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Affordability

'... research suggests that the high costs of holiday childcare prevent some parents from re-entering the labour market. Others who do manage to return to work are forced to give up their jobs during the holidays because of a lack of childcare. ... [they] may also leave their children unsupervised and therefore at greater risk of getting into trouble or suffering an accident.' (*Holiday Childcare Costs Survey 2013*, Family and Childcare Trust)

With childcare costs rising, less financial childcare support for older children available, and wages stagnating, how can providers offer families childcare they can afford?

This section outlines practical approaches schools can take to offer childcare provision on their site that parents consider to be affordable. Examples from across England are provided to exemplify practice in different settings.



Find out what parents can pay

When planning your childcare provision, ensure you carry out detailed consultations with parents/carers. The Learning Exchange has guidance to help you with this: www.learning-exchange.org.uk The information you gain will help you to decide:

- how many parents at your school or in your community need childcare
- when the childcare is needed
- what type of childcare is needed
- what parents are willing to pay.

This information will give you an indication of the service parents require and what they can, and will, pay.

Map other local provision

To ensure your charges are competitive and affordable for parents, find out what other local childcare providers charge. Knowing what is offered in your area may also help you design provision that offers something unique.

As well as asking people in your area, you can contact your local Family Information Service (FIS) for information about providers: <http://bit.ly/1bHT6TJ>. The fact that a provider is registered with an FIS does not mean that the FIS endorses it, or that the provision is of a high quality. It is important to contact providers yourself for up-to-date information.

Use the information you gain to help you:

- identify possible local childcare partners
- establish average local costs and see how other providers charge (eg per hour, per session)
- decide on a competitive, and affordable, charging policy.

Offer different deals

In all your marketing literature (online and printed) highlight ways in which you are offering families an affordable service.

Sibling discounts

Flag up any sibling discount offers, such as:

- pay for two children and get a third place for free or half price
- receive a 12% discount for a second child, 15% for a third, and 20% for four or more.

Loyalty cards

Using loyalty cards can save families money, while keeping them coming back, for instance:

- when a child attends a breakfast or after-school session they get a stamp; after nine stamps they receive a free session
- each full day a child attends a holiday camp they receive a stamp; after ten stamps they receive a voucher for £15 off the next course they book.

Multiple sessions

Encourage parents to book multiple sessions in advance, for instance:

- buy four full-day holiday sessions and get a fifth free
- pay for a week's holiday course and receive 20% off the following week's fee
- book 20 days' holiday provision in a year and receive a 20% discount.

'Bring a friend' deal

Publicise any 'bring a friend' deals (eg if parents introduce a new family to a course, they receive £20 off a future programme).

Early bookings

You could offer 'early-bird' discounts, such as:

- 5–10% off a holiday programme if parents book in advance by a certain date
- a discount of 10–15% for the first 25 parents to book their child a place on a holiday course.

Long-term discounts

Offer longer-term discounts (eg lower prices if children attend more than two weeks of a summer programme).

Also give 'rewards' to your regular families, such as:

- a T-shirt with the club's logo when a child attends a certain number of sessions
- a free session for 100% attendance during a term.

Online booking

Encourage families to book online, for example, by offering a 10% 'online discount'.

As well as saving them money, this approach will save your organisation time and money (in terms of staffing, administration etc).

To make fees more affordable for parents, Fit For Sport offers many of the above discounts to schools where it runs the childcare provision, such as discounts for siblings and online bookings (*photo below*).



Keep your overheads down

If you keep your overheads down, you will be able to pass on any savings to your customers (ie by making your charges more affordable). School-based childcare providers have done this in different ways.

Negotiating the rent or agreeing longer-term utility costs

A primary school in Warwickshire does not charge its external provider any rent. This helps the small club to remain viable.

Applying for funding

This can help to cover some of your costs, for example, for breakfast clubs. Also approach local companies to see if they will provide in-kind support, such as volunteers or resources.

Magic Breakfast, which currently funds the breakfast club at Rye Oak Primary School in London, agreed to help cover the school's breakfast and refreshments during the Easter 2014 holiday programme.

Reviewing staffing costs

Ensure you review your staffing costs. Staff will be your biggest expense.

While you obviously want to offer a high-quality service, and use highly-trained and motivated staff, ask yourself:

- How many staff do you legally need in terms of children-staff ratios?
- What qualifications do they need and what are the going rates for staff of this calibre?
- Can you use volunteers/apprentices?

Offer a wide range of options

Offer different ways for parents to book and pay for sessions, to suit their preferences (eg phone, online). Also offer a range of different sessions to suit families' different financial situations. For instance, during the holidays you could offer:

- half-day sessions (mornings or afternoons)
- core day sessions (eg 9am to 4pm)
- extended day sessions (eg 7.30am to 9am and 4pm to 6.30pm).

To make your provision more affordable, consider charging lower rates if children bring their own snacks and packed lunch.



Kingswood Primary School, London

During the first holiday programme at Kingswood Primary School in London, Fit For Sport offered two options: 8am to 6pm; and 9am to 5pm. As well as offering parents flexibility, this approach allowed the school to see which option suited its parents best.

Negotiate with external providers

Anthony King, Project Leader at Family Action, said:

'It's important for schools to negotiate realistic costs when appointing an external provider. Parents at Redriff Primary School in London continued to negotiate with its chosen provider to ensure that parents could afford the childcare fees – which they initially felt were too high.'

Further information

- Family Action was funded 2013-15 by the Department for Education (DfE) to support schools to develop wraparound and childcare provision. Find out more about the project, and download a wide range of free resources from: www.learning-exchange.org.uk
- Our Learning Exchange Facebook page gives links to events, suppliers, equipment, training and venues that might be of interest to school-based childcare providers: www.facebook.com/pages/Learning-Exchange/904749822892733?sk=timeline

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