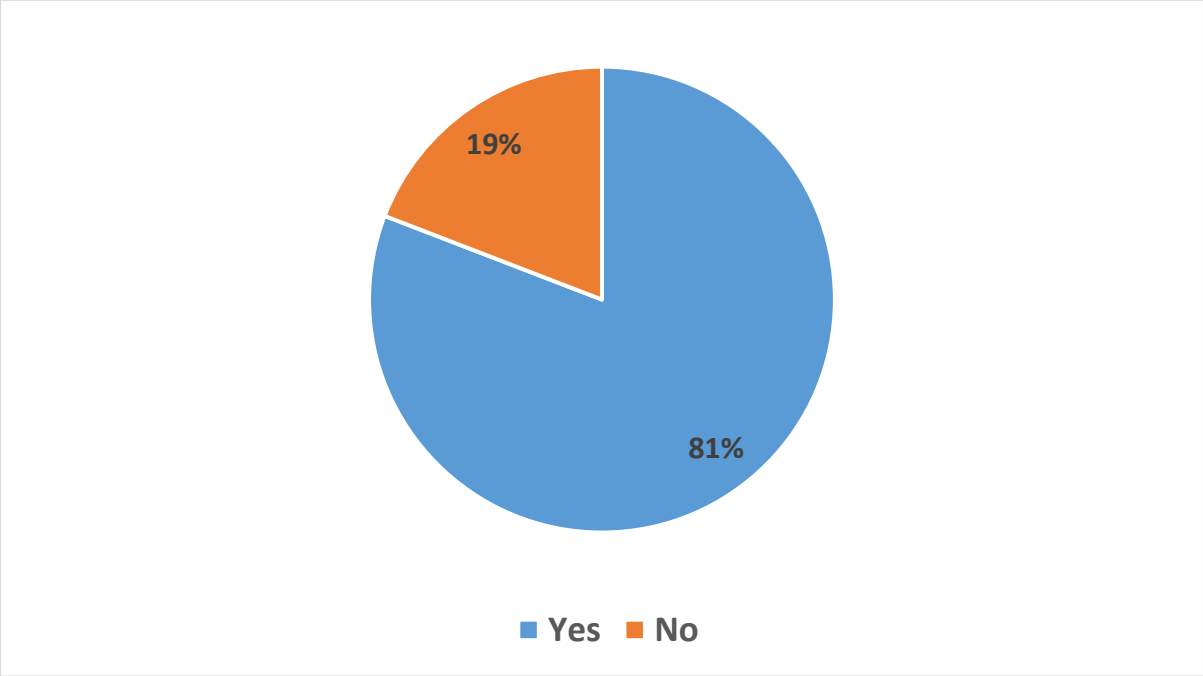
“The wonderful curriculum and play opportunities provided by staff in an outdoor setting in which children are encouraged to learn about and care for their environment, become curious, and take the lead on fun. It’s an opportunity that the other nurseries don’t match” *Silver Birch*

“It is the only option” *Tighnabruaich*

“Outdoor nursery with excellent enthusiastic teachers” *Silver Birch*

We asked: Does the pattern of attendance on offer meet your needs? Pattern of attendance is the number of weeks your child attends their ELC setting and the number of hours offered per day/week, e.g. 38 weeks, 6 hours per day.

You said: 81% of respondents said that the pattern of attendance on offer meets their needs.

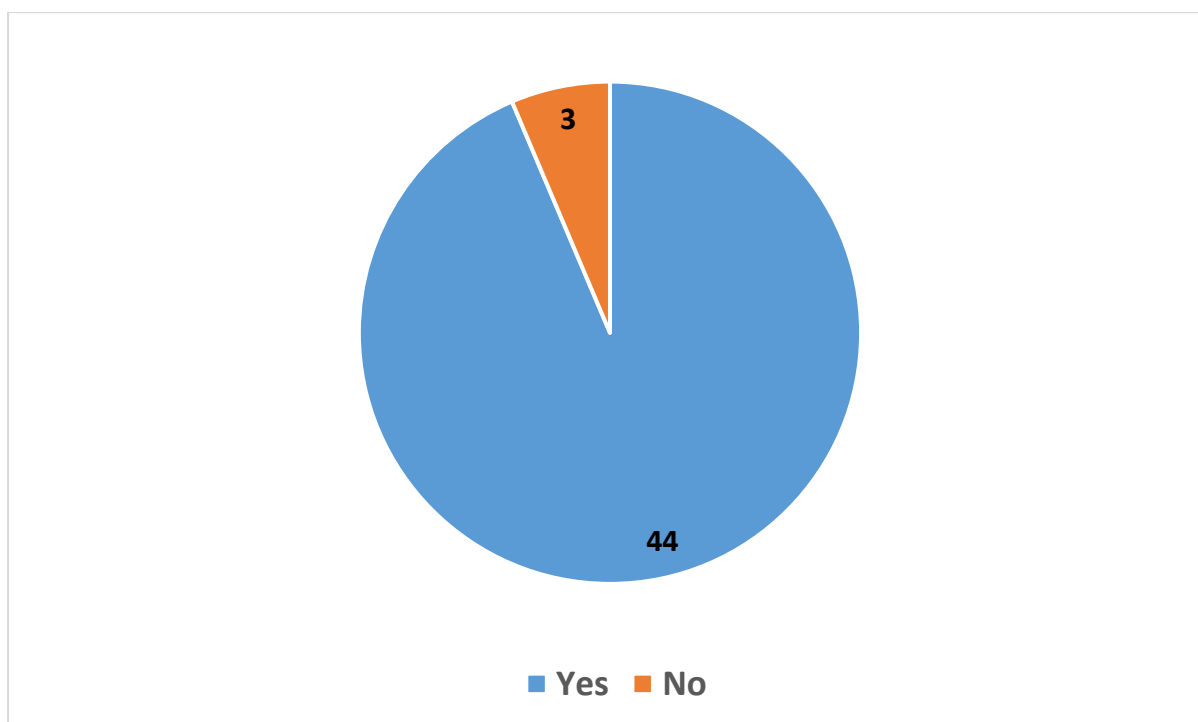


Those who expressed that the pattern of attendance did not meet their needs, were asked to comment further:



We asked: Do you believe you have been treated with equity and fairness in relation to the provision of ELC?

You said: 94% of respondents said that they have been treated with equity and fairness in relation to the provision of ELC.



We asked: Are there any comments you wish to add in relation to ELC in the Cowal area?

You said:

“Would be great if more ELCs were available through the summer holidays. Would like to see Gaelic being introduced into all local ELCs” (*Silver Birch*)

“Silver Birch Nursery is an excellent addition to the ELC that’s available here. The staff are fully committed to the nursery and the children. It is amazing” (*Silver Birch*)

“We only have one option in our area and it is for 3-5 year olds unless you qualify for eligible 2. The Nursery currently has 4 spaces for 2 year olds and I know parents would love the opportunity to access this with no other childcare available. There will be 2 primary school teachers soon that would be able to access this if it was an option and go back to full-time work but they are unable to as there is nothing available to them until their child is 3. (*Tighnabruaich*)

“The barrier to entry for childminders to become partner providers is a real problem, and in fairness not entirely A&B's fault. The care inspectorate haven't visited childminders in the Dunoon area since 2018, so regardless the amount of prospective childminders who are supported to start their businesses locally, they cannot become partner providers. So realistically they can only offer care to under 3s, after which the vast majority of parents are effectively forced to move to the local authority setting to access funded ELC. And with the expansion of younger age provision locally, even

that stream is being cut off to them, which is a great pity to the diversity of the ELC ecosystem” *(Sandbank)*

“The pre school provision is good. We and our child love Silver Birch and Clyde Cottage and they attend Clyde Cottage as it provides wraparound hours so we can both work two days. But my child starts school in August and I simply can’t believe the absolute lack of ANY childcare options once they hit school age. How does anybody work even part time??” *(Clyde Cottage Nursery)*

“Patchwork Nursery is absolutely fantastic ” *(Patchwork 2-5 Nursery)*

“I am a teacher so I cannot pick my children up at 2.45 and neither can their other parent. This limited our choice of placement as we required wraparound care which is not available at many centres.” *(Clyde Cottage Nursery)*

“We require more hours for ELC provision than the standard 9-3 hour so Cairndow provides us with that.

There is also an added bonus of having a ‘family feel’ at the nursery which I didn’t feel we had when my eldest child attend a school nursery which felt more like primary school and didn’t feel warm and nurturing like I wanted my toddler to have.

There isn’t enough wrap around care in the Cowal area for ELC. We have to travel to Cairndow (which is well worth it!) but we would have no other options ” *(Cairndow Community Childcare)*

“I chose Patchwork as it is a standalone building away from a school which I believe is much more nurturing. The whole staff team are absolutely fantastic. They have made me and my partner feel so welcome and included. They are all so down to earth and approachable but you can tell how skilled and professional they are. My child absolutely loves attending and we have seen such growth in him and his learning since he started. ” *(Patchwork 2-5 Nursery)*

“My 2 year old suffers from no available childcare locally”

“It’s good to have ELC in the area. My daughter has been full time since joining Sandbank ELC she’s a very bright girl and she’s learning. She says she can’t wait to start p1 as she wants to learn now. She said “I’ve had enough of playing and learning in ELC but ready for school” *(Sandbank Pre Five)*

“Silver Birch provision is excellent, but hours are quite limiting for parents who work” *(Clyde Cottage Nursery)*

“There is very little option for under 2s, very few childminders and so little ELC places that offer wraparound. It’s really difficult for families with no relatives nearby. And on top of this there’s no breakfast club and after school club once my child will start primary school it’s really difficult for parents that both work. Silver Birch provision is excellent, but hours are quite limiting for parents who work” *(Clyde Cottage / Silver Birch)*

“Patchwork is a fantastic nursery. They had a great recent inspection and my child loves attending. The staff are kind, caring and nurturing” *(Patchwork 2-5 Nursery)*

More spaces for under 2s at an affordable price working to pay for your child's placement does not make sense there has to be a solution to this." (Kirn)

"An outdoor nursery would be beneficial in the Tighnabruaich area" (Tighnabruaich)

"Rural areas are discriminated against by the Early Years Team. This is having a very negative effect on the youngest people in our community and certainly not providing the best start to life" (Tighnabruaich)

"I'm a working mum. My child attends Kirn it suits me because I drop off a child at the primary school. My child also attends Clyde Cottage who do offer a model that runs all year but it still doesn't suit my working week therefore I opted for the 38 week model. I wish there was more flexibility so I could have nursery/childcare all year round" (Kirn / Clyde Cottage)

"Fantastic ELC. Hours non-negotiable, however meets our needs, because we worked around available provision as opposed to the other way around" (Dunoon)

Here is a summary of the key things you said and we will endeavour to do:

You said: You value the quality of our ELC settings

Many respondents praised the nurturing environments, dedicated staff and high-quality experiences provided by local settings, particularly Clyde Cottage, Silver Birch, Patchwork and Cairndow.

We did:

We have shared this positive feedback with providers and will continue to support high-quality learning and childcare opportunities across Cowal.

You said: More wraparound care, flexibility and year-round childcare is needed

Parents told us that a lack of wraparound care and year-round provision can make it difficult to balance work and family commitments.

We did:

We continue to work with our funded providers to explore opportunities for flexible delivery models where these are sustainable and meet local demand. While we always aim to support working families, local authorities are funded by the Scottish Government to deliver funded ELC entitlement only. Provision for non-eligible two-year-olds and younger children is not currently a statutory requirement and does not receive Scottish Government funding.

You said: There are limited childcare options for younger children and in some rural areas

Feedback highlighted a lack of provision for children under three, particularly in rural communities such as Tighnabruaich.

We did:

We have incorporated this feedback into our ongoing childcare sufficiency and service planning. We also continue to work closely with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) to encourage and support more childminders to enter the sector. We believe childminding offers an important and flexible solution for rural communities and can help meet the needs of working parents where larger-scale provision may not be viable.

You said: More choice would be welcome in some communities

Some parents, particularly in Tighnabruaich, would like to see additional local options.

We did:

We will continue to review local demand and capacity across all communities and consider opportunities for future service developments when they arise.

You said: You would like Gaelic opportunities to be considered

Some respondents expressed an interest in Gaelic Medium Early Learning and Childcare.

We did:

Gaelic Medium ELC provision is already available at Sandbank Gaelic Pre-Five Unit, and we will continue to monitor demand for Gaelic Medium Education and Early Learning and Childcare across Cowal.

Thank you

We are grateful to everyone who shared their views. Your feedback will continue to inform how we work with providers and partners to deliver high-quality, accessible and sustainable ELC services for children and families across Cowal.