

**Title:** Quality and Uses of Data: Provision for Children Under five years of age in England – January 2012

**Description:** This document outlines the use made of these statistics and the types of decisions they inform, provides information on the quality and reliability of these statistics overall, and in relation to the range of potential uses.

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## Users and Usage

### Department for Education and Central Government

The *Provision for Children* statistical release contains the latest information on provision of education for children under five in the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors in England. This includes:

- The number of three and four year olds **benefiting from some free** early education places.
- Local Authority **rates for numbers benefiting** as a proportion of the population.
- The part-time equivalent (PTE) number of **free early education places filled** by three and four year olds.
- The number of three and four year olds in free early education by number of funded hours received.
- The number of **children taking up early education places**.

*For more information on the items included in the statistical release and how they have been calculated, please refer to the accompanying methodology note which is available alongside the publication at:*

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001074/index.shtml>

The main use of these statistics is by the Department for Education in informing the UK Government, in monitoring the overall system as well as individual policies and local level performance in England.

The free early education entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds is at the heart of the Government's vision for all children to have access to high quality early years provision that helps them reach their full potential. It offers universal free provision from the term following a child's third birthday up until they reach compulsory school age, for every child, irrespective of background or family circumstances. From September 2010, the free early education entitlement equates to 15 hours per week, over a minimum 38 weeks of the year, with flexible access to meet parents' needs.

The UK Government uses the information to monitor the take-up of free early education provision including the latest position and trends over time, as well as the distribution by number of hours received and the distribution across local authorities.

One of the main areas of interest to the UK Government is in the number of children benefiting from some free early education provision, specifically the take up rates as a proportion of the population.

In addition to monitoring the take-up of the free early education entitlement for policy purposes, detailed information on numbers of children in receipt of the free early education entitlement at local authority level is used as part of the Dedicated Schools' Grant funding calculations.

### **Other users**

We are very familiar with the uses made of the data within the Department for Education and by the UK Government. However we have less clarity of the uses made of this data by other organisations and external parties.

We have carried out external consultation through our Research and Statistics website and through our user group of known contacts to try and ascertain users of these statistics and to try and better understand how the statistics are being used. Based on the responses received, we are aware of the following users and uses made of these statistics:

- Students and lecturers in the Early Childhood Studies field to keep abreast of changes and challenges in Early Years policy and practices and to support coursework.
- The Scottish Government to make UK-wide comparisons.
- The London School of Economics for various analyses on the early education sector.
- Department for Work and Pensions for numbers of children in early education.
- Local Authorities for comparisons against the National trend and also to compare themselves to other authorities for benchmarking purposes.

Previous consultations have been carried out seeking comments on the format and contents of the publication. The general nature of the response was that the statistics were useful in their current format and no strong suggestions were received as to improvements or additions to the statistics.

We will continue to engage with users to ensure that the publication best meets their needs and welcome feedback or suggestions from any new or previously unknown users which we will take onboard.

Would you like to feed in your views? If so, please contact us through:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/usercons.shtml>

## Data Quality

The source for this publication is the Early Years Census and School Census. All schools and all Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) providers receiving government funding are required to make (through their local authority) a child-level return. These collections are on a statutory basis through legislation which results in complete and accurate information being returned.

Schools making School Census return are required to submit child-level information for all children at the school. PVI providers are required to provide child-level information only for those children in receipt of some free early education provision. Only those providers with children receiving some free early education are required to make an Early Years Census return. For this reason, the Early Years census and therefore the *Provision for Children* publication does not provide a count of all children aged 3 or 4 in Private, Voluntary, and Independent providers. We are not aware of a source which would provide this information.

However, as the data source is a census and all providers return details of children in receipt of the free early education entitlement, this publication provides a full and accurate picture of the numbers of children receiving the free early education entitlement.

### Population estimates

The population estimates are derived from mid-year estimates and projections provided by the Office for National Statistics. They are subject to a margin of error and should be considered to be approximations and are not directly comparable to the EYC data. (Visit <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/index.html> for more information and population estimates.)

Population estimates at lower geographic levels, such as local authority, are subject to a greater degree of error. Also population estimates for individual age groups are more difficult to estimate; in this publication we only include children aged 3 or 4. In some cases, local authority take-up rates can exceed 100%. Therefore, take-up rates at local authority level should be treated with more caution than national take-up rates.

However, take-up rates have been presented in the publication at local authority level as there are valid reasons, explained below, for why the take-up rate can exceed 100%. Also, the sources used in the calculation of take-up rates are consistent over time; therefore rates have been published as they allow a user to see any valid change in take-up rates in a local authority over time.

### What are the issues with the ONS population data?

While national level estimates have relatively small levels of uncertainty, issues using ONS estimates exist. Firstly, ONS estimates only include long-term migrants, i.e. a person who changes their permanent residence for more than a year, while the Early Years Census includes all children, even if they are defined as being short-term migrants. The implication of this is that take up percentages are likely to be overestimated and could well exceed 100%.

Secondly sub-national ONS estimates are subject to greater levels of uncertainty. One of the reasons for this is due to the difficulties of estimating internal migration where estimates use changes in health service administrative data to approximate measures of movements of individuals between areas within the UK. International migration estimates, which affects both national and sub-national estimates, uses a combination of sources - predominantly the International Passenger Survey (IPS) which is subject to sampling and other types of error. These issues could under or overestimate the underlying population and therefore take up percentages.

Thirdly the national census has only been carried out every 10 years. Following the census previous years' estimates are revised – when the 2011 census results become available, estimates from 2002 to 2010 will be revised to ensure there is a coherent time series between the Census points. Since the greatest uncertainty around the estimates comes from the migration components, the further from the Census the estimates are, the greater the uncertainty. Once more this could lead to over or underestimation of take up rates.