

Flying Start- The Tendering Process. Where are we now?

The expansion of Flying Start to cover all two year olds in Wales is entering the final phase with all Local Authorities developing plans to provide sufficient places for 2 year olds in their area. At the start of the expansion the owner of Osbourne Lodge Nursery, Nikola Masters attended a fact finding meeting held by Torfaen County Borough Council. She had already successfully tendered to provide Early Education and wanted to find out more about Torfaen's plans for expanding Flying Start in line with the Welsh Governments plans.

After Nikola attended the information evening and discussed the expansion with their childcare team, she realised she was already meeting many of the requirements of Flying Start. Although the nursery was required to carry out a quality assessment to ensure the high quality and skilled workforce required by the Flying Start Programme. Nikola found this useful to highlight areas of improvement as well as reinforcing the good practice that already existed in her setting. Once she had decided to tender Nikola found the process relatively straightforward but admitted it was time consuming. After registering with Sell2Wales she was able to create a Proactis account and go through the tender stage by stage. She answered a series of questions and needed to upload the setting's policy documents, accounts and supporting evidence to the site. The whole process was completed online, and a certain amount of computer literacy was required. However, Business Wales and all the umbrella organisations offer a lot of support in this respect. Once submitted her tender was sent to the Local Authority for approval, she was then added to the list of providers offering Flying Start that parents can choose from.

At the start of the process Nikola had been a little sceptical, afraid that offering Flying Start places would involve considerably more paperwork for very low funding rates and increased stress for herself and her staff. However, it was the needs of parents and families in her community that finally persuaded her to take part. Eligible parents would be able to access up to 12.5 hours of free high-quality childcare a week, making childcare a little more affordable for parents. There was also a concern that the settings business model only offers 5- or 10-hour sessions so families would have to fund the other 2.5hours. Nikola said "I see it as future proofing. We have a lot of 2 year olds at the moment but we don't know what might happen in two years and the flying start sessions may support sustainability."

Two years on from initially providing Flying Start places Nikola has reviewed the impact it has had on her setting and on her business. There have been clear benefits for her business, the families that attend Osbourne Lodge consist of many working parents who find the funded places financially supportive and this has led to them taking up more fee paying hours alongside the Flying Start funded places. However the restrictive 2.5 hours a day model does not work for many families who have to fit them in around their working days. Welsh Government guidance states *"However, the Flying Start setting has some flexibility in how the 5 sessions are split across the week, where a parent/carer requests a different arrangement,*

such as when they attend a training course or go to work. Both the Flying Start setting and the family must agree on this arrangement.” This has led to some Local Authorities allow settings to condense two sessions into one day.

As part of the drive for exceptional quality in Flying Start providers, free training is provided to Flying start staff to support their Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Although this is provided by the Local Authority it can be difficult to arrange cover for staff to attend and private providers, who need to open for non-funded children, are at a disadvantage as they cannot close their settings for training. Nikola is also concerned that the training does not always reflect the Welsh Government initiatives like ECPLC or the Curriculum for Wales and it can sometimes feel that there is a disconnect between the work of the Flying Start Local Authority advisors and the care the nursery provides under the framework of the National Minimum Standards (NMS).

There has been very positive benefits for the two year olds attending Osbourne Lodge. Providing funded places through Flying Start and Nursery Education in private day nurseries mean that children have fewer transitions and the secure, caring environment with familiar staff leads to growth and development. They form friendships with their peers that develop strongly within the Flying Start period.

Nikola recognised that while providing Flying Start would place additional burdens on her and her staff especially regarding paperwork and submitting registers, there would be advantages. She has worked closely with Torfaen to address difficulties, in particular around the sessional nature of the Flying Start programme. As a result of this partnership working the delivery of Flying Start has become much easier and she recognises that it has had a positive effect on the local community.

However, low funding rates that do not meet the costs of the provision, difficulties around condensing hours and how the programme will operate across Local Authority borders are all concerns that will need to be addressed if the programme is to be successfully rolled out to all two year olds in Wales.

Case study: Flying Start-The Tendering Process. Where are we now? January 2026.

Further support

- <https://ndna.org.uk/childcare-and-early-years-policy/welsh-government-support-and-information/>
- <https://www.gov.wales/flying-start-programme>