



Department
for Education

Surveys on childcare and early years in England

Government consultation response

December 2018

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Introduction

The Department for Education sought user perspectives on two surveys that are released as Official Statistics and part of [statistics on childcare and early years](#).

[The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents](#) provides information on parents with children aged 0 to 14 in England. It covers parents' and their children's use of childcare and early years provision, and their views and experiences.

[The Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers](#) collects information on the main characteristics of childcare and early years providers in England, including on the early years workforce.

The Department for Education consulted on the following aspects of each survey:

- Frequency;
- Sampling;
- Mode(s);
- Topic coverage; and
- Outputs and approaches to dissemination.

Responses were received online and via e-mail between 29th March 2018 and 18th May 2018 from twenty-three individuals or organisations. Two separate two-hour roundtable were attended by a total of sixteen individuals on 9th May 2018, hosted at the Department for Education.

Executive summary of changes to each survey

Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents

Key developments for the survey in 2019 and 2020

- **We will continue to collect data on school-aged children and across the 0-14 age range**, via the published 2018 survey outputs and through the 2020 survey. This will continue the survey time series and the quality of data collected on childcare among both pre-school and school-aged children and on themes such as maternal work among parents of children aged 0-14. Both the 2018 and 2020 surveys will achieve a sample of approximately 6,000 parents of children aged 0-14.
- **We will change the sample coverage for the 2019 survey to parents of 0-4 year-olds**, with the aim of an achieved sample of 5,000 parents of 0-4 year-olds, including children in Reception year. This will enable more in-depth analysis of early years policy priorities and various family and child demographics within the 0-4 age range.
- **A push-to-web mode trial of the survey will be conducted in 2019** that will run parallel to, but not instead of, the mainstage face-to-face survey. Learning from the mode trial will be used to inform the design of the survey from 2021 onwards. We will publish a report on the mode trial and consult further on any implications for the survey from 2021 onwards.
- **We will be removing non-resident parental care from the definition of informal childcare**, to bring the survey in-line with other international and national surveys' measurement of informal childcare. This change will be introduced from the 2019 survey onwards.
- **We will continue to use the dual-sample frame approach to sampling**, using the HMRC Child Benefit Register (CBR) and the re-contact sample of Family Resources Survey respondents of higher earners. We will introduce address-based sampling for the CBR sample from 2019 onwards.
- **Continuing to publish the survey statistics annually via an Official Statistics release** with a summary report, main and additional tables and later depository of the data file and survey materials on the UK Data Service.

Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers

Key developments to the survey in 2019 and 2020

- **We will be intensifying the early years focus** of the survey by focussing on providers for pre-school children aged 0-4 alone. In previous surveys, the inclusion of reception classes, wraparound and holiday club providers diluted the early years focus of the survey, as provision for school-aged children was part of the survey sample. More specifically:
 - **In 2019 we will not be surveying reception class providers.** Whilst reception class providers are part of the early years providers market, they are fundamentally different to other providers: the survey questions are less relevant to them and they risk skewing some of our findings.
 - We are **revising the survey to cover wraparound and holiday care for the early years age range only.** Previous surveys collected data on care for children aged 0-7, but only from early years providers, yielding a partial view of the holiday care market.
- **We will be changing the mode of the survey to a mixed-mode approach:** via an online survey and by telephone. In 2018, we have conducted a mode experiment, trialling this and assessed it as a feasible and robust way of collecting the data and retaining the time series for the survey.
- **We only envisage making small changes to the topics covered in the survey.** In response to the consultation discussion, we have included additional questions on special educational needs and disability (SEND) and the Home Learning Environment. Additionally, we have streamlined the question on provider ownership to match other data sources.
- In response to consultation queries on the **availability of local level data**, we will be re-running the short version of the providers' survey in 2019. In 2018 data collected in the short survey enabled us to look at fees at local authority level, analysis published as experimental statistics alongside the main Official Statistics release.
- **We will continue to publish the survey statistics annually via an Official Statistics release** with a summary report, additional tables and later depository of the data file and survey materials on the UK Data Service. We will also publish findings from the short survey on fees as experimental statistics alongside the main Official Statistics release.

Summary of responses received and the government's response

Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents (CEYSP)

This section summarises comments received through the consultation on the CEYSP and the Government response.

Use of the survey data

Respondents told us about a variety of uses of the survey statistics, including:

- regional and local childcare sufficiency assessments;
- academic and policy research on topics such as maternal employment and childcare;
- understanding usage of childcare and early years provision by children with additional needs;
- tracking trends in parents behaviour, choices and attitudes over time; and
- analysis of specific groups of parents and children such across the household income distribution, by area deprivation and by family work status and child characteristics such as ethnicity and SEND.

The data on formal and informal childcare usage rates, childcare costs, maternal work choices, and attitudes and perceptions of local childcare provision were the most frequently cited topics that users analyse and apply in their work. Respondents intend to use the data in future to monitor of awareness, usage and impacts of the free childcare entitlements, in analyses on the Home Learning Environment and to update existing national and regional statistics informing childcare sufficiency assessments.

Local authority respondents stressed the importance of the data about school-aged children for their local sufficiency assessments, as the survey is the only high-quality source on use and demand for childcare among parents of school-aged children.

The Department for Education will continue to collect data across the breadth of survey topics, reflecting the variety of user needs. We will also continue to collect data on school-aged children and across the 0-14 age range via the 2018 and 2020 surveys. The Department for Education makes extensive use of the survey data for policy development, monitoring and evaluation.

Survey frequency

There was widespread support for an annual survey up to 2020, with respondents citing a period of rapid policy rollout of free Government childcare entitlements and financial support for childcare, requiring frequent monitoring via the survey. Some respondents also felt that the survey should continue to be annual from 2021 onwards, though others noted that this decision would depend on policy developments over this period.

The Department for Education will conduct and publish an annual survey in 2018, 2019 and 2020, following the 2017 survey, meaning an annualised frequency for four consecutive years. However, we will use the increase in survey frequency to undertake a survey focussed solely on parents of 0-4 year-olds in 2019, enabling in-depth analysis of early years policy priorities and family and child demographics within this age range.

Sampling and sample coverage

Most respondents did not express a view on the current sample frames used for the survey, but among those that did the Child Benefit Register (CBR) and Family Resources Survey (FRS) re-contact sample were felt to be the most suitable sample frames despite some known under-coverage issues in the CBR. The Postal Address File was suggested by some respondents, but with a recognition that this does not include details of parent households so would be a less efficient sample frame for the sample population. A number of respondents highlighted the need to preserve the survey time series comparisons and avoid any change in the sample frame that would compromise this.

The Department for Education will continue to use the CBR and FRS sample frames up to 2020, as these continue to be the most representative sample frames for the sample population and will ensure that the survey time series is maintained. We have seen a growing prevalence of moved addresses within the CBR sample frame in recent years, this being the key reason for static survey response rates. Following a successful trial in 2018, we will be introducing address-based sampling from 2019 onwards. This is where new families that have moved into an address where the sampled child has moved house will be invited to take part in the survey. This approach will counter a key under-coverage issue within the CBR, and does not introduce sample bias as address-based sampling ensures recently moved addresses are engaged via the sampling strategy rather than excluded due to under-coverage within the CBR sample frame.

Some respondents would ideally like more robust regional-level data and local-level data to inform sufficiency modelling, while some respondents wanted larger sample sizes of specific groups of children and young people such as those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

The Department for Education cannot commit to more robust data collection at a regional and local-level, as this would require an expansion in the sample size with an associated substantial increase in survey costs which cannot be met through the Department's

budget. However, the 2019 survey will focus on parents of 0-4 year-olds only which will boost the size of the regional and demographic sample sizes within this age range compared to previous years' surveys. The survey will continue to collect data on the prevalence of SEN and disabilities, on types of needs and impairments, and experiences and perceptions of local childcare provision for children with additional needs.

Respondents expressed contrasting views on whether the survey should focus on just pre-school children, both pre-school and school-aged children, or consider alternative collection modes for some age groups. On the one hand, many respondents welcomed the analysis opportunities that would be associated with the sample coverage being focussed on parents of pre-school children and achieving larger sample sizes for this age range, especially considering that the majority of the Government's support for childcare is focussed on this age group. On the other hand, a number of stakeholders (especially local authorities) were concerned about any loss or change in collection mode for school-aged children, as the survey is a crucial source for local and regional childcare sufficiency analysis and the only Official Statistic on holiday and wraparound childcare among school-aged children.

The Department for Education will continue to collect and publish data about school-aged children and across the 0-14 age range via the 2018 and 2020 surveys, each of which will have an achieved sample size of approximately 6,000 parents. We will use the increase in the survey frequency up to 2020 to dedicate the 2019 survey to parents of children aged 0-4, including children aged 4 that have started in Reception year in order to monitor the transition from early years settings to school. The 2019 survey will aim to achieve a sample size of 5,000 parents of 0-4 year-olds, boosting the analysis potential for this age group for various family and child demographics. The budget savings associated with a 5,000 achieved sample rather than 6,000 will be used to invest in a parallel push-to-web mode experiment (see more details below).

Survey mode

Most respondents wanted the face-to-face collection mode to continue; they argued this is a 'gold standard' approach to data collection and ensures the continued robustness and reliability of the survey estimates. However, some respondents felt that the expensive face-to-face mode limits the samples sizes that can be achieved at regional and local-level and that developments in online data collection should be considered for the future. Some respondents felt that the face-to-face interviewer length (around 45 minutes) may mean fewer parents with time pressures such as caring for a child with additional needs are able to take part in the survey.

The Department for Education will continue to use a face-to-face collection mode for the survey up to 2020. However, in light of developments in online survey methodology, we are keen to trial and learn from alternative and lower cost data collection methods that could boost overall achieved sample sizes and be more accessible for some groups of

parents. In 2019, we have commissioned our survey contractor, Ipsos MORI, to conduct a push-to-web mode experiment that will run in parallel with, rather than replace, the mainstage survey. The mode trial will sample parents of children aged 0-14 and use the CBR sample frame. The mode trial will aim to develop and test the most efficient approach to questionnaire design, user and cognitive testing, sampling and data collection and processing for the push-to-web approach. The mode trial will also feature a number of experiments around use of survey materials and incentive strategies. We will publish learning from the mode trial in late 2019, with recommendations on the implications of the trial for the mainstage survey beyond 2020. We are also learning from similar mode trials being conducted on other large-scale Government household surveys, including by the ONS on the Labour Force Survey. We will re-consult on any implications of the mode trial for the survey post-2020.

Topic coverage

Some respondents were keen for a change in the measurement of informal childcare, by removing non-resident parental or ex-partner care from the survey and from the derived statistics on use of informal childcare. This is because non-resident parental care is not part of the definition of informal childcare in other national studies such as the Study on Early Education and Development, nor international surveys on childcare usage.

The Department for Education will remove non-resident parental care from the survey in 2019, therefore changing our definition and statistics on informal childcare. The inclusion of non-resident parental care in the survey is an historical inclusion relating to past evidence needs of the now defunct Child Support Agency around how many children maintain contact with their non-resident parent following relationship breakdown. We have confirmed with the Department for Work and Pensions that this data is no longer required as it can be collected via other means. Excluding this from the survey will improve the measurement of informal childcare, and we have estimated may decrease the overall informal childcare usage rate among 0-14 year-olds by two-three percentage points. Future releases of the data will caveat and explain any trends associated with this removal. We believe a small loss in time series comparisons on overall rates of informal childcare usage are acceptable in the context of using a more up-to-date and accurate measurement that will bring the survey in-line with a more valid definition. The role of ex-partners in supporting parents with the costs of childcare will be maintained in the survey.

Respondents were supportive of the breadth of topics covered via the survey but had specific suggestions for improvements to some question modules. Some respondents wanted to see improvements and longer-term testing and development of new questions on the module about the costs of childcare to parents. Some respondents felt that the questions on the prevalence and frequency of home learning activities for 0-5 year-olds could be expanded to better capture the quality of the parent-child interaction. A respondent felt that the module for school-aged children on holiday childcare could ask more detail about the spread, volume and hour per week and day usage of holiday

childcare. Another respondent wanted to see more questions about accessing childcare, distance travelled and the location of the provider compared to home and parent(s) work location.

Some respondents were unaware that the survey already asks questions about the prevalence of SEN and disabilities and types of needs and impairments, and on experiences and perceptions of childcare and early years provision for children with additional needs.

One respondent wanted to see enhancements to the questions relating to the childcare element of Tax Credits and Universal Credit, covering awareness, take-up, attitudes and the perceived impacts of usage. One respondent also wanted more detailed questions included on the impacts of Tax-Free Childcare on parental employment.

The Department for Education needs to balance requests for enhanced question content with high-demand for questionnaire space and because the survey is already running to its maximum interview length. We will work on reviewing and developing (where appropriate) various survey modules over 2019 and 2020 and via the mode trial in 2019.

Outputs and approaches to dissemination

Respondents commented on the high quality of the published outputs and were supportive of a continuation of publishing a summary report, main and additional tables and a technical report via an annual Official Statistics release. Some respondents would like to see more detailed age-based and geographical splits in the data tables.

The Department for Education will continue to publish the survey outputs as in previous years, via an annual Official Statistics release, up to and including 2020. The shift in the sample coverage to 0-4 year-olds in 2019 will provide an opportunity for more detailed demographic splits in the data tables, especially by age of child within the 0-4 age range, which will be reflected in the 2019 outputs.

Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers (SCEYP)

This section summarises comments received through the consultation on the SCEYP and the Government response.

Use of the survey data

Respondents told us about a variety of uses of the survey statistics and data, such as:

- analyses of the key characteristics of early years provision e.g. average sizes of setting, staff numbers and opening hours, are commonly used as baseline statistics for related work on the early years and childcare sector;
- understanding workforce trends in the childcare and early years sector, especially around staff qualifications, training and pay;
- assessments of the cost of childcare provision, sources of income and funding;
- understanding the provision available for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and
- inclusion in reports and analyses on the quality of early childhood education.

The most commonly mentioned use of the statistics was for analyses of the workforce data. Providers and provider organisations use this as a resource for understanding trends and challenges, and as a benchmarking tool for salaries and yearly rates. Meanwhile, academics and researchers stressed the usefulness of the data for a wider understanding of the way in which the childcare market functions, ranging from staff turnover rates to staffing structure (e.g. unpaid volunteers, apprentices and temporary staff members). Many respondents also mentioned using data on staff qualifications and training in relation to the wider issue of quality of childcare.

Although there was acknowledgement across the board regarding the usefulness of the survey in providing a national level picture of the sector, many local authority and academics/researchers cited the value of local level data for their analysis.

The Department for Education will continue to collect data across the same range of the survey topics, reflecting the variety of user needs. Although the main survey sample size does not allow us to provide statistics at local level, in 2018 we also ran a short version of the survey on a larger sample and this enabled us to provide local authority level statistics on topics such as fees. We will be re-running this short survey in 2019 and publishing the data alongside the 2019 statistical release. The Department for Education makes extensive use of the survey data for policy development, monitoring and evaluation.

Survey frequency

There was support across the board for an annual survey up to 2020, with respondents mentioning the need to monitor and capture the impact of government's recent programmes on childcare on the early years market. Some respondents also felt that the survey should continue annually after 2020, but a few suggested that we should review the effectiveness of the annual approach and the scale of change in the sector in 2020 and depending on this the survey could be run biennially or even triennially. Respondents also stressed the importance of being able to compare across survey waves and create a time series.

The Department for Education will conduct and publish an annual survey in 2018, 2019 and 2020, meaning an annualised frequency for three consecutive years. Alongside the 2016 survey, these will enable us to provide a 4 year time series¹.

Sampling

Reception providers

There was support for the exclusion of Reception providers from the survey sample, due to differing staff structures, budget ratios and requirements. Respondents made a case that reception providers are part of formal schooling both from the providers' and parents' perspective. They also noted that a lot of the data on Reception is collected through other sources e.g. the Department for Education School Census.

Nevertheless, respondents in the consultation also stressed that we would not be collecting information on the Reception workforce, capacity and spare places data. Still, our current survey sample sizes for Reception mean this data is not very useful as a standalone source on reception classes. Other issues our respondents would have liked us to cover in relation to reception are delayed entry, additional needs and, as a general point, using reception as a baseline for the rest of our analysis of children's development. As these topics are mainly focussed on children and parent's experiences, they are covered in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, where we've ensured parents of children 5 and above are surveyed biennially, and that parents of children aged 4 using Reception providers are surveyed in 2019.

¹ The SCEYP questionnaire was fully redesigned for the 2016 survey to reflect changes in the childcare market and to provide more accurate and detailed data. Hence both the sample design and sample groups have changed since the 2013 survey meaning that the results for 2016 are not comparable with previous waves of the research.

Lastly, irrespective of their position on the inclusion of reception providers in the survey sample, a majority of respondents stressed that they see reception as part of early years in terms of child development and curriculum.

The Department of Education will focus the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers on settings offering care to 0-4 year olds, but will ensure that the reception age group is covered within its sister survey, the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, in order to reflect user needs around this age group.

Holiday and Wraparound Care

Respondent views were mixed on our suggestion to focus the wraparound and holiday care coverage of the survey to early years age range only, not the 0-7 age group as we've done so far. The key reason behind this choice is that the current data doesn't cover the whole age range for which holiday and wraparound care would be relevant (up to 14 years), being unrepresentative of this market; moreover, as it only covers a narrow group of school-aged children (aged 5-7), this data is of limited usefulness. Those in favour acknowledged that this would reduce misunderstanding related to what the data is measuring and ensure a more efficient and useful data collection.

Nevertheless, many local authorities and academics who responded to the consultation felt that wrap-around and holiday care for both early years and school-aged children is an important factor in parental decisions regarding work. Their suggestion was to ensure that data on wraparound and holiday childcare is collected for the whole age range through a different, more targeted effort. A further point was made about the utility of some of the wraparound questions for calculations of costs and income for settings.

The Department for Education will focus the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers on wraparound and holiday care for the early years age range, but also monitor the need for further evidence on the topic of holiday and wraparound care for school-aged children. Additionally, we will be retaining some of the survey questions on this issue to aid us in better understanding provider finances.

Survey mode

Participants were very positive about a mixed-mode approach provided it leads to robust findings, with some providers arguing that this would make it considerably easier for them to fill in the survey. Nevertheless, some questions were raised regarding the complexity of the issues covered in the survey (e.g. the financial questions) and some noted that we would need to provide respondents with ample support and, even, an option to change to telephone mode mid-questionnaire.

The Department for Education has run a mode experiment testing a mixed-mode approach alongside the 2018 survey. This highlighted the feasibility and robustness of this approach and, as such, the survey mode in 2019 will be online and by telephone. We will also ensure that respondents to the survey have the necessary support when completing the online questionnaire, alongside the option to conduct it over the telephone.

Topic coverage

There were a range of requests for topics to be added to the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers questionnaire. The discussion below covers some of the most common themes arising across the consultation responses. The most important issue we've had to keep in mind when assessing these suggestions is that the survey is already running at maximum interview length for some provider types/variants (20 minutes). This means the department has to carefully balance adding additional topics to the questionnaire and extending the interviews with ensuring providers are not put off by the time they have to spend completing the survey.

Consultation respondents were supportive of the breadth of topics covered in the survey and many of the suggestions made were for additional information on themes already covered.

Many respondents asked for more information on staff training and qualifications. The latter request was specifically focussed on a breakdown of the different types of Level 6 qualifications (EYTS/EYPS/QTS), whereas the suggestions around training and CPD delved into the details of what qualifications staff are working towards, what training is provided and for how many hours per year, where they do their training, and how CPD decisions are made and by whom. The survey currently collects data on EYTS, EYPS and QTS in the main set of staff questions (although not in the staff loops), enabling us to provide a breakdown by these variables. Any additional questions on training or within the staff loops would need to be considered within the constraint of the interview length.

A few respondents also mentioned the need to collect information on spare capacity broken down by age group and entitlement type. Whereas we think this information would be very useful, we are not confident that providers organise their business model in such a clear-cut way, which may lead to unreliable data.

Another theme covered in the responses was childcare costs. The survey currently asks settings about their yearly costs and income and respondents in the consultation suggested collecting 'costs per hour', alongside data on the free entitlement. The Department for Education collects robust data on hourly cost through other research endeavours, such as the 2015 SEED Cost of Childcare Report and research conducted in 2018 to update these findings.

A few stakeholders cited a need for more detailed information on special/additional needs and disabilities e.g. on types and levels disability. In practical term, this needs to be balanced with the length of the survey, but also to ensure that whatever information we collect covers a big enough sample to be useful in analysis. The Department for Education is considering re-introducing in 2019 some of the previous survey questions on the severity of disability; we will monitor their usefulness and the need for further questions going forward.

Lastly, academic colleagues made a case for the usefulness of matching the Provider and Parents survey samples in order to bring together data on the supply and demand of childcare. The Department of Education has some ethical concerns about the feasibility of this endeavour, especially around ensuring settings' and families' anonymity, but would be grateful for further insight from stakeholders on implementing a matched sample whilst retaining the nationally representative samples for both surveys. In the meantime, the Study of Early Education and Development² offers an excellent insight into both providers and children's circumstances.

Many of the requests we received around additional information were focused on data we already collect, but don't report on and, as such, they will feed into our decisions around reporting in 2019.

Outputs and approaches to dissemination

Respondents were supportive of publishing a summary report, with additional tables and a technical report via an annual Official Statistics release. Some respondents would like to see a more detailed research report alongside these, but stressed the need for a quality output.

The Department for Education will continue to publish the survey outputs via an annual Official Statistics release up to 2020. In 2018 and 2019 we will also be publishing a financial analysis and an additional report (on a theme chosen to reflect interest at the time) providing comprehensive and high-quality analysis on these topics. Moreover, in 2019 we will also be publishing local authority level fee data, helping serve user needs around geographical breakdowns.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/study-of-early-education-and-development-seed>

Next steps

Changes to each survey have been introduced for the 2019 surveys, and will be reflected in publication of the 2019 outputs.

The Department for Education will consult with users on any additional changes to the surveys conducted in 2021 and future years.

If you would like to discuss further with a member of the Department for Education Early Years Research team, please e-mail EY.ANALYSISANDRESEARCH@education.gov.uk or:

- Jonathon Blackburn, to discuss the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, via jonathon.blackburn@education.gov.uk
- Adina Huma, to discuss the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers, via adina.huma@education.gov.uk.

Annex A: List of organisations that responded to the consultation

- Cornwall County Council
- T Maynard Childminding Services
- Caroline Kinder
- Jo Mullins
- Kent County Council
- Frontier Economics
- Family and Childcare Trust
- National Network of Parent Carer Forums
- Education Policy Institute
- Save the Children UK
- Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years
- Royal National Institute for the Blind
- Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Early Education
- Dr Jo Blanden, Dr Birgitta Rabe, Dr Sarah Cattan (University of Surrey, University of Essex, Institute For Fiscal Studies)
- Council for Disabled Children
- London Borough of Hillingdon
- London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- Greater London Authority Economics
- National Day Nurseries Association
- Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics
- Pamela Calder, London South Bank University
- Welsh Government.



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