

Early Years Provision

Survey Results

June 2018



Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Councils have a wide range of duties around childcare and early education. The Local Government Association (LGA) was keen to understand how, if at all, recent changes by central government to both funding and policy in the early years sector have affected councils and children. To develop its work in this area – and help improve provision and outcomes for all children in their earliest years – the LGA invited all Heads of Early Years (or equivalent) to take part in a survey focusing on the five issues outlined below. A total of 88 out of 152 councils responded (58 per cent response rate).

The five issues included in the survey were:

- **The cap on central spend:** Government has implemented a limit on the funding that councils can retain for central costs. This means centrally retained funding must be less than 7 per cent of the Early Years' Block in 2017/18 and 5 per cent from 2018/19 onwards. Councils can request to disapply the high pass-through rate in specific, exceptional circumstances until 2019/20. Our survey looked at how this measure has impacted on councils' abilities to support early years providers.
- **Maintained nursery schools:** Following a consultation on the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF), the government committed to providing extra funding to local authorities for maintained nursery schools, to keep their funding stable during the EYNFF implementation process. Our survey looked at the likely impacts on maintained nursery schools (MNSs) if funding is not protected after 2019/20.
- **Early years entitlements:** The Government provides 15 hours free childcare for all 3 and 4-year-olds and disadvantaged 2-year-olds (usually for 38 weeks of the year). Our survey looked at the likely impacts of the new 30 hours free policy, which doubles the universal offer for 3 and 4-year-olds whose parent/parents meet a specific earnings criteria.
- **Provision for disadvantaged children:** The '2-year-old offer' provides free early education to 2-year-olds whose parents receive certain benefits, those with special educational needs and those in local authority care. Our survey explored the possibility of a reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds in the past year. The survey also considered additional hours provided by councils to disadvantaged 3 to 4-year-olds above the universal 15 free hours, while also looking at the impact of recent policy changes on social mobility.
- **Quality of provision:** The LGA is aware of concerns within the sector around the quality of the early years' workforce, in particular in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff with higher qualifications. Our survey sought to identify whether or not this was a universal concern, as well as exploring potential solutions.

Key messages

The cap on central spend

- Almost half of the 86 responding councils (48 per cent) said the cap on retained spending had led, or would lead, to reductions in support for providers.
- The key impacts of the cap have been, or were anticipated to be, an increase in charging for early years services, a reduction in local authority staff numbers, reduced training and support for providers and less outreach work to encourage take up of childcare. At least a third of councils had already put at least one of these measures in place, or expected to in 2019/20.

Maintained nursery schools

- Sixty three per cent of the 56 councils with MNSs that responded supported the protection of funding for MNSs at either the current level or a higher level than for other settings, with the most cited reasons for this being because they provided more places for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged 2-year-olds.
- Sixty one per cent of responding councils with MNSs felt that it was 'very likely' (33 per cent) or 'fairly likely' (28 per cent) that these would close without protected funding.

Early years entitlements

- Thirteen of the 19 councils that had previously offered additional hours to the most disadvantaged 3 and 4-year-olds, on top of the universal entitlement, were no longer able to do so as a result of the new funding formula and/or the 30 hours offer.
- All 88 councils had experienced an increase in enquiries and/or administration as a result of the 30 hours policy, and several commented on the difficulties that this was causing with no additional resource to deal with the increase.
- A sizeable proportion of councils raised a shortage of funding in their additional comments, with most highlighting concerns around insufficient funding having an impact on the quality and sustainability of provision.

Provision for disadvantaged children and SEND

- Of the 56 councils with MNSs that responded, more than half (29 in total) said there would be a reduction in support for disadvantaged children and those with SEND, if funding for MNS was not protected after 2019/20, and 21 councils said nurseries would reduce their participation in the 2-year-old offer.
- Several councils highlighted issues with both the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Inclusion Fund and funding rates more generally in their additional comments, with concerns that the increasing demand for SEND support could not be adequately met within available funding.

Quality of provision

- Over three quarters of the 86 responding councils (76 per cent) were 'very concerned' or 'fairly concerned' about the quality of Level 3 practitioners working in early years settings, with higher wages and improved professional development suggested as the best ways to improve this.
- Half of the 85 responding councils (51 per cent) were concerned that the new EYNFF would result in a decrease in the quality of early years practitioners in their authority area.

Methodology

An online survey was sent to all councils with responsibilities for early years support and services (in total, 152 local authorities in England). It was in the field between 15 June and 31 July 2018. A total of 88 councils responded (58 per cent response rate).

The survey was based on a set of questions originally designed by London Councils, a cross-party organisation working on behalf of London's borough councils and the City of London. A full list of the survey questions is provided in Annex A. The following items were included:

- the cap on central spend
- maintained nursery schools (MNSs)
- early years entitlements
- provision for disadvantaged children
- early years practitioners.

As shown in Table 1, between 44 per cent and 64 per cent of authority types responded to the survey (metropolitan districts represented the lowest proportion of responses, and English unitary authorities the highest). Responses by region are given in Table 2, showing response rates of between 43 per cent (North West) and 74 per cent (South East).

The information collected has been aggregated, and no authorities are identified in this report. Due to the size of the response, the results should be taken as a snapshot of the views of all local authorities in England, rather than as representative picture overall.

Sample size figures are shown in tables to allow readers to see the basis on which the figures have been calculated. Where sample sizes total less than 50, only absolute numbers are reported rather than percentage values.

	Number of responding councils	Total number of councils	Response rate %
Shire County	17	27	63
English Unitary	36	56	64
Metropolitan District	16	36	44
London Borough	19	33	58
Total	88	152	58

Table 2: Response rate by region

	Number of responding councils	Total number of councils	Response rate %
East Midlands	6	9	67
East of England	5	11	45
London	19	33	58
North East	7	12	58
North West	10	23	43
South East	14	19	74
South West	9	16	56
West Midlands	8	14	57
Yorkshire and Humber	10	15	67
Total	88	152	58

Full Survey Results

This section outlines the full set of results for the survey.

Cap on Central Spend

The survey asked about the 5 per cent cap on ‘centrally-retained’ spending and its impact on councils’ abilities to support early years providers. Forty eight per cent of the 86 responding councils said the 5 per cent cap introduced from 2018/19 had resulted in ‘an actual reduction’ in support for providers – or was likely to have this impact. Fifty two per cent of responding councils reported ‘no change’ in support (see Table 3).

Table 3: Thinking about the new requirements on how local authorities allocate funding to early years providers, what has been the impact of the 5 per cent cap on ‘centrally-retained’ spending in your authority?

	Number	Per cent
An actual reduction in support for providers	29	34
A predicted reduction in support for providers	12	14
No change	45	52
Don’t know	0	0

Base (all councils): 86

Councils indicating an actual or a predicted reduction in support for providers as a result of the impact of the 5 per cent cap were asked to indicate the extent to which the cap had already, or would, impact on their authority’s ability to support early years providers. As shown in Table 4, 37 of the 41 councils said it would impact on their ability to support providers ‘to a great extent’ (17 councils) or ‘to a moderate extent’ (20 councils).

Table 4: Please indicate the extent to which the 5 per cent cap has, or will, impact on your authority’s ability to support early years providers:

	Number
To a great extent	17
To a moderate extent	20
To a small extent	3
Not at all	1
Don’t know	0

Base (all councils indicating that the 5 per cent cap had resulted, or was predicted to result in, a reduction in support for providers): 41

Councils were asked if they had offset all, or part, of the reduction in permitted spend through disapplication and/or use of alternative funding sources.¹ Most of the 85 responding councils (67 per cent) had not offset the reduction in permitted spend,

¹ Councils can request to disapply the high pass-through rate in specific, exceptional circumstances until 2019/20.

whereas 22 per cent had done so by either disapplication, alternative funding sources or both of these methods (see Table 5).

Table 5: Thinking about the 5 per cent cap, has your authority offset all, or part, of the reduction in permitted spend through disapplication and/or use of alternative funding sources?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, through disapplication	2	2
Yes, through alternative funding sources	15	18
Yes, through both methods	2	2
No	57	67
Don't know	9	11

Base (all councils): 85

Councils using alternative funding sources and/or disapplication were asked to provide further details. They included (either separately or in combination):

- Buy-back.
- Dedicated Schools Grant.
- Disapplication to offer full-time places to 3 and 4-year-olds with severe and complex social and emotional needs and switch of funding source for services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) in early years.
- High Needs Block.
- Income generated through sold service to continue providing some support.
- Local authority central/general fund (e.g. for financial and IT support).
- Revenue Support Grant.
- Short-term measures (e.g. previous underspends/reserves).
- 3 per cent cap (rather than 5 per cent).

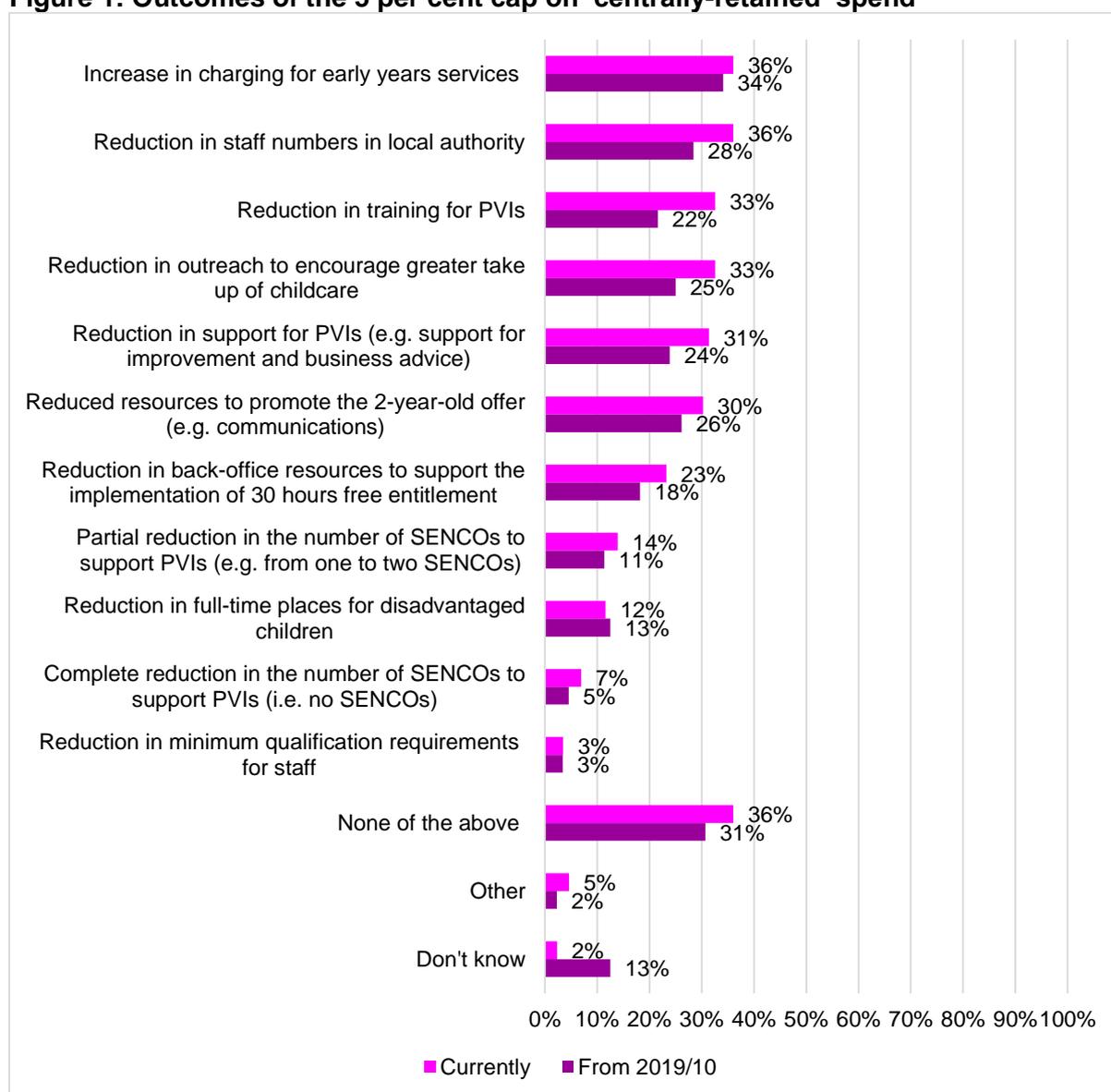
A further council gave this account about offsetting the reduction in permitted spend by using alternative funding sources:

The 2017/18 7 per cent cap presented only modest issues which were resolved by the actions in question 2 [i.e. an actual reduction in support for providers] and also by charging some of the early years costs to the High Needs Block in recognition of their work supporting pupils with high needs. The 5 per cent cap presented a greater challenge and the authority supported £0.491m of spend, over and above the level of the grant, by using DSG [Dedicated Schools Grant] reserves. Forum supported the resultant level of central spend. This reliance on cash will be removed in 2019/20 by making nursery schools pay for more services...and by a planned reduction in the nursery unit funding rate to bring it in line with PVI [private voluntary and independent] providers. – County, East Midlands

Due to the 5 per cent cap on ‘centrally-retained’ spend, at least a third of responding councils had seen a ‘reduction in staff numbers’ (36 per cent) and an ‘increase in charging for early years services’ (36 per cent) – see Figure 1. A third had seen a ‘reduction in training for PVI’s’ and a ‘reduction in outreach to encourage greater take up of childcare’ (33 per cent, respectively). Thirty six per cent had not observed any of the specified impacts.

Asked for predictions from 2019/20, 34 per cent of responding councils anticipated an ‘increase in charging for early years services’, and 28 per cent expected a ‘reduction in staff numbers’. Thirty one per cent did not anticipate any of the specified impacts.

Figure 1: Outcomes of the 5 per cent cap on ‘centrally-retained’ spend



Base (all councils) 86 ‘currently’; 88 ‘from 2019/20’. Councils could select more than one reply for each time period.

Other outcomes of the 5 per cent cap on ‘centrally-retained’ spend were reported to be:

- Currently: “Increase in back-office resources to support the implementation of 30 hours free entitlement.”
- Currently: “Increase in charges for some training.”
- Currently: “We are currently in the latter stages of a cross-Children and Young People’s Service early years review and all staffing changes are to be implemented in January 2019. This is part of our reduction to 5 per cent of centrally-retained spend of Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant.”
- Currently and from 2019/20: Cuts have occurred but not as a result of the 5 per cent cap.”
- From 2019/20: “Nothing currently but all could be applicable from 2019/20 as firm measures to address the pressures have yet to be brought forward.”
- Unspecified: “[Name of authority] has had to re-organise its support for SEND children in the Early Years.”

Maintained Nursery Schools

The survey asked about funding for maintained nursery schools (MNSs). The government committed itself to providing extra funding to local authorities for MNSs, to keep their funding stable during the EYNFF implementation process. Our survey looked at the likely impacts on MNSs if funding is not protected after 2019/20.

Of the 88 responding councils, 57 provided nursery education through maintained nurseries (65 per cent) and 31 did not (35 per cent). The number of MNSs in a given authority ranged from one to 14.

The 57 councils that provided nursery education through MNSs were asked to think about funding for standalone MNSs (i.e. nurseries not integrated with any other services). As shown in Table 6, 63 per cent of the 56 responding councils said ‘funding should be protected at a higher level than other settings’ (39 per cent) or ‘funding should be protected at the current level’ (23 per cent). A further 25 per cent said ‘funding should be in line with other settings’ and 13 percent were unsure.

Table 6: Thinking about funding for standalone maintained nursery schools after 2019/20, which of the following positions is taken by your authority?

	Number	Per cent
Funding should be protected at the current level	13	23
Funding should be protected at a higher level than other settings	22	39
Funding should be in line with other settings	14	25
Don’t know	7	13

Base (all councils with maintained nursery schools): 56

The 22 councils that supported protecting funding for standalone MNSs at a ‘higher level than other settings’ after 2019/20 were asked give a reason for their reply.

Fifteen of the 20 responding councils said such settings offered ‘more places for pupils with SEND’ and 14 said such settings ‘provide a significant number of places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds’ (see Table 7).

Table 7: Please specify the reasons why funding for standalone maintained nursery schools should be set at a higher rate than other settings from 2019/20:

	Number
They provide a higher quality early education than other settings	11
They provide essential capacity to ensure local authorities are meeting their sufficiency duty	11
They are located in disadvantaged areas where other settings may not be financially viable	10
They provide systems leadership and support other settings	11
They offer more places for pupils with SEND	15
They provide a significant number of places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds	14
Other (see below)	7

Base (all councils MNSs replying ‘funding should be protected at a higher level than other settings’ after 2019/20 for standalone MNSs’): 20. Councils could give more than one reply.

Other reasons why funding for standalone MSNs should be set at a higher rate were reported to be:

- “Additional burden of statutory costs.”
- “By their very nature and all staff are qualified so they are more expensive to run.”
- “Staffing qualifications and requirements for children's centre and other early years maintained nurseries are the same as for nursery schools and provide a similar standard of service, particularly to disadvantaged children and therefore need similar levels of funding.”
- “Due to the unique governance arrangements/ staff requirements and LGPS pay scales they are more costly to operate.”
- “They provide high quality provision for vulnerable children and those with SEND. They also support others through outreach where commissioned to do so.”
- “They employ a Headteacher.”
- “The costs of the infrastructure/governance are higher than other provision.”

All 57 councils that provided nursery education through MNSs were asked to predict the likely impact on such schools if funding was not protected after 2019/20. As shown in Table 8, the most commonly selected impacts were: ‘reduced staff numbers’ (35 councils, 63 per cent), ‘reduced support for children with SEND’ (29 councils, 52 per cent) and ‘reduced support for disadvantaged children’ (29 councils, 52 per cent).

Table 8: What would be the likely impact on maintained nursery schools if funding was not protected after 2019/20?

	Number	Per cent
Reduced staff numbers	35	63
Reduced number of places	27	48
Reduced support for children with SEND	29	52
Reduced support for disadvantaged children	29	52
These nurseries would reduce their participation in the 2-year-old offer	21	38
These nurseries would federate with each other or primary schools	26	46
Other (see below)	13	23
No impact	0	0
Don't know	2	4

Base (all councils with MNSs): 56. Councils could give more than one reply.

Further impacts on MNSs if funding was not protected after 2019/20 were reported to be:

- “They may be outsourced as standalone nurseries.”
- “They are both specialist nurseries attracting premium funding.”
- “Probably a combination of all of the above. Nursery schools’ budgets are supported by a £1.178m Maintained Nursery Schools grant from the DfE [Department for Education]. If this grant were to be withdrawn it would represent a cut of around 36% in their current funding. Unless significant replacement funding was identified and taken from elsewhere e.g. a cut in the universal rate or a transfer from the Schools Block, such a loss would jeopardise the viability of some of our nursery schools. The reduced level of EY funding would have to be focussed on a smaller number of LA maintained schools.”
- “Not sustainable with reduced funding so likely to consider transfer to a private entity.”
- “There is a possibility of federation and we would encourage a change to allow nursery schools to work with academies.”
- “Ratification of leadership.”
- “This is a question for the nursery school to answer.”
- “Possible closures.”
- “The nursery school would close”
- “[MNSs] will close.”
- “Closure.”
- “Closure.”
- “Closure from September 2018”

The 57 councils with MNSs were asked about the likelihood of these nurseries closing, if funding was not protected. As shown in Table 9, 61 per cent of councils with MNSs said closure was ‘very likely’ (33 per cent) or ‘fairly likely’ (28 per cent).

Sixteen councils (28 per cent) were unsure if their MNSs would close if funding was not protected.

Table 9: What is the likelihood of maintained nursery schools closing in your authority, if funding for such nurseries is not protected?

	Number	Per cent
Very likely	19	33
Fairly likely	16	28
Not very likely	4	7
Not at all likely	2	4
Don't know	16	28

Base (all councils with MNSs): 57

Provision for Disadvantaged Children

The survey looked at provision for disadvantaged children, those aged 2-years-old and those aged 3 to 4-years. Councils were asked about any reductions in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds in the past year, and any additional support provided to disadvantaged 3 and 4-year-olds above the universal 15 free hours, while also looking at the impact of the 30 hours policy on school-readiness.

Disadvantaged 2-year-olds

Our survey aimed to determine if councils had seen a recent reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds, and the reasons behind this, where it had occurred. Eighty six per cent of councils said their authority had not seen a reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds in the past year, while 11 per cent (10 councils in total) said this was the case (see Table 10).

Table 10: In the past year, has your authority seen a reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	10	11
No	76	86
Don't know	2	2

Base (all councils): 88

The 10 councils that had seen a reduction in places for 2-year-olds in the last year were asked to approximate how many such places were no longer available. Results are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Approximately, how many places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds are no longer available?

	Number
Between 1 and 50 places	3
Between 51 and 100 places	1
Between 101 and 150 places	1
Between 151 and 200 places	1
More than 200 places	1
Don't know	3

Base (all councils that had seen a reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds in the past year): 10 councils

Those councils that had seen a reduction in places for 2-year-olds in the last year were asked to give their opinion as to why such a reduction in places had taken place. See Table 12.

Table 12: In your opinion, what explains the reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds?

	Number
The new EYNFF for 3 and 4-year-olds	5
The new 30 hours free entitlement for 3 and 4-year-olds	8
Other (see below)	5
Don't know	0

Base (all councils that had seen a reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds in the past year): 10. Councils could give more than one reply.

'Other' reasons for the reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds included:

- "Closures of businesses due to increased business rates, increase in staff costs etc."
- "Accumulation of reasons: reduction in 2-year-old rate with EYNFF preventing LA from cross-subsidising 2-year-old rate from 3 and 4-year-old rate and over supply of 3 and 4-year-old places in the borough, following introduction of 30 hours and reduction in full-time places for other children meaning margins are tighter."
- "Nursery Education Funding rates, staffing shortages."
- "Decrease in DWP [Department for Work and Pensions] list and ability to target eligible families due to Universal Credit."
- "2-year-old rate is lower than the universal funding for a 3 and 4-year-olds."

Councils were asked if they were currently offering additional financial incentives to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds. Most councils (89 per cent) were not offering such incentives, while 11 per cent were (10 councils). See Table 13.

Table 13: Is your authority currently offering additional financial incentives to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	10	11
No, but under consideration	0	0
No	78	89
Don't know	0	0

Base (all councils): 88

The 10 councils offering additional financial incentives to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds were asked to describe these. Their replies are shown in Table 14.

Table 14: What financial incentives are being used to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds?

"Top up to £6.00 per hour."
"The rate paid is being supplemented through disapplication."
"An extra £0.80p per hour for eligible 2-year-olds on a Child Protection Plan."
"Top up."
"There are no financial incentives other than a higher hourly rate for 2-year-olds but providers have access to bespoke business support."
"Enhanced hourly rate over and above the national rate we receive. Although it has decreased from the original rate we offered in 2014, we are now protecting at the 2016/17 rate through disapplication. We also offer a quality supplement for providers with graduates leading 2-year-old provision; extensive support with capital, resourcing and quality for providers wishing to take on funded 2-year-olds."
"Higher funding rate provided than that received from the DfE."
"The hourly rate is higher – £5.04."
"10p per hour increase."
"Full rate passed to providers; capital funding available for place creation."

Base (all councils offering financial incentives to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds): 10. An open-ended question.

The 10 councils offering additional financial incentives to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds were asked how these financial incentives were being funded. Responses are shown in Table 15.

Table 15: How are these financial incentives being funded?

	Number
Retained funding from the EYNFF	4
Savings generated through reductions in other early years support	3
Investment by the local authority	4
Other*	1
Don't know	0

Base (all councils offering financial incentives to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds): 10. Councils could give more than one reply.

Through disapplication.

The 10 councils offering additional financial incentives to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds were asked if they expected to be in a

position to offer such financial incentives from 2019/20 onwards. As shown in Table 16, six were unsure of their position, two expected to be a position for a limited time period, one expected to be a position without a fixed time period, while another said its offer was not sustainable post-2019/20.

Table 16: Does your authority expect to be in a position to offer such financial incentives from 2019/20 onwards?

	Number
Yes	1
Yes, but for a limited time period	2
No	1
Don't know	6

Base (all councils offering financial incentives to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds): 10

Disadvantaged 3 and 4-year-olds

All councils were asked if they had ever offered free hours to the most disadvantaged 3 and 4-year-olds in any of their maintained settings, in addition to the hours offered through the universal entitlement. Sixty five of the 88 councils (74 per cent) had not offered free hours to this particular cohort, while 19 councils (22 per cent) said free hours had been offered. See Table 17.

Table 17: Has your authority ever offered free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds in any of its maintained settings, in addition to the hours offered through the universal entitlement?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	19	22
No	65	74
Don't know	4	5

Base (all councils): 88

The 19 councils that had offered free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds were asked to specify how many free hours were offered on top of the universal entitlement per child. Fifteen of the 19 councils had offered between 11 and 15 free hours on top of the universal entitlement, two councils had offered between one and five free hours per child, one had offered between six and 10 free hours and a further council was unsure (see Table 18).

Table 18: How many free hours were offered on top of the 15 hours universal entitlement per child?

	Number
1-5 hours	2
6-10 hours	1
11-15 hours	15
More than 15 hours	0
Don't know	1

Base (all councils that had offered free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 and 4-year-olds): 19

Thirteen of the 19 councils that had offered free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds said these 'additional free hours are no longer offered' due to EYNFF and/or the new 30 hours entitlement. Two other councils said 'additional free hours will not be offered in the future', while three said there had been 'no change' in their provision and a further council was unsure (see Table 19).

Table 19: What has been the impact of the Early Years National Funding Formula and/or the 30 hours entitlement on the provision of additional free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds in your authority?

	Number
Additional free hours are no longer offered	13
Additional free hours will not be offered in the future	2
No change	3
Don't know	1

Base (all councils that had offered free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds): 19

The 15 councils that had offered additional free hours to the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds but said these were 'no longer offered' or 'will not be offered in the future' as a result of the EYNFF and/or the new 30 hours entitlement were asked to indicate the first financial year in which their authority was/will be unable to offer this support. Responses are given in Table 20.

Table 20: Please indicate the first financial year in which your authority was/will be unable to offer additional free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds:

	Number
2012/13	1
2014/15	0
2015/16	3
2016/17	2
2017/18	2
2018/19	5
2019/20	1
2020/21	0
Other*	1
Don't know	0

Base (all councils that had offered additional free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds but either no longer offer these or will not offer these in the future due to the EYNFF and/or 30 hours policy): 15

*"We manage to offer extended hours for disadvantaged children with severe and complex social, emotional or educational need but it is a hugely reduced offer (around 200 places per year) as opposed to over 1000 places per year previously many of whom were Free School Meals."

The 19 councils that had offered free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds were asked to approximate how many of these children would qualify for the 30 hours free entitlement in their authority. Responses are shown in Table 21.

Table 21: Approximately, what proportion of 3 and 4-year-olds previously receiving free hours on top of the universal entitlement qualify for the 30 hours free entitlement in your authority?

	Number
None	2
Less than 25%	5
Between 25% and 50%	3
Between 51% and 75%	1
More than 75%	0
Don't know	8

Base (all councils that had offered free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds): 19

All disadvantaged children

All 88 councils were asked to comment on the impact of the 30 hours policy on the school-readiness gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in their authority. Most councils (66 in total, 75 per cent) were unable to provide details at this point in time, 10 councils (11 per cent) had observed 'no impact' of the policy, eight councils (nine per cent) said it had 'increased the gap' and four councils (five per cent) said it had 'reduced the gap' (see Table 22).

Table 22: What has been the impact of the 30 hours policy on the school-readiness gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in your authority?

	Number	Per cent
Reduced the gap	4	5
Increased the gap	8	9
No impact	10	11
Don't know	66	75

Base (all councils): 88

Early Years Entitlements

The survey looked at the likely impacts of the new 30 hours policy, which doubles the universal offer for 3 and 4-year-olds whose parent/parents meet a specific earnings criteria. As shown in Table 23, all 88 responding councils said they had experienced an increase in enquiries and/or administration due to the introduction of the 30 hours policy.

Table 23: Has your authority experienced an increase in enquiries and/or administration due to the introduction of the 30 hours policy?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	88	100
No	0	0
Don't know	0	0

Base (all councils): 88

Councils that had experienced an increase in enquiries and/or administration due to the introduction of the 30 hours policy were asked to indicate the scale of this increase. The largest proportion of councils (37 in total, 43 per cent) said the increase had been between 25 and 50 per cent (see Table 24).

Table 24: Please indicate the level of increase in enquiries and/or administration due to the introduction of the 30 hours policy:

	Number	Per cent
No increase	0	0
Less than 25%	13	15
Between 25% and 50%	37	43
Between 51% and 75%	26	30
More than 75%	7	8
Don't know	4	5

Base (all councils experiencing an increase in enquiries and/or administration due to the introduction of the 30 hours policy): 87

All councils were asked to specify the main reasons for children not accessing their early years entitlement, in their authority. As shown in Table 25, the main reasons were 'use of informal childcare' (60 per cent) and 'cultural reasons' (51 per cent).

Table 25: What are the main reasons for children NOT accessing their early years entitlement, in your authority?

	Number	Per cent
Lack of places	6	7
Lack of flexibility	17	20
Lack of suitable provision at times required	16	19
Lack of close to home provision	7	8
Lack of quality	0	0
Term-time provision only	10	12
Use of informal childcare	51	60
Cultural reasons	43	51
Other (see below)	34	40
Don't know	6	7

Base (all councils): 85

Thirty four councils gave 'other' reasons for children not accessing the early years entitlement – including:

- **Parental choice:** the view that being 2-years-old is “too young” for formal childcare and a desire to “look after [one’s] own children” (14 councils).
- **Benefit eligibility:** a lack of knowledge or understanding of the 30 hours policy, a “complicated” HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) process with “patchy” service, parents accessing alternative childcare funding, parent(s) not working or earning too much, parental choice to pay directly and not via HMRC, workplace training not accessible until child is school age (7 councils).
- **Setting preferences:** no places available at parents’ preferred setting and a preference for a maintained setting (4 councils).
- **Special needs:** no inclusive settings or a lack of confidence in providers to meet a child’s needs (3 councils).
- **Unmet hours:** places not completely funded or the full 30 hours not being available due to pressure on settings (2 councils).

- **Location:** a preference for childcare to be close to work or siblings' school (1 council).
- **Population mobility:** insecurity of tenure resulting from benefit changes and a cap in the local housing allowance (1 council).
- **No overnight care** (1 council).
- **Limited demand** (1 council).
- **No take-up issues:** no unmet demand reported/high take-up (4 councils).

Quality of Provision

The survey explored issues related to the quality of the early years' workforce, in particular in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff with higher qualifications. A total of 76 per cent of responding councils said they were 'very concerned' (23 per cent) or 'fairly concerned' (52 per cent) about the quality of Level 3 practitioners working in early years settings (see Table 26).

Table 26: To what extent is your authority concerned about the quality of Level 3 practitioners working in early years settings?

	Number	Per cent
Very concerned	20	23
Fairly concerned	45	52
Not very concerned	15	17
Not at all concerned	4	5
Don't know	2	2

Base (all councils): 86 councils

Councils were asked to specify ways to increase the quality of early years practitioners, with three options being suggested. All three suggestions – 'higher wages' (82 per cent), 'improved professional development' (79 per cent) and 'better career progression' (71 per cent) – were viewed positively by most of the 85 responding councils.

Table 27: In your view, what would increase the quality of early years practitioners?

	Number	Per cent
Higher wages	70	82
Improved professional development	67	79
Better career progression	60	71
Other (see below)	24	28
Don't know	1	1

Base (all councils): 85. Councils could give more than one reply.

Twenty four councils suggested other ways of increasing the quality of early years practitioners:

- **Better initial training and/or qualification** to cover the full remit of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and child development (6 councils).

- **Better training:** more in-depth knowledge of child development within the Level 3 qualification, better delivery of training, better awareness of statutory requirements for the EYFS, greater knowledge of assessing children's progress (5 councils).
- **Raise the status of early years work** to attract higher calibre candidates, to move from 'second earner' standing, to move from 'easy option' status and to increase professional recognition (5 councils).
- **Better qualifications:** including improved teaching and learning requirements (2 councils).
- **Apprentice levy:** funding to support the apprentice levy for childminders (1 council).
- **Bursaries** (1 council).
- **Dependents' support** to support early years students with the cost of their own childcare (1 council).
- **Promotion:** a national campaign aimed at both males and females (1 council).

Asked if the 30 hours policy and also the EYNFF would result in a decrease in the quality of early years practitioners in their respective authorities, the largest proportion of councils (34 in total, 40 per cent) said the 30 hours policy would not result in such a decrease, whereas most councils (43 in total, 51 per cent) anticipated this would be the case due to the EYNFF (see Table 28). A sizeable number of councils were unsure about any possible decrease, at this point.

Table 28: In your view, will the 30 hours policy result in a decrease in the quality of early years practitioners in your authority? In your view, will the Early Years Funding Formula result in a decrease in the quality of early years practitioners in your authority?

	30 hours policy		EYNFF	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Yes	21	25	43	51
No	34	40	23	27
Don't know	29	35	19	22

Base (all councils): 84 '30 hours policy' and 85 'EYNFF'

Additional Comments

All councils taking part in the survey were invited to provide further information about the provision of early years services that the LGA might find helpful. Fifty seven of the 88 councils provided feedback. The main themes and issues for the LGA to consider – arising from councils' comments – are summarised below.

Increased financial constraints

The impacts of increased financial constraints on early years provision were described by several councils. One council reported switching from using non-DSG

allocations to fund most of its early years services to now only its DSG allocation in order to guarantee a source of income, but said this was “nowhere near” the grant funding allocated a decade ago.

Increased financial constraints meant councils were less able to:

- Provide high quality care and learning in early years settings.
- Offer support to early years settings (except those judged inadequate or requiring improvement).
- Narrow the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children.
- Work with families within home learning environments.
- Plan for the future.

Issues for the LGA to consider:

- Look at ways to secure an increase in early years funding to ensure provision remains financially viable – particularly increasing 2-year-old funding in line with the 3 and 4-year olds.
- Encourage central government to review early years funding year-on-year.
- Raise with the issue of termly pupil adjustments following the January school census with central government.
- Explore the introduction of an IT support package to help with the administration of 2-year-old places and 30 hours eligibility.

Early Years National Funding Formula

Both positive and negative impacts of the EYNFF were raised. One council, for example, said the timing of the EYNFF had provided an opportunity to re-evaluate and focus its services and it had now closed gaps within its service delivery. However, the council said it had experienced a drop in its Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) for the first time, speculating this was due to prior under-resourcing or a reduction in funding experienced by its nursery classes. A second council said it had benefited from the EYNFF as it protected a number of early years posts previously funded by the council (making them at risk of cuts), however, the hourly rate had been reduced to create the new Inclusion Fund.

For other councils, the EYNFF was described as worsening the effects of underfunding. One council, for example, said the new formula had reduced its base rate enough to result in the closure of two providers. Another said local funding rates for 3 and 4-year-olds were significantly higher than new national rates, including its base rate and also the proportion of funding allocated to disadvantaged children which was now capped at 10 per cent.

A key criticism was a lack of funding to meet staffing costs – providers’ main expenditure – especially given increased business rates, pension contributions and national wage policy. One council said the EYNFF was “insufficient for the

operational costs of the early years free entitlement” and it was seeing negative impacts in the sector as a result. Another council, while unconcerned about a funding formula per se, said the hourly rate needed to increase so providers could meet the challenge of inflationary and pension pressures.

Issues for the LGA to consider:

- Encourage central government to review the EYNFF to assess fitness-for-purpose and to address any unintended consequences.
- Urge central government to introduce funding rates to reflect those required by providers to run their businesses effectively and, as a result, increase the number of funded places they feel able to offer.

Cap on central spend

Both positive and negative impacts of the 5 per cent cap on central spend were reported. The cap was more than one council previously retained and was helping to sustain a small but workable team. Another council said it had retained 2 per cent for central costs for many years, and was using its DSG on early years posts rather than other school spend.

Yet, for other councils, the cap had resulted in a reduction in local authority staff and/or capacity, such as within early years advisory teams, limiting outreach work and support for providers. One council said the 5 per cent cap, overlapping with the duty to increase places and introduce 30 hours, had resulted in a significant increase in the demands with much reduced resources available.

Other council-specific impacts included:

- A reduction in essential services such as CAMHS and SALT.
- New chargeable services for nurseries (previously free) such as insurance, special staff costs, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and school improvement (increasing to include capital maintenance, broadband and catering costs next year).
- Less flexibility within the early years sector and reduced long-term sustainability.
- Difficulties maintaining 2-year-old places, as a higher funding rate for 3 and 4-year-olds is received than for 2-year-olds.

Issues for the LGA to consider:

- Explore the introduction of a grant to support councils in providing direct support to providers.
- Encourage central government to re-consider ending the disapplication process, in order to maintain 2-year-old-places.

Maintained nursery schools

A lack of certainty about maintained nursery schools was reported by some councils, with no information about funding beyond 2019/20 from the DfE. A further complaint made by one council was that MNSs get much higher funding rates despite only offering places to a small proportion of all children.

Issues for the LGA to consider:

- Encourage central government to provide early information on any planned changes to the policy and regulation framework – and also early clarity on plans for future funding of MNSs.
- Urge central government to consider funding levels for all types of provision in the context of outcomes for children to ensure all children have access to high quality provision that meets their needs.

Early years entitlements

Regarding the introduction of 30 hours free childcare, on the positive side, one council reported that the policy and the EYNFF had “brought more money into early years” in its authority, but it still remained at the national minimum for all rates. Other less positive accounts were given:

- Negative impact on budgets because there was less opportunity for providers to charge for additional hours, especially those with opening hours similar to a school day – and because funding passed on from a council was significantly less than a provider would charge a fee-paying parent per hour.
- Additional burdens on members of staff processing the 30 hours entitlement, and additional burdens on providers.
- Providers prioritising 3 and 4-year-olds (lower overheads) over 2-year-olds to recoup losses from 30 hours introduction.
- Revised children’s centre offer leading to fewer universal services (leading to fewer opportunities to promote the 2-year-old offer and less support for parents in accessing the offer).
- A fall in 2-year-old take-up in summer term, which may have arisen because the 30 hours entitlement has resulted in fewer places.

Issues for the LGA to consider:

- Ask central government to increase funding to ensure financial viability for providers.
- Urge central government to simplify the claim process for providers, local authorities and families by removing the need for continual checks and re-confirmation of eligibility codes.
- Recommend that HMRC publishes deadlines for applications on its website to provide clarity (thus limiting enquiries from parents to councils).

- Encourage central government to re-promote the entitlement nationally to support work being carried out locally.
- Continue monitoring the impact of the 30 hours policy, including capacity to deliver the 2-year-old entitlement.

Provision for SEND

Some councils gave specific details about increased pressures for SEND services in the early years, including those accessing the 30 hours entitlement. Funding to support SEND in the early years was reported to be much lower than for older children with the same needs attending school provision. One council reported SEND numbers had increased “substantially” in 2017/18 year without any additional funding. The council added:

“Despite trying to be smarter in how and what we fund, we are predicting that children will either not be able to access places, or that their experiences will be compromised as a result.” – London Borough

Issues for the LGA to consider:

- Ask central government to extend the Inclusion Fund, Early Years Pupil Premium and Disability Access Fund to include 2-year-olds – and increase funding for SEND to match the increase in the hours for those children who are entitled.
- Continue monitoring the impact of the 30 hours entitlement on the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children – using a clear measure of ‘disadvantage’ to allow for meaningful comparisons.

Quality of provision

The issue of quality was raised in relation to providers’ inability to recruit and retain highly-skilled practitioners, fundamentally because they were unable to offer higher wages. This problem was said to be exacerbated by additional budget pressures such as national wage policy and rises in pension contributions. There would be an additional impact on MNSs (if not protected) with the introduction of the universal base rate in 2020/21.

Tight budgets meant providers were unable to pay higher qualified staff appropriately. One council said it was facing “a severe shortage of high quality practitioners”, and others referred to an increase in providers taking on staff with lower qualifications and/or an increased use of apprentices across the sector. To help improve quality, one council described its use of a “quality supplement” as an incentive for settings to employ well-qualified staff. However, under the new funding arrangements, the council had reduced the pool of settings that can access this supplement, leaving only those with the highest qualifications eligible.

Ofsted's monitoring of early years settings on a four year cycle was also said to have implications on the quality of the provision. One council said:

“The quality of the provision may decline, however, local authorities are obliged to fund the setting (Free Early Education Entitlement) and wait for Ofsted to inspect. Local authorities have no tools or procedures to withdraw funding unless Ofsted lowers the settings rating to inadequate. In the meantime, children attend [such] provision and do not receive quality teaching and their outcomes are lower than those who attend a high quality early years provision.” – Metropolitan District, North West

The need to integrate key services (e.g. health, education, social care) was also highlighted to ensure that interventions are holistic and swift. One council said:

“Work is needed on enabling professionals working in the early years to have a single framework to support work in this area and enable dynamic conversations about children and their families. Health ASQ [Ages and Stages Questionnaire] and EYFS are viewed and used very differently and, whilst mapping across can be undertaken, a shared professional understanding/training is needed.” – Unitary Authority, North West

Issues for the LGA to consider:

- Recommend that central government invests in Level 3 training courses to ensure that early years staff are highly skilled and highly qualified – and have the appropriate level of training supporting children with SEND.
- Encourage central government to introduce a higher premium for practitioners with graduate status – and a minimum pay threshold for early years professionals (with appropriate increases dependent on qualification, fully funded within the EYNFF).
- Ask Ofsted to consider reviewing its four-year monitoring cycle of early years settings – and its impact on outcomes.
- Encourage central government to provide local authorities with early notification of changes to funding rates and other payment issues – and consider year-on-year increases within the EYNFF to cover the cost of inflation along with other increases.
- Continue working towards the integration of key services (health, education and social care).

Annex A: LGA survey on early years provision

1. Please delete/complete as appropriate	
Name	
Role	
Authority	
Email	

Cap on Central Spend

2. Thinking about the new requirements on how local authorities allocate funding to early years providers, what has been the impact of the 5% cap on 'centrally-retained' spending in your authority?	
<i>Please select one option</i>	
An actual reduction in support for providers	GO TO Q3
A predicted reduction in support for providers	GO TO Q3
No change	GO TO Q4
Don't know	GO TO Q4

3. Please indicate the extent to which the 5% cap has, or will, impact on your authority's ability to support early years providers:	
<i>Please select one option</i>	
To a great extent	
To a moderate extent	
To a small extent	
Not at all	
Don't know	

4. Thinking about the 5% cap, has your authority offset all, or part, of the reduction in permitted spend through disapplication and/or use of alternative funding sources?	
<i>Please select one option</i>	
Yes, through disapplication	
Yes, through alternative funding sources (please specify)	
Yes, through both methods (please specify)	
No	
Don't know	

5. In your authority, has the 5% cap on ‘centrally-retained’ spending resulted in any of the following outcomes? And, do you anticipate any of these impacts from 2019/20 when disapplications can no longer be made?

<i>Please select all that apply</i>	<i>Currently</i>	<i>From 2019/20</i>
Reduction in staff numbers in local authority		
Reduced resources to promote the 2-year-old offer (e.g. communications)		
Reduction in back office resources to support the implementation of 30 hours free entitlement		
Reduction in full-time places for disadvantaged children		
Reduction in outreach to encourage greater take up of childcare		
Partial reduction in the number of SENCOs to support PVI's (e.g. from one to two SENCOs)		
Complete reduction in the number of SENCOs to support PVI's (i.e. no SENCOs)		
Reduction in training for PVI's		
Reduction in support for PVI's (e.g. support for improvement and business advice)		
Reduction in minimum qualification requirements for staff		
Increase in charging for early years services		
Other (please specify)		
None of the above		
Don't know		

Maintained Nursery Schools

6. Do any maintained nursery schools operate within your local authority?

<i>Please select one option</i>	
Yes	GO TO Q6a
No	GO TO Q11
Don't know	GO TO Q11

6a. If possible, please state the number of maintained nursery schools operating within your local authority:

Please enter figure:	
----------------------	--

7. Thinking about funding for standalone maintained nursery schools after 2019/20, which of the following positions is taken by your authority?

<i>Please select one option</i>	
Funding should be protected at the current level	GO TO Q9
Funding should be protected at a higher level than other settings	GO TO Q8
Funding should be in line with other settings	GO TO Q9
Don't know	GO To Q9

8. Please specify the reasons why funding for standalone maintained nursery schools should be set at a higher rate than other settings from 2019/20:

Please select all that apply

They provide a higher quality early education than other settings
They provide essential capacity to ensure local authorities are meeting their sufficiency duty
They are located in disadvantaged areas where other settings may not be financially viable
They provide systems leadership and support other settings
They offer more places for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
They provide a significant number of places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds
Other (please state)

9. What would be the likely impact on maintained nursery schools if funding was not protected after 2019/20?

Please select all that apply

Reduced staff numbers
Reduced number of places
Reduced support for children with SEND
Reduced support for disadvantaged children
These nurseries would reduce their participation in the 2-year-old offer
These nurseries would federate with each other or primary schools
Other (please specify)
No impact
Don't know

10. What is the likelihood of maintained nursery schools closing in your authority, if funding for such nurseries is not protected?

Please select one option

Very likely
Fairly likely
Not very likely
Not at all likely
Don't know

Provision for Disadvantaged Children

11. In the past year, has your authority seen a reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds?

Please select one option

Yes	GO TO Q12
No	GO TO Q14
Don't know	GO TO Q14

12. Approximately, how many places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds are no longer available?

Please select one option

Between 1 and 50 places
Between 51 and 100 places
Between 101 and 150 places
Between 151 and 200 places
More than 200 places
Don't know

13. In your opinion, what explains the reduction in places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds?	
<i>Please select all that apply</i>	<i>Approximately, how many places does this reason account for?</i>
The new Early Years National Funding Formula for 3 and 4-year-olds	
The new 30 hours free entitlement for 3 and 4-year-olds	
Other (please specify)	
Don't know	

14. Is your authority currently offering additional financial incentives to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds?	
<i>Please select one option</i>	
Yes	GO TO Q15
No, but under consideration	GO TO Q18
No	GO TO Q18
Don't know	GO TO Q18

15. What financial incentives are being used to encourage providers to offer places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds?

16. How are these financial incentives being funded?
<i>Please select all that apply</i>
Retained funding from the EYNFF
Savings generated through reductions in other early years support
Investment by the local authority
Other (please specify)
Don't know

17. Does your authority expect to be in a position to offer such financial incentives from 2019/20 onwards?
<i>Please select one option</i>
Yes
Yes, but for a limited time period
No
Don't know

18. Has your authority ever offered free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds in any of its maintained settings, in addition to the hours offered through the universal entitlement?	
<i>Please select one option</i>	
Yes	GO TO Q19
No	GO TO Q23
Don't know	GO TO Q23

19. How many free hours were offered on top of the 15 hours universal entitlement per child?

Please select one option

- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 11-15 hours
- More than 15 hours
- Don't know

20. What has been the impact of the Early Years National Funding Formula and/or the 30 hours entitlement on the provision of additional free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds in your authority?

Please select one option

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| Additional free hours are no longer offered | GO TO Q21 |
| Additional free hours will not be offered in the future | GO TO Q21 |
| No change | GO TO Q22 |
| Don't know | GO TO Q22 |

21. Please indicate the first financial year in which your authority was/will be unable to offer additional free hours for the most disadvantaged 3 or 4-year-olds:

Please select one option

- 2014/15
- 2015/16
- 2016/17
- 2018/19
- 2019/20
- 2020/21
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

22. Approximately, what proportion of 3 and 4-year-olds previously receiving free hours on top of the universal entitlement qualify for the 30 hours free entitlement in your authority?

Please select one option

- None
- Less than 25%
- Between 25% and 50%
- Between 51% and 75%
- More than 75%
- Don't know

23. What has been the impact of the 30 hours policy on the school-readiness gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in your authority?

Please select one option

- Reduced the gap
- Increased the gap
- No impact
- Don't know

Early Years Entitlements

24. Has your authority experienced an increase in enquiries and/or administration due to the introduction of the 30 hours policy?	
<i>Please select one option</i>	
Yes	GO TO Q25
No	GO TO Q26
Don't know	GO TO Q26

25. Please indicate the level of increase in enquiries and/or administration due to the introduction of the 30 hours policy:
<i>Please select one option</i>
No increase
Less than 25%
Between 25% and 50%
Between 51% and 75%
More than 75%
Don't know

26. What are the main reasons for children <u>NOT</u> accessing their early years entitlement, in your authority?
<i>Please select all that apply</i>
Lack of places
Lack of flexibility
Lack of suitable provision at times required
Lack of close to home provision
Lack of quality
Term-time provision only
Use of informal childcare
Cultural reasons
Other (please specify)
Don't know

Early Years Practitioners

27. To what extent is your authority concerned about the quality of Level 3 practitioners working in early years settings?
<i>Please select one option</i>
Very concerned
Fairly concerned
Not very concerned
Not at all concerned
Don't know

28. In your view, what would increase the quality of early years practitioners?
<i>Please select all that apply</i>
Higher wages
Improved professional development
Better career progression
Other (please state)
Don't know

29. In your view, will the 30 hours policy result in a decrease in the quality of early years practitioners in your authority?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Don't know

30. In your view, will the Early Years Funding Formula result in a decrease in the quality of early years practitioners in your authority?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Don't know

Additional Comments

31. Please use the space below to add any further information that you think would be helpful to the LGA in relation to the provision of early years services:

--

32. Please indicate if you would be happy for the LGA to contact you about the themes covered in this survey (e.g. to follow-up on good practice):

Please select one option

Yes, I'm happy to be contacted further

No, please do not contact me



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