



Department  
for Education

Research Report DFE-RR217

# **Exploring the flexibility of the free entitlement to early education: research among parents**

**Ipsos MORI**

This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DfE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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# Executive Summary

## Background

All three- and four-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours per week of free early education for 38 weeks of the year (known as the free entitlement). Children become eligible for the free hours from 1 September, 1 January or 1 April (the start of term) following their third birthday. They remain eligible until they reach compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday, though in practice most children now start school before this). Free early education places are available at a range of early years settings, including nursery schools and classes, children's centres, day nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools and certain registered childminders.

There are a number of parameters set by the Department for Education (DfE) within which the free entitlement provision operates. These parameters set the framework within which local authorities should deliver the free entitlement (e.g. the minimum and maximum number of hours per day, the number of days on which the free hours should be taken, the restrictions on start and finish times, and the number of providers who can be involved in delivering free hours to a child). The parameters are guidelines for local authorities rather than specific rules for provision of the free hours, so the arrangements of provision can vary from area to area.

The Department for Education estimates that five percent of three- and four-year-olds were not accessing their free entitlement and around one third were not benefiting from their full 15 free hours. As a result, the Department commissioned Ipsos MORI to explore parents' views on the delivery of the free entitlement. The research aim was to help understand how take-up of the free entitlement to early education could be increased, both by reducing the proportion of non-users and increasing the number of hours taken up by partial users. In particular, we were asked to look at how improved flexibility of the offer could increase use of the free entitlement.

## Methodology

The research comprised three strands:

- 40 qualitative interviews with parents of three- to four-year-olds;
- a telephone survey of 801 parents of three- to four-year-olds (including parents who were soon to be eligible for the entitlement and those who had used the entitlement in the past); and
- secondary analysis of data from the 2010 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents.

## Key findings

*Are parents satisfied with the flexibility of the entitlement?*

- There was a high level of overall satisfaction with the free entitlement (88%). The majority of parents (87%) were satisfied with the days of the week that the free hours were available and a similar proportion (83%) were satisfied with the time slots in which the free hours were available.
- The majority of parents were able to decide when to use their free hours choosing either all or most of the times and days of the week. Among the most commonly used

providers, playgroups or playschools were able to accommodate this choice the most (83% of users) and childminders the least (52%).

- On average around a third of parents said that the availability of free hours made it easier for them to work (38%), do a voluntary activity (35%), study (34%), look for work (29%) or do training (29%).

#### *Why are some parents not using the entitlement at all?*

- The main reasons for not using the free entitlement for non-users were lack of awareness (33%) and parental preference (25%). Only a relatively small proportion of barriers related to inflexibility of childcare providers (4%).
- There were no systematic channels of information on the entitlement and most parents (53%) first found out about the free hours through contact with their childcare providers.
- Parents from black and minority ethnic communities, those living in London, and those from workless households (both couples and lone parents), were less likely than average to use the free entitlement at all.

#### *Why are some parents using less than the 15 hours they are entitled to?*

- The main reasons for not using the full 15 hours were constraints imposed by childcare providers (e.g. dictating times and days of use) and parental preferences (e.g. choosing to care for their child themselves) (38% and 39% respectively).
- The qualitative research found that some parents preferred to increase the number of free hours they used per week as their child became older. In accordance with this, the proportion of children receiving their entitlement in full was lower among those aged three to three-and-a-half compared to children aged three-and-a-half to four (43% and 64% respectively).

#### *What demand is there for greater flexibility in the way the entitlement is delivered?*

- While general awareness of the entitlement was high, parents were less aware of the Government's parameters on how and when the free hours can be delivered. The qualitative interviews showed that parents didn't think of the entitlement in terms of flexibility and were generally not aware that they could use the free hours flexibly (i.e. accessing them in different configurations, such as three hours a day over five days or five hours a day over three days).
- Parents interviewed in both the qualitative strand and the telephone survey were generally positive about the potential flexibility of the entitlement (once they were aware of its parameters) but it was seen by some qualitative interview respondents as less flexible for working parents.
- There were varying levels of demand among parents for greater flexibility in the delivery of the free hours, including:
  - enabling the use of the free hours during school holidays in particular, but also at the weekend, over lunchtime and in the early morning and evening;
  - facilitating the gradual increase in hours as children get older;
  - relaxing the constraints over the days and times when the free hours can be used, including allowing more hours on a particular day and/or allowing the use of free hours on more days of the week;
  - allowing the use of the free hours to two-year-olds and also to five-year-olds as part of after-school childcare.

## **Views of the free entitlement**

Overall satisfaction with the free entitlement was very high: 88 per cent among survey respondents. Levels of satisfaction were not as high but still overwhelmingly positive regarding the availability of the free hours during days of the week, availability of time slots during the day, and the number of childcare providers offering the free hours (87%, 83% and 71% respectively). Satisfaction with the provision of free early education among parents who worked irregular hours and/or shifts was in line with overall satisfaction. Part-time workers and those working regular hours were more likely than the average to say that days and time slots of free entitlement was making it *easier* for them to work (53% and 44% compared to 38% overall).

## **Accessing the free entitlement**

Eighty-four per cent of eligible respondents said that their child was either receiving free hours of early education and/or was attending a reception class at a primary or infants' school. Excluding those whose children had already started school, 55 per cent said their child received some or all of their entitlement to free hours.

Use of the free hours and/or primary school was higher among working parents than non-working parents (89% compared to 76%). White parents were also more likely than Black and minority ethnic parents to say that their child received free hours and/or attended school (87% compared to 67%).

The most common providers of the free hours were nursery schools (47%), playgroups and pre-schools (22%) and nursery classes (22%). Day nurseries and childminders were less common (3% and 1% respectively).

Of those receiving the free hours, 71 per cent said they used all 15 hours (or more) and 25 per cent were partial users (4% did not know).

The qualitative research found that some parents preferred to increase the number of free hours they use per week as their child gets older because they feel the child is too young to spend the full 15 hours in an early education setting when only three years old. The proportion of children aged three to three-and-a-half using the entitlement was less than that of children aged three-and-a-half to four (78% compared to 86%) and the proportion of full users was also lower (67% compared to 74%).

## **Communications**

Basic awareness of the free early education entitlement was high (81%) but awareness of the specific conditions of the entitlement was significantly lower (e.g. between 41% and 49% said they were unaware that the free hours can be used between up to two providers, that the full 15 hours have to be used over at least three days, and that they can be used with certain childminders). Evidence from the qualitative interviews consistently showed that parents tended not to receive the full information about the free hours but only what they needed to know in order to apply, such as when the child becomes eligible and the allowance of 15 free hours per week. This means that many parents are unlikely to find out about the full flexibilities that are possible within the parameters of the free entitlement.

There are no systematic channels for disseminating information about the free entitlement. Provision of information appears to be haphazard and evidence from the telephone survey shows that those groups that are relatively deprived or are not in work are less well informed



about the free hours. This includes parents on lower incomes (under £20,800), households with couples where neither of them was working or lone parents who were not in work (72%, 65% and 63% aware of the free hours respectively compared to 81% overall).

Awareness was also lower among parents from ethnic minorities (61% aware compared to 85% for White parents) and those living in London (61% compared to the average of 81%). Among parents with children who are currently eligible non-users and not in education, awareness was also significantly lower compared to users (53 % have heard about the free hours compared to 95% among full users). Most parents (53% among those interviewed in the telephone survey) first find out about the free hours at the point of contact with childcare providers; those parents who do not use formal childcare are less likely to find out about the free entitlement.

### **Reasons for non-use or partial use of the free early education**

The research identified three distinctive groups of issues related to non-use or partial-use of the free early education. These included:

- lack of awareness of the free early education entitlement;
- restrictions in delivery of free early education by childcare providers – these included predominantly lack of extra sessions and provider not offering more free hours;
- parental preferences and attitudes – these included parents wanting to look after the child themselves or spend more time with them, the child being too young or not ready or preference for informal care.

Findings from the telephone survey showed that among *non-users*, lack of awareness was the most common barrier to using the free entitlement (33% of the issues mentioned were related to this), with reasons for non-use related to parental attitudes or preferences coming close in importance (25% of all issues were classified under this category). Barriers to using the free entitlement, which were related to inflexibilities in the delivery of the provision by childcare providers, were a relatively insignificant barrier for non-users (4%).

Among *partial users* (those who use some, but not all of the 15 free hours per week) the main reasons for not using the entitlement were due to restrictions imposed by the childcare providers (38%) and parental preferences (39%). Lack of awareness did not represent a significant barrier among this group (6%)

### **Desire for change**

While satisfaction was high and expectations of flexibility relatively low, the research did highlight a number of areas in which parents would like to see greater flexibility in the delivery of the free early education entitlement. However, when asked what one change they would make to the free entitlement, a common responses were variants on there being no need for change (28% of all suggestions given), suggesting that there is a significant core level of satisfaction with the existing way that the free entitlement was delivered – though 56 per cent of respondents did suggest possible changes.

There was clearly a desire for greater flexibility generally about when parents could use the free hours so as to meet their individual or family needs (17% of all suggestions related to this issue).

Relaxing the constraints over the days and times when the entitlement can be used was a key issue related to improving flexibility. When asked how they would like to change the

times or days of the free hours they were using, 18 per cent expressed preference for using the free hours over a *full* day, and some suggestions from the qualitative interviews discussions related to changing the free entitlement so that parents could use the hours on *fewer days* (for example over two days) or more hours on one day.

Twenty-eight per cent of survey respondents said that it would be *very* important for them to be able to use the free hours in the school holidays *and* that they would be *very* likely to use such a flexibility. There was also some demand for using the entitlement at weekends (3%), morning or before school (3%), evening or after school (2%) and over lunchtime (2%) (all these suggestions were spontaneously suggested by respondents in a response to an open question).

There was evidence from both the telephone survey and the qualitative research that there was demand for an option of increasing the use of free hours as the child grew older. Seventy per cent of survey respondents said that it was *very* important to be able to increase free hours as their child gets older.

There was some demand for using the free entitlement for younger children (i.e. those aged under three years: 8% made this suggestion). Furthermore, 60 per cent of survey respondents said they would have been *very* likely to use the free entitlement before their child turned three if this option was available and out of these fifty per cent said they would use this option even if it meant having fewer hours to use later on.

There was also some interest in being able to use the free hours after the child has turned five where parents can use free hours towards childcare needed after school (2% of survey respondents suggested this change when asked how the free entitlement could be improved).

## Conclusions and implications

This research was commissioned to help understand how take-up of the free entitlement to early education could be increased, both by reducing the proportion of non-users and increasing the number of hours taken up by partial users. In particular, we were asked to look at how improved flexibility of the offer might increase use of the free entitlement.

Among both non-users and partial users, parental preferences and attitudes play an important part in the decisions about whether, and how much, to use the free hours whereas the flexibility of the entitlement was largely not an issue. Such preferences will always mean that some people choose not to use their entitlement, or not to use all of it. However, many respondents in the qualitative research emphasised the importance to them of the social development advantages for their children in attending formal childcare so further information on this may encourage some non-users and partial users to take up the offer.

For non-users, the main barrier was a lack of awareness of the free offer. A key finding has been the lack of any systematic way of informing parents of the free hours. The haphazard way in which parents find out about the free hours (most hear about it through existing childcare providers) means that more deprived or marginalised families are less likely to find out. To overcome this bias there needs to be a way in which *all* families can be informed about the offer. One way might be to inform all parents via Child Benefit mailings a few months before their child becomes eligible. Changes to Child Benefit will soon mean this is no longer a universal benefit but this would overcome some of the bias in the current arrangements.

In particular, there should be specific strategies for informing:

- parents who do not currently use formal childcare, possibly through GPs or health visitors;
- parents from Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, including information translated into the main community languages;
- parents who are not in work; and
- parents who are on low incomes or receiving benefits.

For partial users, the second main obstacle to greater use of the free entitlement was inflexibility in the delivery of the free hours by childcare providers. Although there was little *expectation* of flexibility, there was certainly *interest in improving* the flexibility of the free entitlement. Changes to flexibility might include:

- the ability to use the free hours during the school holidays and, to a lesser degree, at weekends, early morning, over lunchtime or in the evening;
- the freedom to increase the number of hours over time;
- the ability to access the free hours before the age of three or after the child turns five;
- ability to use the free hours over fewer than three days or more hours in a single day;

Some of these changes could be agreed in principle relatively easily by the Government but their implementation would involve changes in practices by childcare providers. Not all providers would easily be able to extend their provision. For example, those attached to primary schools might find it difficult to operate in the school holidays when hitherto they have been closed.

All providers would need a degree of certainty about the number of places that would be filled at any time. They would need to plan the levels of staffing required and the possible associated costs of increasing the flexibility of their offer. This might mean some form of incentivisation by central or local government to enable greater flexibility. In the current economic climate, a starting point might be a dialogue with providers about changes in flexibility that might be implemented at little or no cost.

Parental approval of, and support for, the free entitlement is very high. Any changes to the current provision would need to ensure that the existing, highly-valued free entitlement continues to be available to parents. And any changes to flexibility will need to meet the family and employment needs of parents as well as being workable for providers.

# 1. Introduction

This report covers findings from three strands of a research project investigating the use by parents of the free entitlement to 15 hours per week of early education.

## 1.1 Background

All three- and four-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours per week of free early education for 38 weeks of the year (known as the free entitlement). Children become eligible for a free place from 1 September, 1 January or 1 April (the start of the term), following their third birthday. This eligibility continues until they reach compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday), though many start school before this.

Local authorities are required in legislation to make available free early years provisions for every eligible child in their area. The parameters of the free entitlement are set out in a Department for Education Code of Practice.<sup>1</sup> This sets out to local authorities a national framework for delivery of the free entitlement. These limits are not what local authorities should make available to parents but are parameters within which the local flexible entitlement should operate. Some of the main parameters are:

- sessions should be between a minimum of two-and-a-half hours and a maximum of 10 hours;
- the free hours can be used between 8am and 6pm, over at least three days (if the maximum 15 hours are taken);
- children qualify for the free hours over a period of no fewer than 38 weeks per year (for many providers this means that the free hours are available during school term-time only);
- and the hours can be shared between a maximum of two childcare providers.

Free early education places are available at a range of early years settings, including nursery schools and classes, children's centres, day nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools and certain registered childminders.

The Department for Education (DfE) estimates that five percent of three- and four-year-olds were not accessing their free entitlement<sup>2</sup> and around one third were not using all of their free hours.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the Department wanted to explore parents' views on the delivery of the free entitlement in order to find out how take-up could be improved. This would support one of the Department's key priorities, namely to make the delivery of the free entitlement more flexible in order to increase take-up and maximise child development benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> Code of Practice for Local Authorities on Delivery of Free Early Years Provision for 3 & 4 year olds (Department for Education, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> According to DfE Statistical First Release (DfE: Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England - January 2011) in January 2011, the number of three- and four-year-olds benefiting from some free early education (where each child is counted once) was 1,224,465 or 95% of the 3 and 4 year old population. By implication, 5% did not use any free early education.

<sup>3</sup> According to estimates in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2010 (Department for Education, 2012), 68% of parents using the entitlement used the full 15 hours or more and 32% used less than 15 hours.

## 1.2 Overall research objectives

The overarching aims of the study were to:

- measure and understand parents' usage of the free entitlement;
- understand awareness of the provision;
- explore the views and experiences of parents who **use** or **do not use** the free entitlement and reasons for this, focusing specifically on barriers to usage;
- find out the preferred way of accessing the free entitlement among parents;
- investigate where the demand for improving the flexibility of the free entitlement lies.

## 1.3 Methodology

### Overall research approach

The research approach consisted of three strands: 1) *qualitative* research with parents, including 40 in depth interviews; 2) a *quantitative* telephone survey of 801 parents; 3) *secondary analysis* of data from the 2010 Childcare Survey.

The qualitative interviews and telephone survey interviews were conducted with parents who had taken part in the 2010 Childcare Survey<sup>4</sup> and agreed to be recontacted for research purposes. The respondents were originally sampled from Child Benefit records.

A key aim for both the qualitative and quantitative interviews was to interview three main types of parents depending on their usage of the free entitlement:

- parents whose children were accessing the full 15 free hours – **full users**;
- parents whose children were accessing some but not all 15 free hours (1-14 hours) – **partial users**; and parents whose children were not using any of the free hours – **non-users**.

### Qualitative methodology

In total, 40 interviews were completed with parents who took part in the latest Childcare Survey from 2010. All interviews were conducted face-to-face by Ipsos MORI researchers. Each interview lasted around one hour. The interviews followed a “discussion guide” designed by Ipsos MORI in consultation with the Department. A copy of the final topic guide is appended to this report.

### Qualitative respondent profile

The recruitment criteria were set in consultation with the Department (see Table 1). In order to explore barriers *different* to those related to lack of knowledge about the free early education (lack of knowledge was likely to explain some of the non-use of the entitlement) parents who were *not aware* of the entitlement were screened out of the qualitative research. As such, all parents who took part in the qualitative interviews had already heard of the free entitlement.

### Table 1

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<sup>4</sup> Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2010, Department for Education (2012)

Respondent profile for qualitative interviews			
		Quota	Achieved
Usage of free entitlement	Full	10	14
	Partial	20 ( <i>includes up to 5 past partial users</i> )	19
	Non	10	7
GOR	London	at least 8	8
	South East	at least 8	13
	North East	at least 8	7
	West Midlands	at least 8	6
	East Midlands	n/a	6
Urban/Rural	Urban	at least 10 (not all London)	24
	Suburban	at least 10	9
	Rural	at least 10	7
Age of child	3 years - 3.5 years	at least 8	11
	3.5 years - 4 years	at least 8	15
	a range of 4 year olds	at least 10 (5 of these can be with children who have started school in Sep 2011)	14
Number of children in household	One child	at least 10	5
	Two or more children	at least 15	35
Household composition	One-parent household	at least 10	10
	Two-parent household	at least 10	30
Household income	Under £20,000	at least 10	13
	£20,000 and over	at least 10	27
Working status	Working	at least 10	15
	Not working	at least 10	20
	Unknown	n/a	5
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>40</b>

## Telephone survey methodology

Fieldwork took place between 27 February and 18 March 2012 and the average interview length was 21 minutes. The original target was to interview over 1,000 parents by drawing a sample from participants of the 2010 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents<sup>5</sup> who had agreed to be recontacted for the purposes of further research. Ideally we would have sampled only from parents whose children were currently eligible for the free early education, however, it transpired that there was an insufficient number in this group who agreed to be recontacted or who were contactable. Because of this, it was necessary to broaden the sample criteria to three groups:

- parents whose child would **soon be eligible** for the free entitlement (once they had turned three years old),
- parents whose children were eligible at the time of the fieldwork (referred to as **currently eligible**), and
- parents whose children had been **recently eligible** but who were not any longer as they had started school.<sup>6</sup>

This was considered to be justifiable as parents whose children were eligible until recently would have had to make decisions about childcare and early education in the relatively recent past and so their recall should be fairly reliable. Parents whose children were due to become eligible from April 2012 would be making – or would be about to make – decisions on their own children’s early education and childcare. Respondents in this latter group might therefore be expected to be able to answer questions about those decisions and the factors underlying them.

At the end of the fieldwork, the actual number of interviews achieved was 801. The main reason for the shortfall was that many of the telephone numbers collected during the original survey fieldwork were no longer good or valid numbers. A longer fieldwork period would have helped to increase response among some harder to contact groups but it is unlikely that this alone would have taken the achieved sample very close to the 1,000 plus target. Statistics relating to survey response and the socio-demographic profile of the achieved sample can be found in the appendices.

All interviewer supervisors were briefed by the Ipsos MORI research team before the start of fieldwork. Around 10 per cent of interviews were monitored via routine listening and edit checks and at least 15 per cent of respondents were recontacted to confirm the interview was conducted properly and key questions were asked and accurately coded.

The final data have been weighted by government office region, urban/rural groupings, ethnicity of respondent and couple status/work status to the known profile of the eligible sample from the 2010 Childcare Survey.

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<sup>5</sup> The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2010 was a face-to-face in-home survey of over 6,700 respondents in England. It used a stratified random sample design using HM Revenue and Customs’ Child Benefit records as the sample frame. The sample was selected from all recipients claiming benefit for a child aged 0-14 years and included a boost sample of parents of 2-4 year olds.

<sup>6</sup> The main eligibility groups: those born between September and December 2006 who would no longer be eligible at the time of fieldwork but would have recently been eligible (in practice up to at least July 2011); those born between January 2007 and December 2008 who would still be eligible up to the end of March 2012; and those born between January and March 2009 who would become eligible from April 2012.

We carried out a significant non-response analysis including regression modelling of the drivers of non-participation. The main change to the weighting as a result was the inclusion of the interaction of couple status (couple or lone parent) and work status (both working, one working, neither working).

The term 'free early education' was referred to as 'free hours' or 'free childcare' throughout the telephone survey questionnaire for ease of understanding among survey respondents.

### **Terminology – “parents” and “respondents”**

The respondents in both the qualitative study and the telephone survey are referred to interchangeably as “parents” or “respondents”. These terms should be taken to include step-parents, adoptive parents, foster parents and legal guardians.

### **Secondary analysis methodology**

The secondary analysis of data from the 2010 Childcare Survey was intended to complement analysis already carried out on that data<sup>7</sup> and, particularly, to focus on use, partial-use and non-use of the free entitlement and on flexibility issues.

With the DfE team, we initially drew up a number of hypotheses about possible links between take-up of the free entitlement and flexibility. In some cases, a lack of available data necessitated modifying or dropping the original hypotheses. Where data were available, we identified a number of dependent and independent variables and carried out bivariate analyses to see whether there was any indication of a significant relationship.

Where a significant bivariate relationship appeared to exist, we included the relevant variables in one or more of five multiple logistic regression models relating to the hypotheses.

### **Odds ratios**

In the description of the secondary analysis, an odds ratio (OR) greater than 1 indicates higher odds of using the free entitlement, and an odds ratio of less than 1 indicates lower odds, compared to the reference category.

### **Conventions for presenting data**

Unless otherwise stated, all percentages quoted are based on weighted data and all base sizes are unweighted.

In tables and charts:

‘-’ indicates zero;

‘\*\*’ indicates a percentage less than 0.5%.

Unless stated otherwise, differences highlighted in the text of the report are significant at the 95% level.

All subgroup differences in tables have been marked in bold and the cell highlighted in grey.

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<sup>7</sup> Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2010, Department for Education (2012)



## 2. Use of childcare and important aspects of provision

This chapter covers parents' use of the different types of childcare available to them. Before trying to understand their decisions on early years education and childcare, we needed to find out what arrangements parents had put in place for their children. In both the qualitative study and the telephone survey therefore, we asked parents to describe their general childcare arrangements. The patterns of care that parents described formed the basis of subsequent questions and discussions. This enabled us to find out how parents came to choose particular arrangements and what preferences and barriers played a part in their decisions.

### 2.1 Children attending primary school

In the telephone survey, we asked all parents of children aged four and five whether their children attended a primary school, including a nursery or reception class attached to a primary school. Sixty-eight per cent of children aged four to five attended primary school full time, with 22 per cent attending part time (see Table 2). Ten per cent of children aged four to five years did not attend primary school.

**Table 2**

Attendance at primary school for four- and five-year-olds	
	Percentage of all children aged 4 and 5
<i>Base: All respondents with a child or children aged 4 or 5 n = 536 respondents or 559 children aged 4 or 5.</i>	%
Attending primary school full-time	68%
Attending primary school part-time	22%
Not attending primary school	10%
Don't know	*

For those children aged four who attended school, we asked the respondent a further question about the type of the class that the child attended. Fifty-six per cent of children aged four attending primary school were in a reception class with the remaining 44 per cent attending a nursery class (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

Attendance at a nursery class or reception class for children aged four	
	Percentage of all children aged 4
<i>Base: All respondents with a child or children aged 4 attending school full-time or part-time. Unweighted n = 299 respondents or 306 children aged 4.</i>	%
Attending a nursery class	44%
Attending a reception class	56%

Where the respondent had a child aged five attending school, we asked whether their child/children attended a nursery class, reception class or Year 1 class. Almost all (97%) of the 191 five year old children attended a reception class.

## 2.2 The use of a reference week in the telephone survey

To focus respondents' minds in the telephone survey, we asked them about the most recent week ending on the preceding Sunday. Where this week fell in school holidays, we asked respondents about the most recent week that fell during term-time. Using a reference week in this way meant that respondents did not have to make a judgement about what happened in a "typical" week and could instead concentrate on what actually did happen in the week specified.

## 2.3 Who looks after the children?

The telephone survey questionnaire asked parents in detail about a specific "reference" child born between September 2006 and March 2009. Where there was more than one such child in the family, the interviewing programme randomly selected one as the reference child. Interviewers then asked respondents who had looked after the reference child on each day of the previous week. Interviewers probed for *all* the people or organisations that looked after the child on each day of the week, rather than just the *main* provider of childcare. Table 4 summarises the findings for Mondays to Fridays, for the weekend, and for the whole week.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) reported using some kind of formal early education and childcare during Monday to Friday in the reference week; the remaining 37 per cent did not. If primary schools are included in the analysis, 92 per cent of parents used formal early education and childcare during Monday to Friday while the remaining eight per cent used only informal (this would include the respondent's ex-partner, the child's grandparents or older sibling, friends and relatives) and/or parental childcare. Differences between socio-economic sub-groups were generally small and few were statistically significant.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> We analysed daily use of formal and informal care by a number of subgroups: region, rural/urban area, ethnicity of respondent, benefits, household income, disability and household/employment composition. Because figures for formal and informal care vary from day to day, there were few consistent patterns across the reference week and little that is both consistent and statistically significant. There is some evidence that those receiving benefits (other than Child Benefit) used informal care more than those who received Child Benefit only. Low income households made slightly more use of informal care than the highest income households who, in turn, used formal care more. Respondents with a disability were slightly more likely to use informal care and less likely to use formal care than parents without a disability. Households with two parents where both were working were more likely to use formal care than average. Lone parents who were not working tended to be less likely than average to use formal care. There were no significant differences in day by day use formal and informal care by respondent's ethnicity or urban/rural areas.

**Table 4**

Who looked after the reference child during the reference week: summary table for <i>all</i> providers of early education and childcare			
	Monday to Friday	Saturday and Sunday	Whole week
<i>Base: All respondents (n=801)</i>	%	%	%
Respondent	93%	97%	99%
Respondent's spouse or partner	40%	67%	70%
Reception class at a primary or infants school	37%	-	37%
Nursery school	29%	-	29%
Nursery class attached to primary or infants school	14%	-	14%
Playgroup or pre-school	12%	-	12%
Childminder	8%	-	8%
After school club/activities	7%	1%	8%
Breakfast club	3%	-	3%
Day nursery	2%	-	2%
Nanny or au pair	1%	*	1%
Babysitter	*	*	*
Special day school or nursery	*	-	*
Holiday club	-	*	*
<b>All users of formal early education and childcare providers</b>	63%	1%	64
<b>All users of formal care including primary or infants school</b>	92%	1%	92
The child's grandparents	23%	8%	26%
Another relative	5%	2%	6%
A friend or neighbour	4%	1%	5%
Ex-partner/ex-spouse/child's other parent (resident elsewhere)	2%	3%	4%
The child's older sibling	1%	1%	2%

<b>Informal care or parental care only</b>	8%	99%	8%
<b>Parental care only</b>	6%	87%	5%
Other nursery education provider	*	*	1%
Other childcare provider (not specified)	2%	*	2%
Note: percentages total more than 100 as respondents could choose multiple options. "Don't know" details relating to two children have been excluded from this table.			

Among respondents whose child was currently eligible for the free hours, use of formal early education and childcare was 69 per cent.

As would be expected, the pattern of childcare at weekends was very different with almost no use of any formal childcare providers and a greater reliance on the respondent and her/his spouse or partner.

Among respondents with children currently eligible for free entitlement hours, there was almost no difference in the use of formal childcare by the age of the child before entering primary school. Use of formal childcare was more common among working than non-working respondents.

Those working full time were more than twice as likely as average (20% compared to 10%) to use more than 30 hours of formal childcare per week. Conversely, parents who were not working were more likely than those in full time work to use up to 15 hours of formal childcare per week (63% compared to 50%).

## 2.4 Important aspects of childcare provision

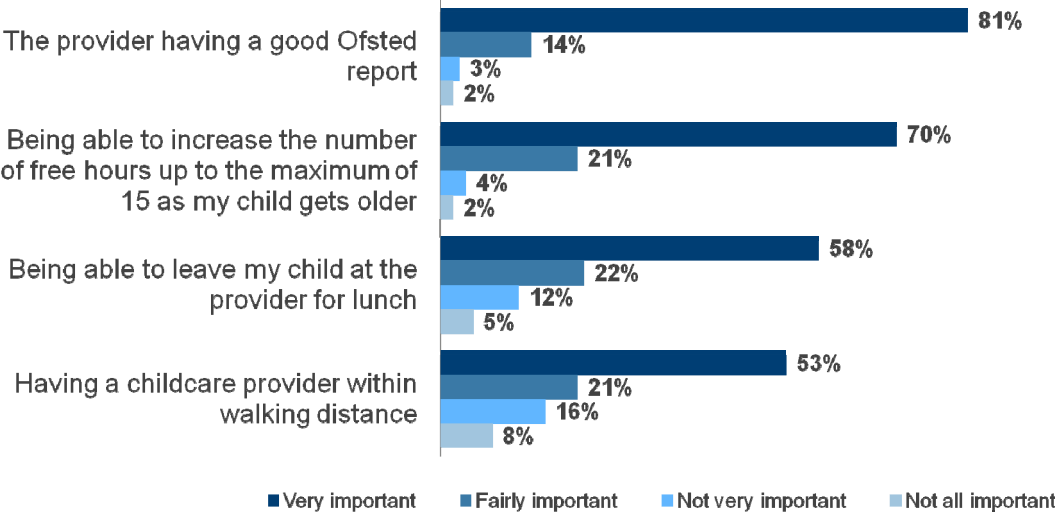
Linked to the research objective of exploring potential for improving the flexibility of the entitlement, we asked parents about what aspects of the service were most important to them and what aspects they would like to change.

Respondents were asked about the importance of a number of factors about the provision of childcare and the free hours (see Figure 1). While all aspects were deemed *very important* by a majority of respondents, quality of childcare appeared to be the most important factor: 81 per cent said it was very important to them that the provider should have a good Ofsted report.

The next most important factor was the ability to increase the number of free hours used over time (up to the maximum of 15) as their child grew older. This question was included as findings from the qualitative study suggested this was an important issues for some parents when their children first became eligible for the free hours. Seventy per cent of respondents rated this as *very important*.

Figure 1

## Importance of provider characteristics



Base: All respondents (801)

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While still rated as very important by more than half of parents, the remaining two factors – being able to leave a child with the provider over lunchtime (rated very important by 58%) and having a childcare provider within walking distance (rated very important by 53%) – were less salient to parents as a whole (though of course they are of very particular importance to some parents).

The secondary analysis of data from the 2010 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents found no statistically significant relationship between parents' perceptions of the quality of local childcare and their making use of the free entitlement.

### 3. Using the free entitlement

Children become eligible for the 15 hours of free early education from 1 September, 1 January or 1 April (or the childcare at the start of the school term following their third birthday) and this entitlement continues until they reach compulsory school age (the start of term following their fifth birthday). In practice, however, most children now start primary school before compulsory school age.

#### 3.1 Receiving free hours

All respondents were asked whether their child had received any of the free hours of early education funded by the government.

Among all respondents, 45 per cent reported that they received at least some free hours and 52 per cent said they did not (3% said they did not know). Among those whose children were *currently* eligible, these figures were 55 per cent and 43 per cent respectively.

When taking into account the fact that some eligible children were known to be at school, 84 per cent of respondents with a child currently eligible said either that their child received some free hours and/or that their child attended primary school. The latter, unless provided by a private school, can be considered as free early education when received before compulsory school attendance age.

Similar statistics provided in the Department for Education’s Statistical First Release (SFR 13/2011), which are based on administrative records of claims for free hours and population estimates, show that 95 per cent of three- and four-year-olds were accessing some free early education during 2010. The difference between the two figures (84% and 95%) is probably explained by the fact that not all parents are aware that they are receiving the free hours (this was noted during qualitative strand of this research) and so there may be a degree of underreporting in this survey.

The youngest eligible children (those aged three to three-and-a-half) were less likely to receive free hours than older children, suggesting that some parents delay the start of using the free hours until they feel their child is ready (this was also reflected in some of the qualitative interviews).

**Table 5**

Receipt of free hours and attendance at primary school by age of eligible child		
	Reported receiving free hours	Reported receiving free hours and/or attending primary school
<i>Base: All respondents with currently eligible children (n=653)</i>	%	%
Child aged 3 years to 3 years 6 months	78%	78%
Child aged more than 3 years 6 months and less than four years	86%	88%
Child aged four years or more	39%	84%
All with an eligible child	55%	84%

Working parents were more likely than non-working parents to say that their child received free hours in the reference week (62% of working respondents currently eligible for free hours, compared to 46% of non-working respondents). If we include children attending school as well as those receiving free hours of early education, the figures are 89% for working respondents and 76% for non-working respondents.

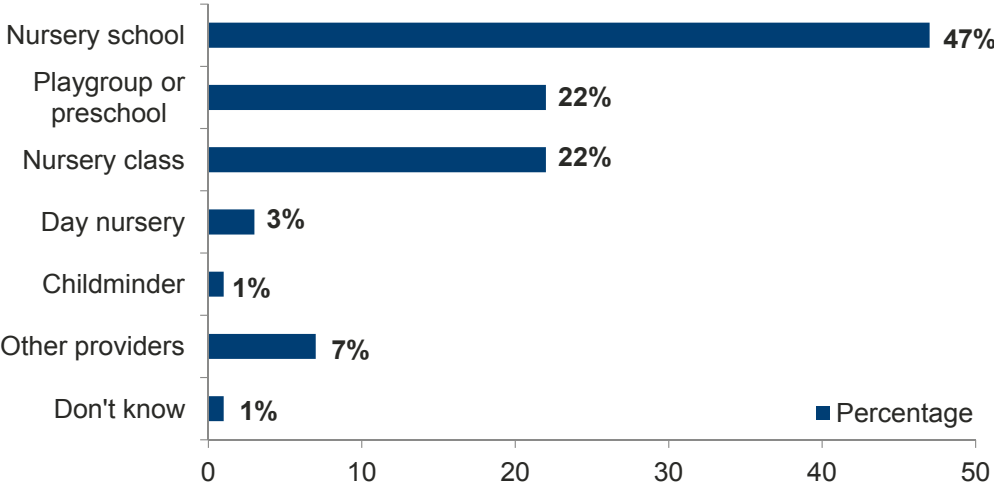
White parents were more likely than parents from Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities to report receiving free hours (48% compared to 32%). Again the figures differ when including children attending school: 87% of White compared to 67% of BME parents.

### 3.2 Childcare providers delivering the free hours

Those parents who reported that their child received free hours of early education in the reference week were then asked a follow-up question to see which providers delivered the free hours (see Figure 2). The most commonly used provider type for the free hours was nursery schools (47%), followed by playgroups or pre-schools and nursery classes attached to a primary or infants school (both 22%).

Figure 2

#### From which providers did respondents receive free hours?



Base: All parents who reported receiving free hours in the reference week (382)

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NB percentages total more than 100 as respondents could choose more than one option.

Although base sizes for some regions were too small to test, there were some significant regional differences in the types of providers delivering the free hours<sup>9</sup>:

- Nursery schools were used more commonly in London (61%), East of England (56%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (55%), and used least in the North West (32%);

<sup>9</sup> It is quite possible that these regional differences reflect different patterns of provision i.e. more of a particular type of setting in one region than another.

- Nursery classes (attached to a primary or infants' school) were used more in the North West (41%) and West Midlands (36%) and used least in the South East (7%); and
- Playgroups or pre-schools were used most in the South East (38%) and East of England (31%) and least in London (8%) and the North West (14%)

Black and minority ethnic respondents made less use of playgroups or pre-schools than White respondents (8% compared to 24%). This may be explained by the relatively high proportion of BME groups in London, where these types of providers are used least.

People with lower household incomes (under £20,800) were more likely than average to use nursery classes attached to a school (33% compared to an average of 21%) and less likely than average to use playgroups or pre-schools (11% compared to 22%).

Table 6 shows details of the main differences in providers of free hours by sub-groups.

**Table 6**

Differences in main providers of free hours for sub-groups			
	Nursery school	Nursery class (attached to a school)	Playgroup or pre-school
<i>Base: All respondents who received free hours in the reference week (n=382)</i>	(n=177) %	(n=76) %	(n=91) %
South East	43%	7%	38%
London	61%	16%	8%
East of England	56%	12%	31%
West Midlands	41%	35%	20%
Yorkshire and the Humber	55%	12%	21%
North West	32%	41%	14%
White respondents	47%	21%	24%
BME respondents	47%	27%	8%
Household income under £20,800	46%	33%	11%
Household income £20,800-£36,399	47%	21%	22%
Household income £36,400-£51,999	50%	16%	26%
Household income £52,000 and over	43%	15%	30%
All respondents	47%	22%	22%

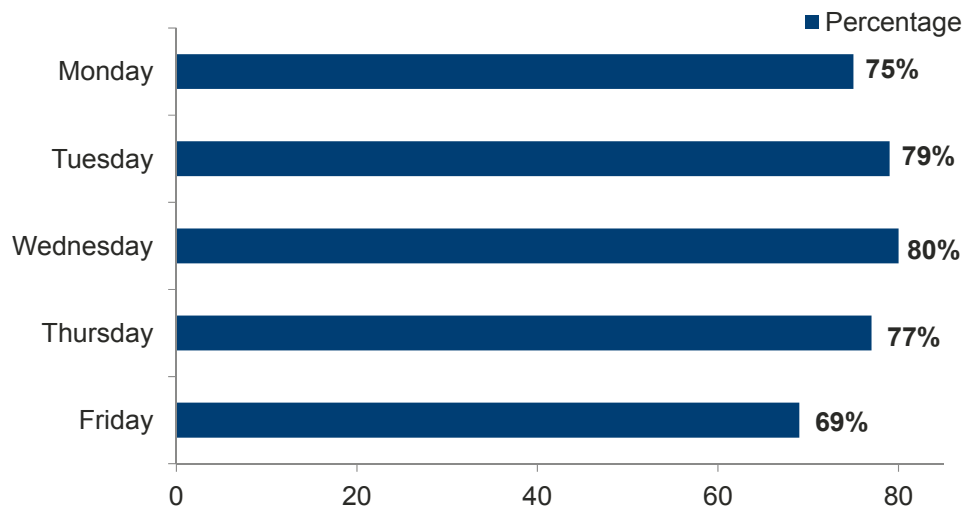
### 3.3 Days on which free hours were received

Parents used the free hours across the whole of the working week, though with use on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday being slightly more common (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**



## Days on which respondents received free hours



Base: All Parents who reported receiving free hours in the reference week (382)

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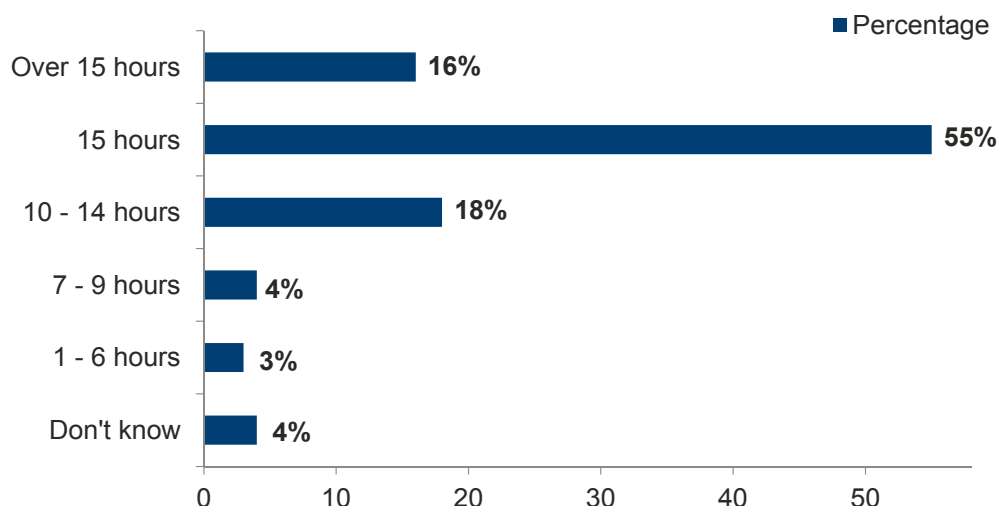
Note: percentages total more than 100 as respondents could choose more than one day.

### 3.4 Number of free hours received per week

Among those who received the free entitlement, 71 per cent said that they received 15 hours or more, i.e. they were full users for the purposes of our analysis (the questionnaire did not restrict respondents to the 15 hour maximum; see Figure 4). Twenty-five per cent of respondents were partial users (i.e. they used some of the free hours but less than the maximum of 15 hours). The mean number of free hours reported by partial users was 11.0 and the median was 12.0.

**Figure 4**

## Number of free hours respondents said they received



Base: All Parents who reported receiving free hours in the reference week (382)

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Partial users were proportionally more common than average in the South East (38% of those receiving free hours). Table 7 shows some of the statistically significant sub-group differences.

**Table 7**

Proportion of recipients of free hours who are partial and full users, by sub-groups		
	Partial users (under 15 hours)	Full users (15 hours or more)
<i>Base: All respondents who reported receiving free hours (n=382)</i>	%	%
South East	38%	58%
South West	35%	59%
East of England	34%	64%
Household income under £20,800	19%	75%
Household income £52,000 and over	33%	63%
White respondents	27%	69%
BME respondents	12%	86%
<b>All who reported receiving free hours</b>	25%	71%

Note: some regional and income sub-groups have been excluded because the differences were not statistically significant.

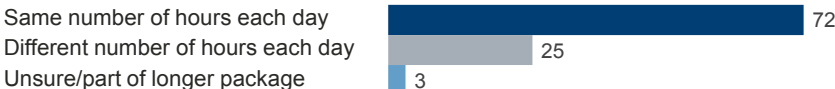
Among recipients of free hours, Black and minority ethnic respondents were less likely to be partial users than White respondents (12% compared to 27%) and more likely to report using 15 hours or more (86% compared to 69%). So while BME respondents were *less likely* than White respondents to report receiving the free hours, they were also *more likely* than White respondents to report being full users.

### 3.5 Number of free hours received per day

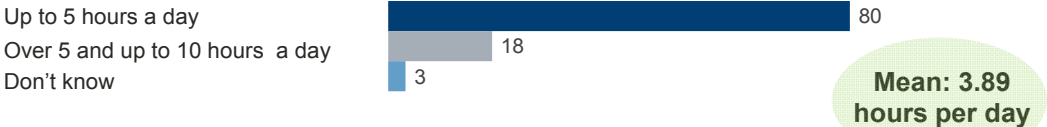
The majority of parents (72%) received the same number of hours each day and for over a quarter of parents (25%) the number of free hours varied each day. The majority (80%) of those who received the same number of hours on each day were using up to five hours (see figure 5). The mean for the number of free hours used each day was 3.9.

**Figure 5**

#### Current pattern of using the free hours



Base: All who receive free hours on more than one day (364)



Base: All who receive the same number of hours each day (250)

### 3.6 Patterns of use of the free hours among qualitative respondents

Findings from the qualitative research provide an insight into some of the existing patterns of use of the free hours for both full and partial users. Table 8 summarises the patterns of accessing the entitlement among parents who took part in the qualitative interviews.

A number of parents interviewed for the qualitative stage of the research were using the free hours in three-hour slots over a number of days (between two and five days) or, where the sessions were longer, these were in six hour blocks. Others used 3.5 hours or four hours spread over a number of days. The model of five-hour slots over three days, which parents

are entitled to as per the Code of Practice.<sup>10</sup>, was not used by the 40 parents who took part in the qualitative interviews.

**Table 8**

Free Entitlement Usage Pattern	
Total number of free hours used per week	Pattern
6 hours	3 hours over 2 days
9 hours	3 hours over 3 days
10.5 hours	3.5 hours sessions over 3 days <sup>11</sup>
12 hours	3 hours over 4 days
13 hours and 45 minutes	2 hours and 45 minutes over 5 days
15 hours	3 hours over 5 days
	6 hours over 2 days and 3 hours on one day
	3 hours over 3 days and 6 hours on one day
	4 hour session over 3 days and 3 hours on one day <sup>12</sup>
	3 full days (pays for the extra hours above the 15 free hours) <sup>13</sup>

### 3.7 Previous users of free hours

Respondents who said they did not currently use the free entitlement to early education were asked if they had used it in the past.

Among those who had **previously** been eligible for the free hours but were not currently eligible (n=104), 82 per cent had used the free entitlement in the past and 18 per cent had not. Of the previous users (n=88), 90 per cent said they used the full 15 hours (or more) while 10 per cent used less than the full entitlement. (Note that previously eligible respondents were not asked about a specific reference week but instead were asked about how many free hours they normally used.)

<sup>10</sup> Code of Practice for Local Authorities on Delivery of Free Early Years Provision for 3 & 4 year olds (September 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Only one parent who took part in the qualitative interviews used this free entitlement pattern.

<sup>12</sup> As above.

<sup>13</sup> As above.

### 3.8 Whether respondents have ever used the free hours

From the questions about current and previous use of the free entitlement, we calculated that 59 per cent of the total achieved sample (n=801) had been a full user at some point, 16 per cent had only been partial users and 24 per cent had never used the free hours (see Table 9). The table also provides the equivalent statistics after excluding the answers of those soon to be eligible (i.e. those who were answering questions about their hypothetical future behaviour).

**Table 9**

Whether respondents have ever used the free hours: full users, partial users and non-users		
	All respondents	All currently or previously eligible for free hours
<i>Base: All respondents / All currently or previously eligible</i>	(n=801) %	(n=759) %
Respondent has ever been a full user	59%	62%
Respondent has been a partial user but not a full user	16%	17%
Respondent has never used the free hours	24%	21%

### 3.9 Future users of the free hours

Respondents who said they did not **currently** use the free entitlement to early education were asked whether they intended to use it **in the future**.

Among those who were currently eligible (n=276), 23 per cent intended to use the free hours at some point in the future, 40 per cent did not intend to use the free hours and 34 per cent said that they thought their child was not, or would not be, eligible. Of those currently eligible but intending to use the free hours in the future, 55 per cent intended to use the full entitlement (or more) and 43 per cent said that they would use less or that it would vary.<sup>14</sup>

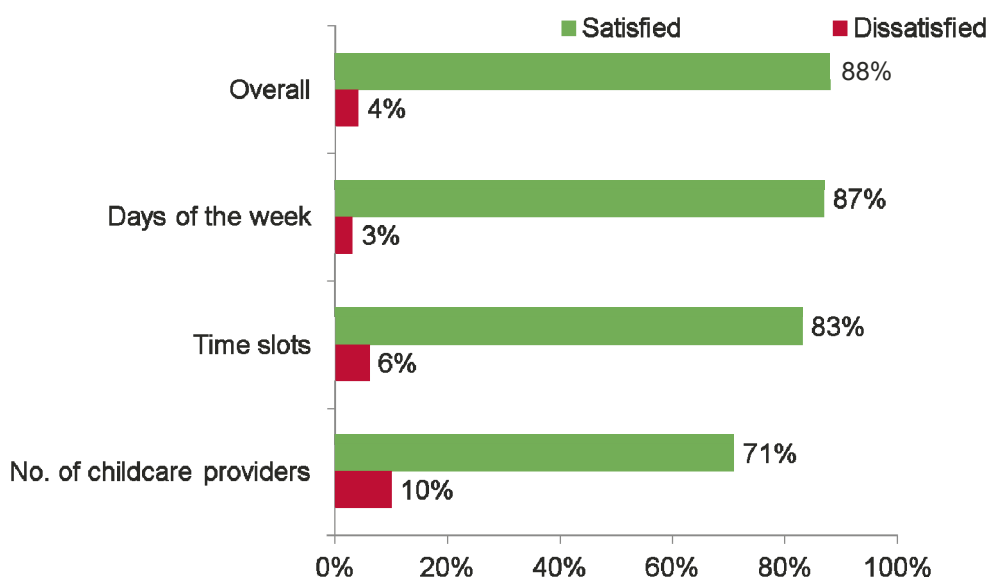
### 3.10 Satisfaction with the free entitlement

There were high levels of satisfaction with the free hours overall with 88 per cent of surveyed parents saying they were satisfied (see Figure 6). Satisfaction with specific aspects of the offer was also high. The majority of parents (87%) said they were satisfied with the days of the week that the free hours were available and a similar proportion (83%) were satisfied with the time slots in which the free hours were available. Satisfaction with the number of childcare providers in the local area offering the free hours was slightly lower, with 71 per cent being satisfied and with 10 per cent being dissatisfied with this.

<sup>14</sup> There were 39 respondents whose children would soon be eligible for the free hours (from April 2012); of these, 93 per cent (though note the low base size) intended to use the free hours at some point in the future and the majority of these said they intended to use the full 15 hours.

Figure 6

## Satisfaction with the free early education



Base: All who were aware of the free hours provision (673)

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Current full users of free early education were significantly more satisfied with the overall provision of free hours than average (95% compared to 88% overall). They were also more satisfied with all three of the other aspects of the free hours provision; the number of childcare providers in the local area offering the free hours (78% compared to 71% average); the days of the week available to them as part of the free hours (94% compared to 87% average) and the time slots available to them (89% compared to 83% average). Parents who were non-users and whose child was not in education were more likely to be dissatisfied with the number of providers in their area (21% compared to 10% overall).

Parents from rural areas were more satisfied with the days of the week available to them as part of the free hours compared to average (92% vs. 87% respectively). Parents from urban areas were more dissatisfied with the time slots available than those from rural areas (7% compared to 2% respectively). Parents living in the South West more likely to be dissatisfied with the number of childcare providers in their area than average (17% dissatisfied compared to 10% overall). However, they were more likely to be satisfied with the days of the week available (96% compared to 87% overall).

Parents with a child aged between three-and-a-half and four-years-old were more likely to report satisfaction with the provision than average (94% compared to 88% overall) as well as with the number of providers in their area (79% compared to 71% overall).

## 4. Views on the flexibility of the free entitlement

In-depth discussions with parents during the qualitative stage of the research helped to illustrate how parents viewed the free early education generally and, more specifically, to identify their views on the flexibility of the offer. This section illustrates the range of views among parents who took part in the qualitative interviews.

### 4.1 Positive views of the provision

Parents who took part in the qualitative interviews were very positive and favourable towards the free entitlement offer. For most parents the free entitlement provided invaluable help towards the cost of childcare. Some parents reported that they would not be able to afford any childcare without it and, as such, the offer presented an incentive to starting childcare. For others, the provision allowed them to increase the number of childcare hours they used without the financial burden or it was seen as a 'real bonus' towards managing the costs of childcare. The provision of free hours was also seen as 'getting something back' for what parents paid into the system through taxes.

### 4.2 Objectives of the provision

Parents viewed the objective of the free entitlement as preparing children for school and incentivising parents (and specifically mothers) to return to work. However, their primary reason for taking up the free entitlement was for their child to benefit from formal childcare. This included getting used to and interacting with other children, learning, language and social development, getting into a routine and generally preparing the child for the transition to school.

**As soon as he was two, because he's an only child, we felt that he needed the interaction with the other children.**

Qualitative interview, Partial user, playschool and grandmothers

**The fact that they teach them, they become more advanced. Since he's been there he's learnt a lot more. I think it's a way for him to be educated, start it early.**

Qualitative interview, Full user, nursery

**I think it's one: to prepare children for school; and secondly, I think it's to help mothers back into work, to give them some time to organise things and start thinking about going back to work.**

Qualitative interview, Partial user, pre-school

Parents often viewed the free entitlement not as childcare provision but as education or as an extension of school. For some parents the free entitlement was closely associated with children attending pre-school, which was often linked to primary schools that the parents wanted their child to attend later. A number of parents in the North East reported that local schools actively promoted free entitlement places as part of pre-school. Pre-school was also

generally preferred to nurseries as it was seen as better equipped and organised for preparing the child for school.<sup>15</sup>

### 4.3 Perception of the free entitlement

In general parents who took part in the qualitative interviews accepted the conditions of the free entitlement without questions. There were no obvious shortfalls that parents pointed to spontaneously and, for many, the interview was the first occasion where they had had occasion to think critically about the offer.

Coupled with that, and one of the themes running through this report, was that parents' understanding of the entitlement did not include any notion of 'flexibility'. The reason for this was not necessarily because of any inherent 'inflexibilities' of the offer but because most parents did not expect something that was free to be flexible and were not aware that they could use the free entitlement *flexibly*. This included accessing the free entitlement using different configurations of hours and days: three hours a day over five days of the week, five hours a day over three days of the week, or using the entitlement of up to 12.5 hours over two days. As such, most parents did not have any expectations that the free entitlement would be flexible.

**I think it fits perfectly. It's a spot-on amount of hours because obviously you want to see your children grow up, you don't want somebody else to be seeing the first things that they do... I think what's on offer is perfect and it is flexible ... I see a lot of mums, we're all fairly happy, I never really hear anybody moan about the entitlement they get. It's fine.**

Qualitative interview, Full user, pre-school

Once parents were presented with the full details of the offer during the interview, they often agreed that it was a generally flexible offer. In particular, the free entitlement was viewed as flexible enough for non-working parents and those who had access to informal care.

Flexibility mattered most in cases where the parents were working. Some said that it would not be easy to fit a job solely around the free entitlement hours unless the parents paid for additional childcare on top of the 15 hours entitlement. As such, there was some demand from parents for improving the flexibility of the offer and this is outlined in the later chapters.

Where parents had encountered issues of inflexibility in relation to using the free entitlement, these were more often related to childcare providers not having capacity, not offering any or any more free hours, or having specific rules of operation (as outlined in detail in later) and tended not to relate to the specific parameters of the entitlement.

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<sup>15</sup> For full definition of the types of childcare providers see section 'Definition of childcare providers' in Appendix.



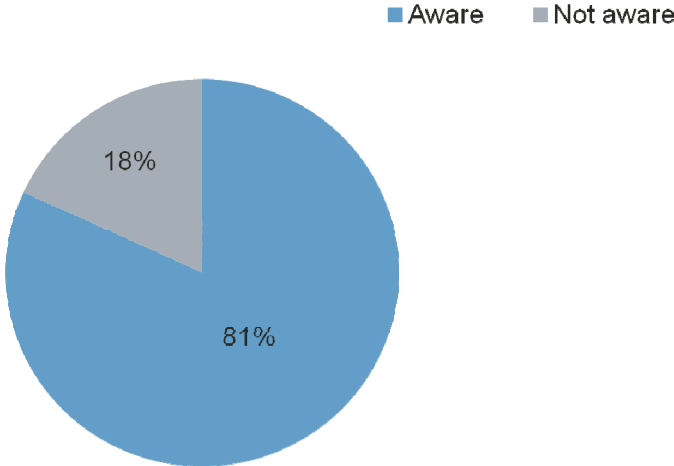
# 5. Accessing information on the free entitlement

## 5.1 Awareness of free hours

General awareness of the free entitlement was very good, though this was to be expected as awareness was likely to be high among the general population given that free early education for three- and four-year-olds is a national and universal entitlement. Furthermore, the survey respondents had previously taken part in the 2010 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, which included questions about the free entitlement. Virtually all parents who were approached at the recruitment stage of the qualitative research had heard the entitlement. Similarly, the majority of parents (81%) in the telephone survey were aware that the government provides some hours of free early education per week for three- and four-year-olds; 18 per cent did not know about this provision (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

### Awareness that the government provides free early education



Base: All Parents (801)  
Less than 1% did not know

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However, there were some wide variations across the different groups of respondents in relation to awareness (see Table 10). Awareness was, not surprisingly, lower among non-users compared to full and partial users (53% of non-users with children not in education were aware of the free hours compared to 95% full users and 94% for partial users).

Similarly, contact with and access to formal childcare also played an important role in relation to awareness of the free hours. Parents who have used parental or informal childcare only were significantly less likely to be aware of the provision than those who used formal childcare (64% compared to 87% respectively).

Awareness was also lower among parents from ethnic minorities (61% compared to 85% for White parents) and those living in London (61% compared to the overall survey figure of

81%). Those living in rural areas were more likely to be aware of the free hours than those in urban areas (88% compared to 80%).

Households with couples where neither of them was working were also significantly less aware of the free entitlement provision (65%), along with lone parents who were not in work (63%) than average (81%).

**Table 10**

Awareness of free early education			
		YES	NO
Base: All parents			
	<i>Base</i>	%	%
<b>Overall</b>	(801)	81	18
<b>Region</b>			
South East	(161)	88	12
London	(99)	61	39
South West	(84)	87	13
East of England	(80)	85	15
East Midlands	(60)	92	8
West Midlands	(85)	83	17
Yorkshire and the Humber	(85)	82	17
North West	(109)	79	21
North East	(37)	79	21
<b>Urban/rural</b>			
Urban	(616)	80	20
Rural	(184)	88	12
<b>Household Benefits</b>			
Child benefit only/none	(356)	89	11
Receive other benefits	(445)	77	23
<b>Household Income</b>			
£0-£20,799	(166)	72	28
£20,800-£36,399	(200)	86	14
£36,400-£51,999	(173)	93	7
£52,000 and over	(183)	90	10

<b>Ethnicity of respondent</b>			
White	(686)	<b>85</b>	14
BME	(113)	61	<b>39</b>
<b>Type of childcare provided (Mon-Fri)</b>			
Parental or informal childcare only	(52)	64	<b>37</b>
Use formal childcare	(530)	<b>87</b>	13
<b>Type of currently eligible free hours user</b>			
Full user	(266)	<b>95</b>	5
Partial user	(111)	<b>94</b>	6
Non-user not in education	(85)	53	<b>47</b>
<b>Household employment</b>			
Couple – both working	(397)	<b>88</b>	12
Couple – one working	(245)	81	19
Couple – neither working	(39)	65	<b>35</b>
Lone parent – working	(56)	90	10
Lone parent – not working	(64)	63	<b>37</b>

The secondary analysis of data from the 2010 childcare survey included an investigation of awareness of the free entitlement among non-users of the free entitlement and, specifically, whether awareness in this group was linked to parents' demographic indicators. In the bivariate analysis, area deprivation (parents in the least deprived areas were more aware than those in the most deprived areas), parents' ethnicity (White parents were more likely than BME parents to be aware of the free hours), parental qualifications (those with A levels and above were more likely to be aware than those with no qualifications) and household income (higher income groups were more likely than parents in the lowest income groups to be aware) were all significantly associated with awareness of the free entitlement.

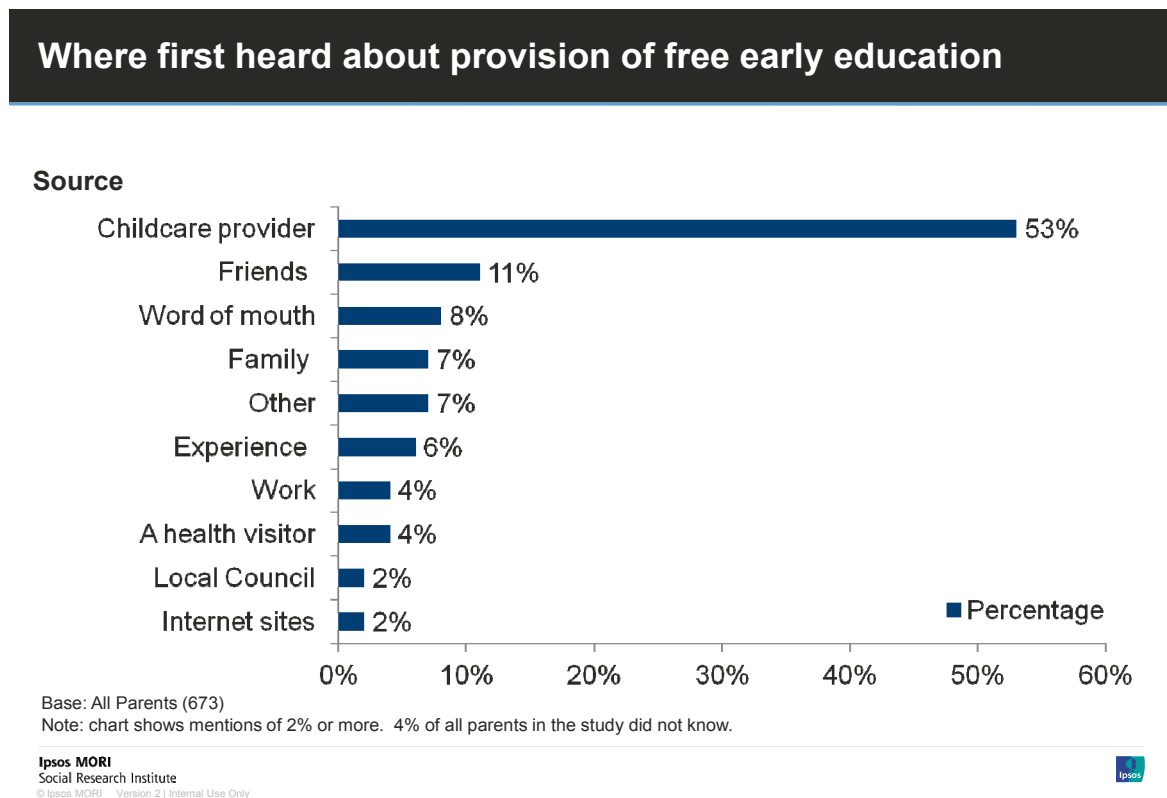
However, when these variables were entered into the regression model and controlled for, only parental qualifications remained significantly related to awareness of the free hours. In this case, it is very probable that qualifications, income, area deprivation and, to an extent, ethnicity are all similarly correlated, with qualifications simply being the most significantly associated variable. In the bivariate analysis, parents with A levels or higher were very much more likely to be aware of the free entitlement than parents with no qualifications (odds ratio = 16.90).

## 5.2 Sources of information about the free entitlement

One of the objectives of the research was to establish how parents found out about the free entitlement. Both the quantitative and qualitative research confirmed that, for the majority of parents, the information about the free entitlement first came from formal childcare providers once the child reached his/her third birthday.

More than half of survey respondents (53%) said they first heard about the provision of free hours of early education per week for three- and four-year-olds from a *childcare provider*. Other sources of information included *friends* (11%), unspecified *word of mouth* (8%), *family* (7%) and previous experience of free entitlement with *older children* (6%). Figure 8 shows the top ten sources where parents reported first hearing about the free entitlement. Subgroup analysis showed that BME parents were more likely to have initially heard about free early education through family members than White parents (15% compared to 6%), whereas White parents were more likely than BME to have heard through their childcare provider (55% compared to 38% respectively).

Figure 8



The qualitative research confirmed that as soon as the child reached their third birthday, parents were usually notified by their childcare provider that their child would soon be eligible for the free hours and were asked to sign a form. Accessing the entitlement appeared to be as simple as finding a provider and 'signing a form'.

**All I've ever done is gone to the pre-school and then they organise everything from there. I didn't have to do anything. They just take care of everything. I don't need to make any applications. I just had to sign something I think. That was it.**

Qualitative interviews, Partial user, pre-school

However, there is a question as to whether parents who, for whatever reason, do not use formal childcare are generally at a disadvantage in relation to finding out about the entitlement and subsequently making use of the 15 free hours a week.

This was evident in the case of one non-user family interviewed in the qualitative research who had not yet sent their child to nursery (but were on a waiting list for a place); the family were not aware that they were eligible for the free hours. In cases such as this, lack of awareness of the free entitlement – stemming from communications channels that do not reach all parents – is likely to present a barrier to using the free hours.

### 5.3 Knowledge of the parameters of the free entitlement

Figure 9 lists the parameters within which the provision of the entitlement operates, as stated in the Code of Practice<sup>16</sup>. Eighty-six per cent of parents interviewed in the telephone survey said they had *definitely* heard about the eligibility starting from the term after the child's third birthday; only 11 per cent had not heard of this parameter.

The next parameter of which parents were most aware stipulates that the free hours *may not be used in the school holidays* (57% definitely aware). The statement about the school holidays was, in fact, inaccurate: the entitlement can be spread across the whole year but in practice many providers only operate during school term-time so this was a genuine constraint for many parents.

The telephone survey confirmed that parents were less aware of some of the parameters including that the free entitlement *cannot be used before 8am or after 6pm* (71% and 64% of parents were not aware), the entitlement *can be used between up to two providers* (49% unaware), *the full 15 hours have to be used over at least three days* (46% unaware), *the entitlement can be used at certain childminders* (41% unaware) and the entitlement *cannot be used at weekends (43% unaware) or during school holidays*<sup>17</sup> (37% unaware).

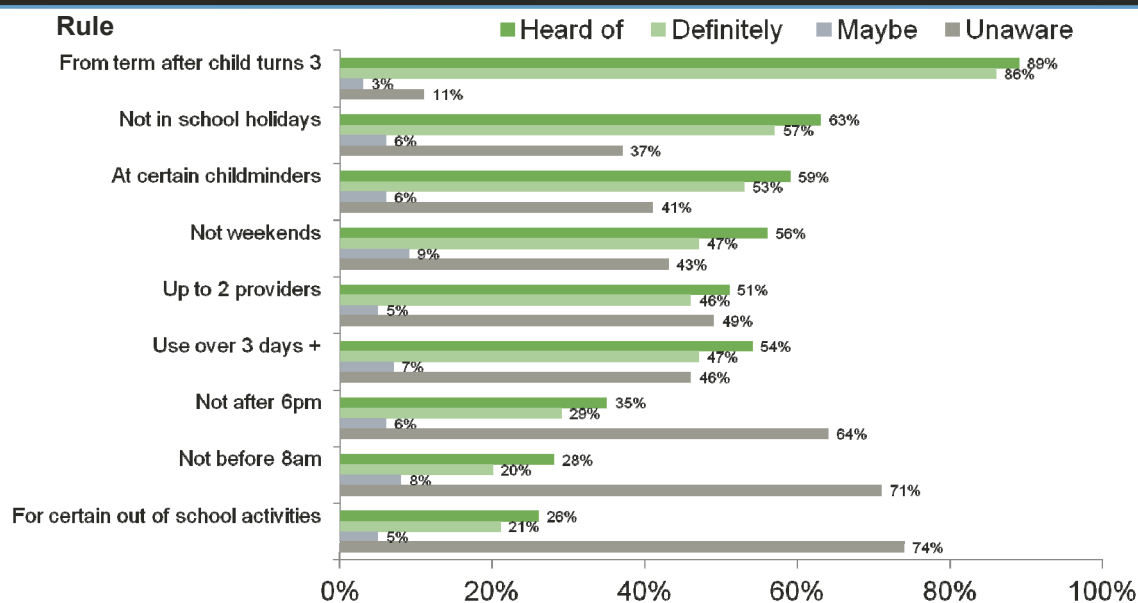
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<sup>16</sup> Code of Practice for Local Authorities on Delivery of Free Early Years Provision for 3 & 4 year olds (September 2010)

<sup>17</sup> While many providers – especially those linked to a primary school – only offer the free entitlement during term-time, there is no central requirement that the entitlement should only be available during the school term. During the research, the qualitative interviewing topic guide and the telephone survey questionnaire both contained references to the free entitlement being unavailable during school holidays. However, most parents who took part in the research were under the impression that this was indeed the rule, possibly because many childcare providers imposed this condition. Because of this, and the way the questions were presented, the research findings were unaffected.

Figure 9

## Awareness of parameters of free early education among parents



Base: All who were aware of the free hours provision. Not all parents were asked the same set of questions about the rules – the base size therefore varies from 539 to 673 for these questions.

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Some of the main issues that came through the qualitative research support the levels of awareness described above; knowledge about the free entitlement among parents was generally limited to the core characteristics of the entitlement. When asked what they knew about the offer, most parents spontaneously mentioned the provision of 15 free hours a week, that children were eligible from the term after their third birthday and the restriction of 38 weeks in the year. For most parents this limit coincided with the school term times and as indeed this was the only option available from childcare providers.

**I just know it starts the term after their third birthday and it's 15 hours a week that you get free. Apart from that, I don't really know much else.**  
Qualitative interviews, Partial user, nursery

The survey showed that parents from ethnic minority communities were less likely to be aware of some of the specific parameters compared to White parents. More ethnic minority parents had not heard that free hours could be shared between up to two providers, compared to White parents (76% compared to 45%) and that children were eligible from the term after they turned three (with 22% not having heard of it, compared to 10% of White parents).

The qualitative interviews provided some further background on the information provision of free early education for parents. Parents who took part in the qualitative interviews did not seem to receive the *full* information about the free entitlement, as provided in the Code of Practice. Knowledge was largely limited to what the childcare provider had supplied, which was usually what the parents needed to know in order to apply for a free place, including when they become eligible and the 38 weeks in the year restriction.

The qualitative study also revealed that there was a degree of misunderstanding among certain non-user families about the free entitlement being a *universal* provision. One of the

non-user families was under the impression that only families on benefits were eligible for the free hours. In contrast, another non-user family reported that they were advised (after calling a number on a free entitlement leaflet) they would not be able to claim the free hours *and* child tax credits at the same time, and that the family would be better off financially with the child tax credits. This example is likely to indicate that this family (or the person or organisation advising them) may have been confusing the free entitlement with childcare vouchers.

## **6. Understanding the reasons for not using the free entitlement**

One of the main objectives of this research was to explore the main reasons for not using the free entitlement and identify barriers to access (where relevant). For the purpose of analysis, the issues are explored separately for the groups of non-users and partial users; both groups were eligible at the time of the fieldwork.

### **6.1 The demographic profile of non-users and partial users**

Identifying the make-up of the groups of non- and partial users of the free entitlement contributes to improving the understanding of the specific reasons for non-usage for each. Non-users constitute a distinct group of parents with specific characteristics, which differ from those of partial and full users. On the other hand, full and partial users have very similar profiles to each other. A statistical profile of each group can be found in Appendix D.

### **6.2 Profile of non-users**

Nine per cent of parents in the survey were classified as 'non-users – currently eligible and not in education'. This group included parents with a child who was currently eligible for the free entitlement but was not using any of it and was not in primary education.

The profile of non-users included a number of distinct demographic characteristics compared to the groups of free entitlement users and the sample overall. Non-users were more likely than the average to be parents from a minority ethnic group (40% compared to 16% overall) or receive Housing Benefit and Income Support (36% compared to 23% overall and 23% compared to 12% overall respectively). There were some significant variations by household employment: non-users were more likely to include households with couples where neither parent was working (17% compared to 6% overall).

The telephone survey found that, geographically, higher proportions of non-users were concentrated in London, as opposed to the other regions, and non-users were more likely to live in urban areas than in rural areas. This may be related to the fact that the proportion of Black and ethnic minorities is higher in London (and urban areas generally) compared to other regions in the country and that such groups make less use of the entitlement (see Table 11).

The secondary analysis of 2010 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents data indicated that there were significant bivariate relationships between use of the free entitlement (that is, any use rather than necessarily use of the full 15 hours) and family type and working status, region, area deprivation and rurality. However, when all of these variables were controlled for in the regression model, only area deprivation and region were still significantly associated with the use of free hours.

Compared to parents living in the most deprived quintile of areas, those in the three least deprived quintiles were significantly more likely to take up the free entitlement (odds ratios of



2.23 for the fifth (least deprived) quintile, 1.91 for the fourth quintile and 2.23 for the third quintile).<sup>18</sup>

After adjusting for other demographic variables, compared to parents living in London, those living in the South West (odds ratio 3.50), West Midlands (2.81), East Midlands (2.62) and Yorkshire and the Humber (2.00) were significantly more likely to use the free hours.

### 6.3 Profile of partial users

As mentioned above, partial users generally tended to have a profile which was similar to that of full users. However, there are certain characteristics that set them apart from full time users. Partial users were more likely than others to be White (94% compared to 84% overall), to have a child with a disability (13% compared to 6% overall), to live in the South East (26% compared to 17% overall) and to use the free hours specifically for playgroup or pre-school (31% compared to 22% overall) (see table 11).

Table 11 summarises the above patterns with all statistically significant differences highlighted.

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<sup>18</sup> An odds ratio (OR) greater than 1 indicates higher odds of using the free entitlement, and an odds ratio of less than 1 indicates lower odds, compared to the reference category (in this case, the reference category is parents living in the most deprived quintile, or the most deprived 20% of areas in England).

**Table 11**

Profile of currently eligible full, partial and non-users				
	Overall	Type of currently eligible user		
		Full users	Partial users	Non-users who are not in education
<b>All (unweighted base)</b>	801	266	111	61
<i>Base: Parents who are currently eligible for free entitlement</i>		%	%	%
<b>Employment of respondent</b>				
Working	55	61	66	32
Not working	45	39	34	68
<b>Employment of partner</b>				
Working	86	85	92	74
Not working	14	15	8	26
<b>Household employment</b>				
Couple – both working	41	46	51	19
Couple – one working	30	29	29	38
Couple – neither working	6	6	2	17
Lone parent – working	8	9	10	6
Lone parent – not working	14	10	8	21
<b>Receipt of benefits</b>				
Housing benefit	23	16	13	36
Income support	12	8	9	23
<b>Disability of target child</b>				
Yes	6	4	13	8
No	94	96	87	92
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	84	87	94	60
BME	16	12	6	40
<b>Region</b>				
South East	17	16	26	10
London	13	9	7	34
South West	10	9	13	4
East of England	10	9	13	5
East Midlands	8	12	4	10
West Midlands	11	9	11	8

Yorkshire and the Humber	11	13	8	7
North West	15	17	13	19
North East	5	7	5	3
<b>Rural/urban</b>				
Urban	80	78	77	<b>88</b>
Rural	20	22	23	12

The secondary analysis of 2010 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents looked at whether there was a relationship between parental demographics and the *full* use of the free 15 hours of early education. In the bivariate analysis, family type and work status, deprivation and receipt of tax credits were related to full take up of free early years education. When these were entered into the regression model and each was controlled for, family type and work status and area deprivation remained significantly related to full use of the free entitlement.

Compared to couples where both partners were working, couples where only one person worked were significantly less likely to use the full 15 hours (odds ratio = 0.53). Compared to those living in the most deprived quintile of areas, parents in the least deprived quintile were significantly less likely to use the full 15 hours (odds ratio = 0.35).

## 6.4 Key issues relating to non use and partial use

The key issues around non-usage or partial-use of free early education were identified using parents' answers to open questions from the telephone survey, covering the reasons for not using any free hours (in the case of non-users) or not using the full 15 hours entitlement (in the case of partial users). The questions were developed using evidence from the preceding qualitative research.

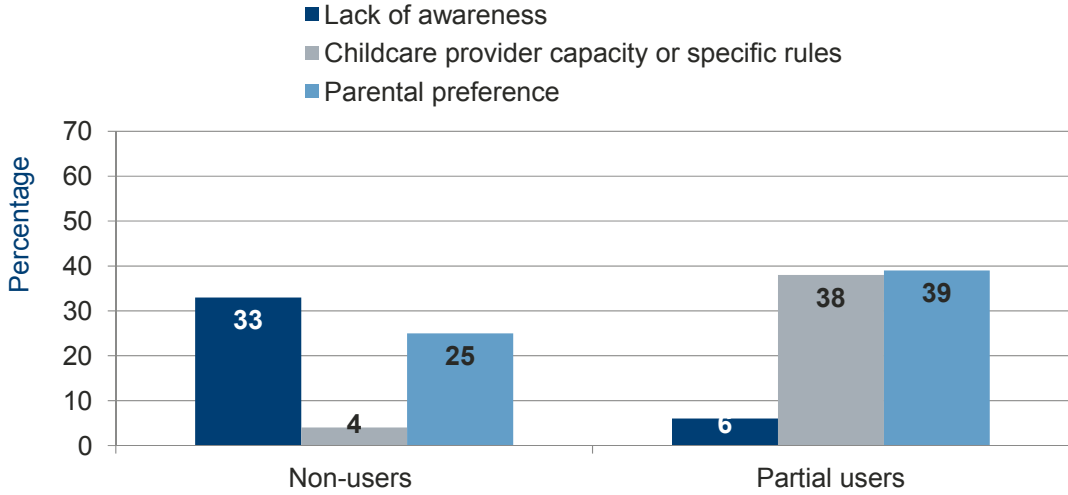
Three main groups of issues related to not using the free early education were identified in this study: 1) *lack of awareness of the free entitlement*; 2) *issues related to childcare providers*; and 3) *parental preferences and attitudes*.

The above issues were common to both non-users and partial users but the relative importance of each group of issues differed for each group. Figure 10 shows how for partial users, the issues were evenly split between inflexibility of childcare providers and parental preferences; lack of awareness did not appear to be a significant issue for this group.

By contrast, lack of awareness was identified as a key issue for non-users with parental preferences close in importance. For non-users the experience of childcare provider restrictions was relatively insignificant compared to partial users. Figure 12 excludes reasons related to the child being in full-time education and any other unrelated reasons.

Figure 10

## Key reasons for under-use or non-use of free early education



Base: All current non-users and current partial users (229, and 113)  
\* Re-coded answers. Options do not include reasons related to child being in full-time education or other irrelevant for this analysis reasons.  
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We now go on to discuss the issues for each group in more detail.

### 6.5 Understanding non-use

Parents who were not using any of their free hours entitlement *currently* were asked why their child did not receive any free hours during the reference week. In addition to cases where the child had started school already (hence they were not eligible for the free entitlement any longer), the most frequently mentioned barrier was not being aware that the child could receive the free hours or that they were eligible, mentioned by 33 per cent of parents.

The following two brief case studies from the qualitative research of families who were not using the free early education illustrate the impact of lack of awareness on the access to early years education.

- 1) In one of the in depth interviews we spoke to a two-parent family with two children, living in an urban area of London. The father was in full-time work and the mother was looking after both children at home. The family had heard of the free hours but was under the impression that only families on benefits were eligible. A secondary reason for non usage for this particular family was the fact that the child was not at nursery yet (but was on a waiting list) and the parents had not therefore had the opportunity to be told about the entitlement and that their child was eligible.
- 2) In another interview we visited a two-parent family with one child, living in a rural area in the South East – both parents were working part-time and the child was in his first year at school. The family were *past* non-users of the free hours. The family reported that they knew about the free hours but there seemed to be some confusion around the eligibility. The family were advised they would lose their child tax credits if they

were in receipt of free hours as only one of the provisions could be claimed at a time, and the child tax credit was a better financial option for this family. It is likely that in this case, the family were confusing the free hours with the childcare vouchers, and were perhaps given advice in relation to childcare vouchers and not the free entitlement.

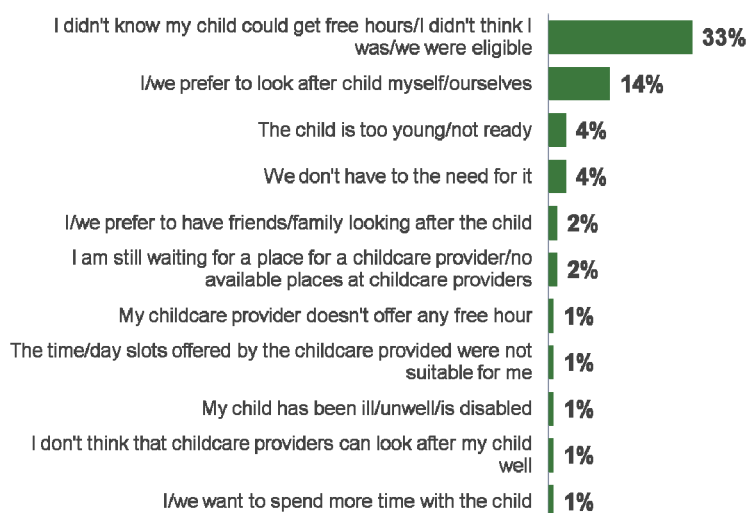
For 25 per cent of non-user parents, the decision not to use the free hours was related to parental preferences or attitudes. This included: parents wanting to look after the child themselves (14%); the child being too young or not ready (4%); parents not needing the free hours (4%); the parent preferring other family members to look after the child (2%); parents wanting to spend more time with the child (1%) and lack of trust that the childcare provider can look after the child well (1%) (see Figure 11).

Only a relatively small proportion of reasons for not using the free entitlement related to inflexibility of childcare providers (4% overall). Specifically these included unavailability of places (2%), the childcare provider not offering any free hours (1%), and sessions offered by the childcare provider being unsuitable (1%).

Findings from the qualitative interviews suggest that some private, voluntary and independent (PVI) childcare providers, in particular, may not be offering the free hours. The parents were not prepared to look for another nursery which offered the free hours because they were keen for their child to attend this particular childcare provider. In addition, they were able to afford the full childcare costs, hence this did not represent a significant issue for these families.

**Figure 11**

**Reasons for non-use of free early education among current non-users**  
*Why doesn't target child currently receive these free hours of childcare?*



Base: All who do not use any free hours currently (229)  
 \* Multi-coded question. Options do not include reasons related to child being in full-time education or other irrelevant for this analysis reasons.  
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## 6.6 Understanding partial-use of the free entitlement

Partial users (i.e. parents who used some free hours but not the full 15 hours to which they were entitled), were also asked why they did not use more free hours. The reasons for partial-use were evenly split between parental preferences or attitudes and restrictions coming from the childcare provider.

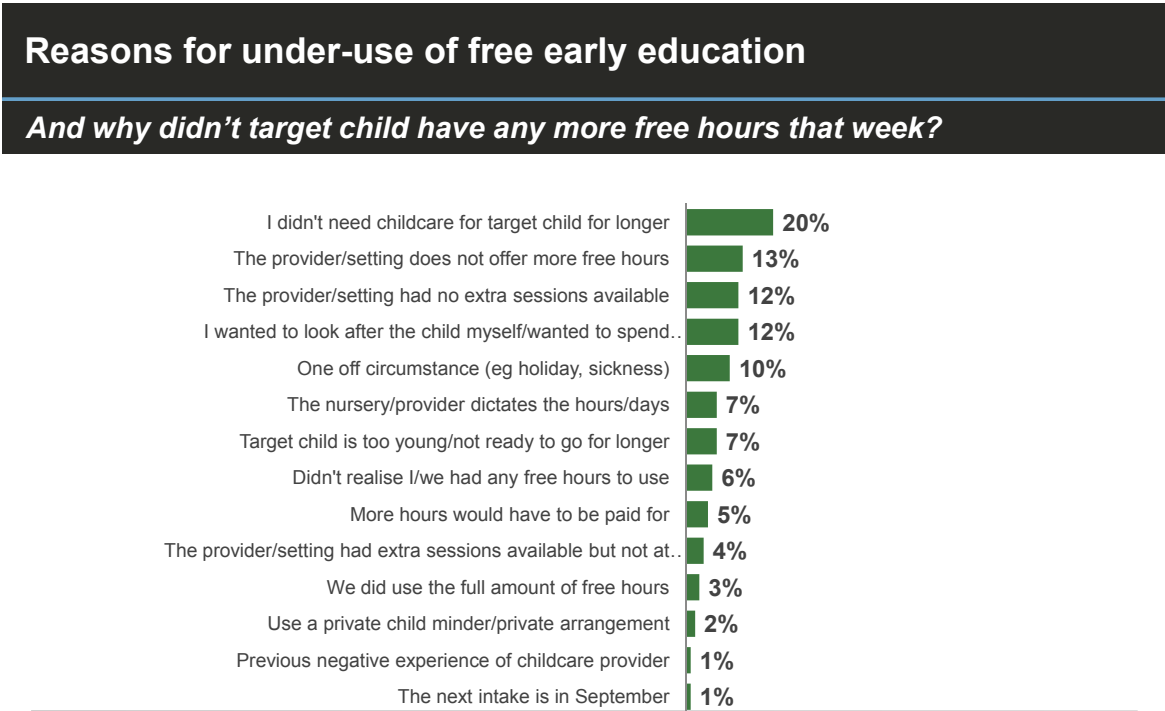
Thirty-nine per cent cited parental preferences as reasons for not using the full 15 hours, including not needing childcare for longer (20%), wanting to look after the child themselves or wanting to spend more time with the child (12%), the child being too young or not ready (7%) and using a childminder or a private arrangement (2%) (see Figure 12).

An almost identical proportion of parents were not using the full entitlement due to restrictions coming from childcare providers (38%). These appeared to relate mainly to insufficient capacity of providers rather than flexibility specifically (although both were interdependent): the two predominant restrictions included the provider not offering more free hours (13%) and no extra sessions being available (12%). In order to overcome this barrier, childcare providers need to ensure they offer enough sessions and that they offer the full 15 free hours per week. Clearly this would have implications for many providers as there are likely to be costs associated with expanding capacity and some may already be operating at their maximum capacity.

Other specific barriers were related to the provider dictating hours/days (7%), having to pay for more hours (5%), extra sessions not being at convenient times (4%) and a provider offering intake from September only (1%).

Unlike the group of non-users, lack of awareness of the free hours and eligibility for partial users is a less significant barrier for partial users; only six per cent of partial users said that they did not realise they had more hours to use.

**Figure 12**



Base: All who do not use the full 15 free hours (113)  
 \* Multi-coded question. Options do not include reasons related to child being in full-time education or other irrelevant for this analysis reasons.

The qualitative interviews explored in detail the nature of the inflexibilities originating from childcare providers and provided some specific examples.

Some of the issues that came from the qualitative interviews were related to parents not always having a choice in the slots they could use and had to take the slots that were available. As such, the hours used by parents were usually the providers' choice.

However, the qualitative interviews demonstrated that parents could be happy in adjusting to these arrangements and making their work or informal care fit around the formal care. (Indeed, 87% of survey respondents said that they were happy with the days of the week available and 83% were satisfied with the time slots available as part of the free hours.) Parents' flexibility could also be partly due to the fact that, as discussed in the earlier chapter, they did not usually have expectations of a free provision to be flexible. Furthermore, the reputation of the provider was often of great importance to some parents and it took precedence over their preference for particular slots of their choice.

**To be honest, that option was never put to us in the application form. We just went for the option that was given to us on the application form. We didn't really have a lot of choice, so we just had to do what was given to us. We had to work our way around it.**

**Qualitative interview, Partial user, nursery**

In some interviews parents reported that they were not using all 15 hours because they were not able to get the sessions of their choice. For example, a parent was only able to use four morning slots (12 hours in total) and there was no availability for a fifth morning. There was an alternative for using an afternoon session instead but this was not convenient because of the afternoon sleep routine of the child. The parent, however, was able to accommodate around this arrangement and was happy with this. Similarly, a mother applied for five morning sessions but due to a lack of availability she had to take the afternoon sessions. The mother reported that she soon got used to these sessions and was happy with the current arrangements.

There were additional barriers to using the free hours coming from *specific rules* imposed by the childcare providers even though they were still operating within the Code of Practice. (The Code of Practice is a statutory guidance for local authorities on the delivery of free places and the providers do not have to comply with the Code.)

The in-depth interviews revealed issues related to some pre-schools offering morning sessions only (9am to 12 noon). In addition, some parents reported that their childcare provider had a rule in place where younger children were given priority to attend the morning sessions and other providers had a similar rule on age limits for the afternoon sessions. Having said that, for some parents with older children in school, the timings for the morning or afternoon sessions were very convenient as these fitted well with dropping off or picking up other children from school.

Provision of afternoon care was seen as important by some parents but it was not available at all childcare providers. As such, some parents said that they preferred if the pre-school also offered afternoon sessions so that they could use full or longer days.

**If you want to go off and do stuff, if they're there a full day ... it's just a bit easier because only three hours, it's surprising. You think three hours that's a long time but it goes.**

**Qualitative interview, Partial user, playschool and grandmothers**

Another example of specific rules imposed by the childcare provider included one limiting the opening hours to 2 hours 45 minutes every morning, which meant that the maximum number of hours the parent could use per week amounted to 13 hours 45 minutes only.

A specific rule set by one nursery meant that the parents could not start using the 15 free hours when they were eligible. The provider in this case had a September intake only, which meant that although the child was eligible from April (he was born in January) he could not take up the free hours until much later.

In another case, the provider only allowed children to attend five days a week (and not fewer), during mornings or afternoons.



# 7. Effects of working patterns on childcare

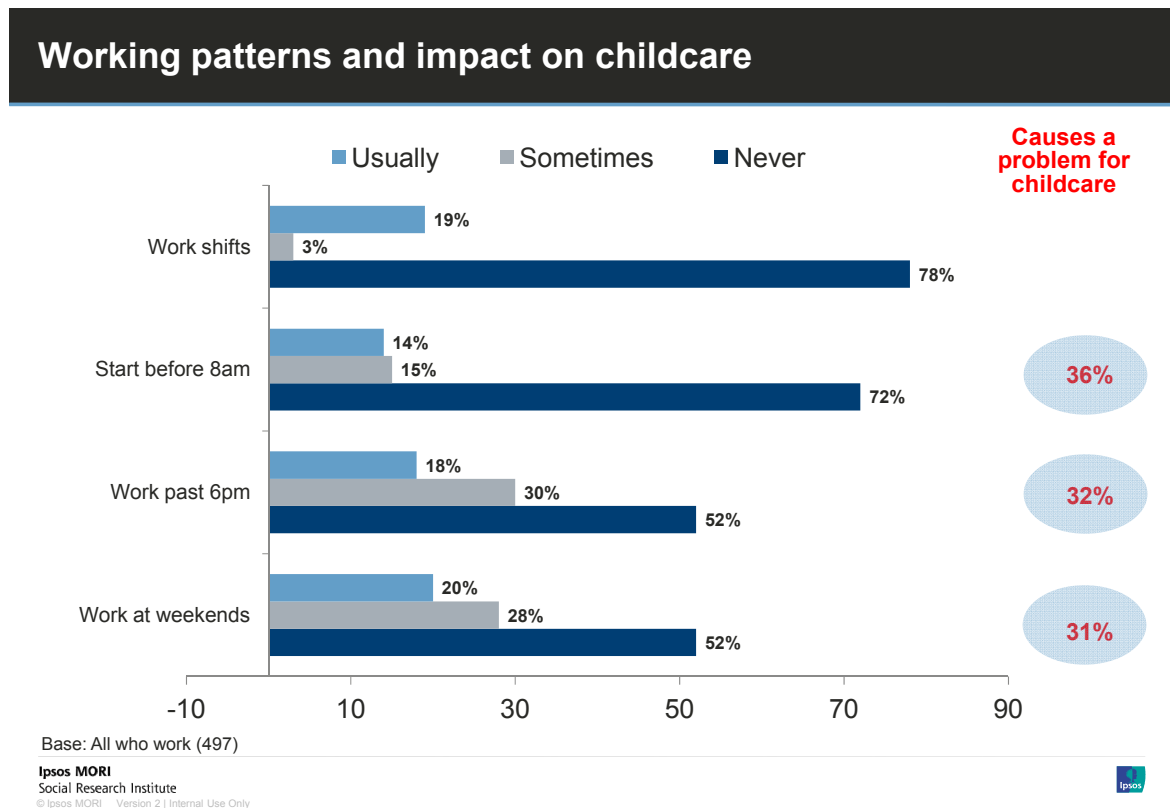
## 7.1 Working patterns

Nineteen per cent of all surveyed parents who were in work said that they *usually* worked shifts in their job. Younger parents aged up to 29 years were more likely to work shifts (41% compared to 19% overall) as were parents earning lower incomes of less than £20,800 (31%) and those receiving benefits other than child benefit (24%).

Between one in five and one in eight of survey respondents overall who were currently in work reported that their job *usually* involved irregular patterns such as working before 8am (14%), after 6pm (18%) and at the weekend (20%). Approximately a third of parents with these work patterns reported that this caused problems in relation to childcare arrangements (36% reported it was a problem for starting work before 8am, 32% for working after 6pm and 31% for working at the weekend) (See Figure 13).

Parents who worked a mixture of irregular hours and shifts reported a higher negative impact of working at the weekend on their childcare arrangement compared to the overall (40% compared to 31% overall), which is likely to be related to the fact they this group was more likely to work during weekend.

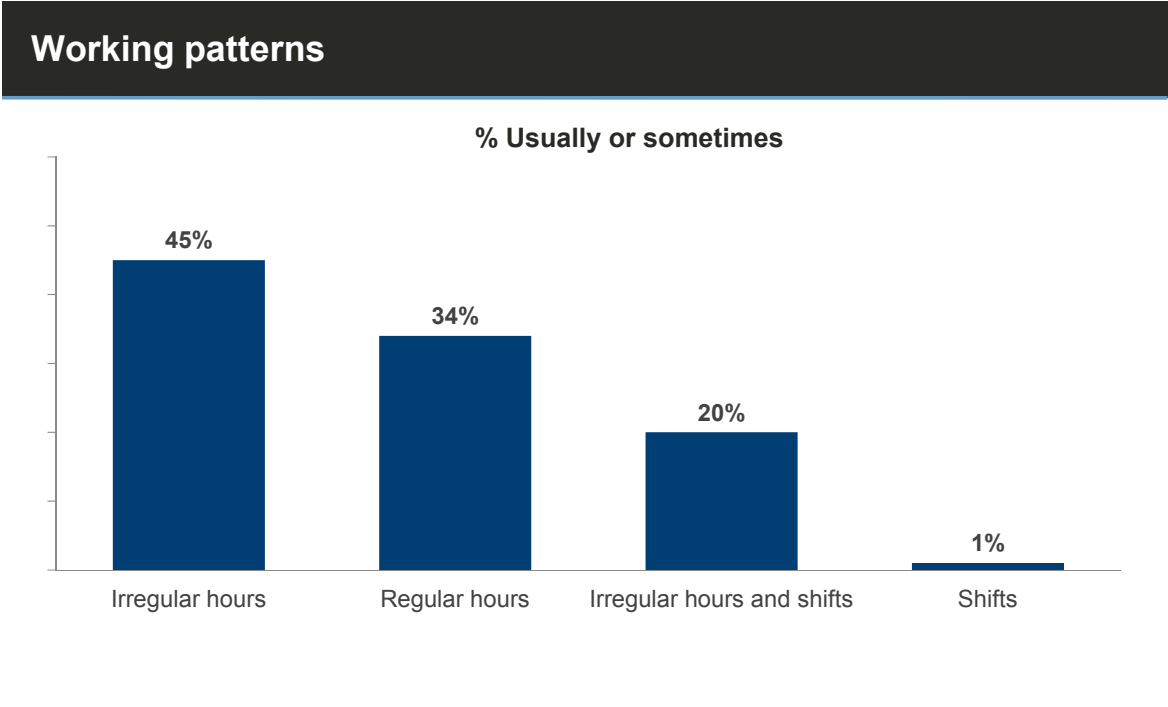
Figure 13



There were more parents who worked irregular hours and/or shifts usually or sometimes (66%) than regular hours (34%): 45 per cent said they usually or sometimes worked irregular hours (including before 8am, after 6pm or at weekends) and a further fifth (20%) reported

working a mixture of irregular hours and shifts (see Figure 14). A third of parents (34%) worked regular hours only. Only one per cent worked shifts only.

**Figure 14**



Base: All who work (497)

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## 7.2 Views of free early education by type of working pattern

Satisfaction with the provision of free early education among parents who worked shifts or irregular hours was in line with overall satisfaction (see table 12). Part-time workers, however, were more likely to be satisfied with the entitlement. Among parents who had a child who was currently eligible for the free entitlement and was not in education, full-time workers generally were more likely to be full users of the entitlement (66% compared to 55% overall) while part-time workers were more likely to be partial users (29% compared to 22% overall). For full details see Table 12.

**Table 12**

Free early education and working patterns							
	All	All in work	Full-time	Part-time	Regular hours	Irregular hours only	Shifts and irregular hours
<b>Overall satisfaction with free early education (801)</b>							
Satisfied	88	89	86	<b>91</b>	90	87	93
Dissatisfied	4	4	9	3	3	5	2
<b>Type of free entitlement users (among those currently eligible and not in education) (454)</b>							
Full user	55	<b>60</b>	<b>66</b>	57	57	62	59
Partial user	22	<b>25</b>	20	<b>29</b>	26	27	24
Non-user	23	14	14	14	15	11	17

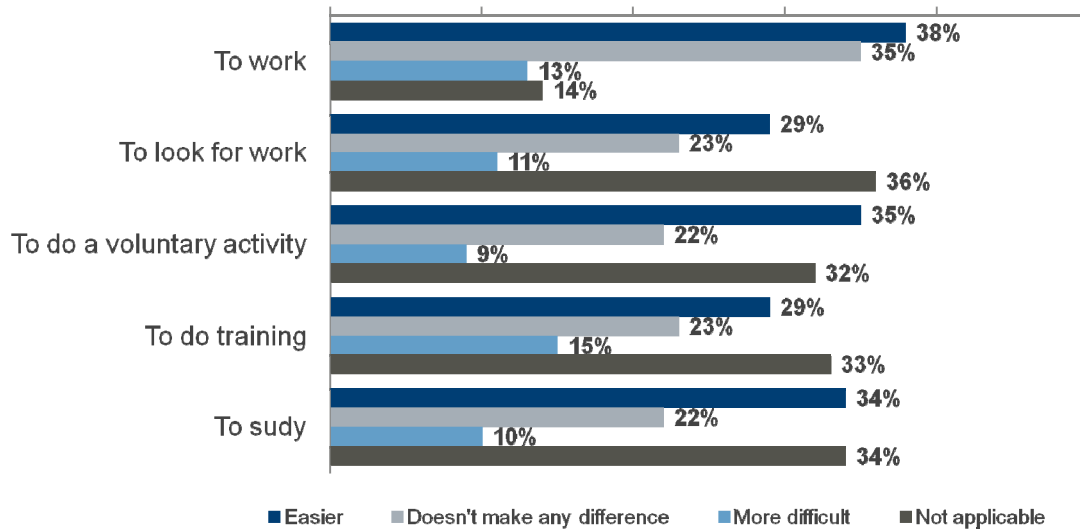
Due to the small base sizes, it is not possible to establish any statistically significant differences in relation to barriers for using the free entitlement among parents working shifts.

### 7.3 Effects of free hours time slots on work and other activities

Parents who were current, past or future free hours users were asked whether the free hours time slots available for their child helped or hindered the extent to which they were able to do different types of activities (see Figure 15). On average around a third of parents say that the availability of free hours made it easier for them to work (38%), do a voluntary activity (35%), study (34%), look for work (29%) or do training (29%). Between nine per cent and 15 per cent reported that the free hours days and slots available made it difficult for them to do these activities.

Figure 15

## To what extent do you think the days and time slots available make/made/will it easier or more difficult for you . . . .



Base: All who are current, past or future free hours users (712)

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The only differences among the user types was that partial users were more likely than full or non-users to say that the free hours slots available to them made it more difficult to them to work (22% compared to 13% overall).

Part-time workers and those working regular hours were more likely than the average to say that days and time slots of free entitlement were making it *easier* for them to work (53% and 44% compared to 38% overall). Table 13 contains further details.

**Table 13**

Free early education and working patterns							
	All	All in work	Full-time	Part-time	Regular hours	Irregular hours only	Shifts and irregular hours
<b><i>Extent to which days and time slots of free entitlement makes it easier or more difficult to work (712)</i></b>							
Easier	38	<b>44</b>	43	<b>44</b>	<b>52</b>	40	38
No difference	35	<b>39</b>	<b>44</b>	37	33	<b>43</b>	43
More difficult	13	9	9	10	5	11	14
Not applicable/ Don't know	16	8	5	9	9	6	5

## 7.4 Choosing free early education sessions

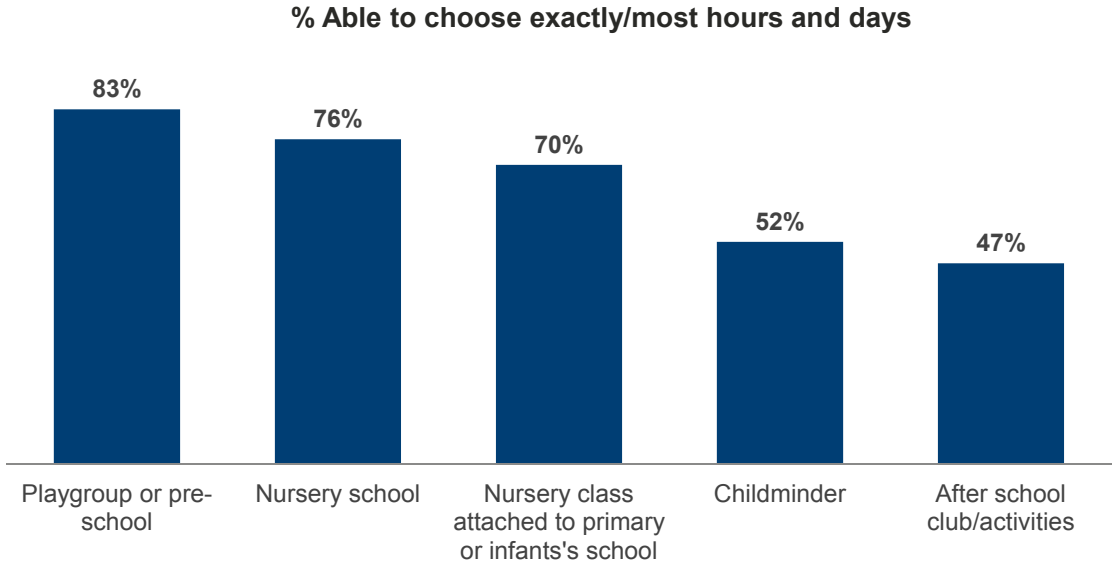
Among parents who used the free hours at childcare providers, the majority reported that they were able to choose exactly or most of the hours and days they used for their child. Eighty-three per cent of parents who used playgroups or playschools said they were able to choose the free hours session they wanted (see Figure 16). Slightly fewer were able to choose the free hours session at nursery school or nursery class attached to primary or infants' school (76% and 70% respectively).

However, among parents who used free hours only at childminders, 52 per cent were able to select the session they wanted. The analysis does not include day nursery, holiday club, special day school or breakfast club due to small base sample sizes of respondents answering these questions.

There were no statistically significant differences between full and partial users.


Figure 16

## Ability to choose free hours sessions



Base: All who are current free hours users and use childcare (66-228)  
The chart does not include day nursery, holiday club, special day nursery and breakfast club due to small base sizes.

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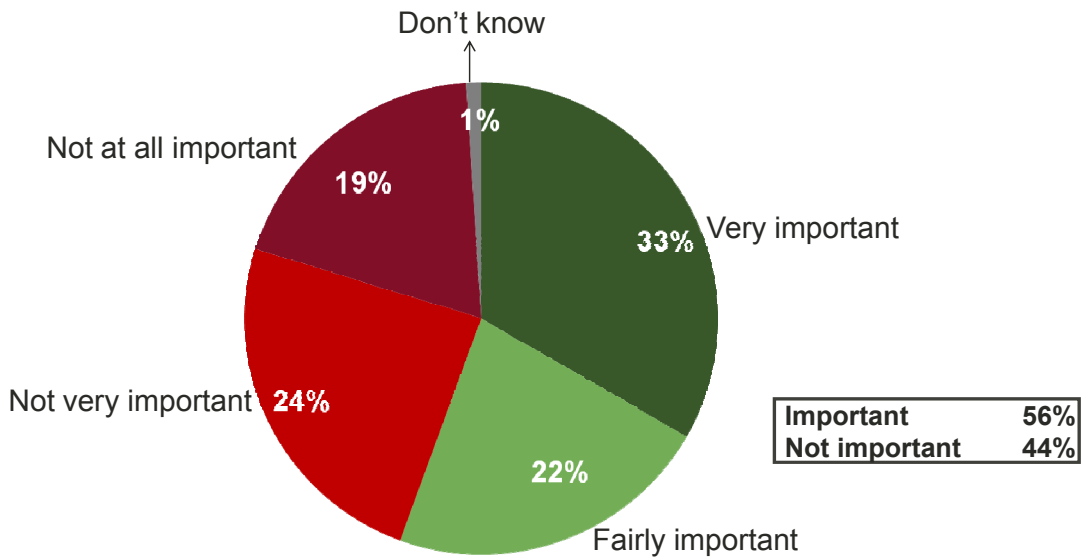


### 7.5 Varying times and days

Parents who were current, past or future users of free entitlement were asked about their preferences to varying the sessions of childcare (i.e. alter their use of free early education to different times of the day and different days of the week). Over half of parents (56%) said that it was important for them to be able to vary the time slots or days of their childcare, with 33 per cent saying that it was very important (see Figure 17).

Figure 17

**How important is it to you to be able to vary the time slots or days of your childcare?**



Base: All who are current, past or future free hours users (712)

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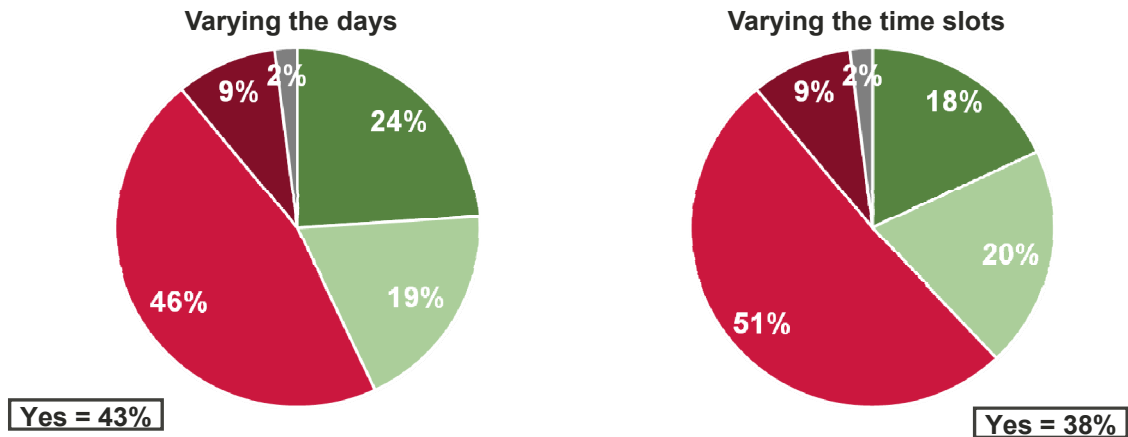
The importance of varying times and days differed between the key demographic groups. Parents who worked irregular hours and shifts were more likely than the rest to say that varying times and days was *very important* (45% compared to 33% overall). This was also true for single parents who were significantly more likely than parents with a partner to see this as very important (48% compared to 30% respectively). There are similar differences by parents' ethnicity: parents from ethnic minorities were much more likely than White parents to say this was very important (59% compared to 29% respectively).

Forty-three per cent of parents were able to vary the days that they used childcare at least sometimes and slightly fewer (38%) were able to vary the time slots they used for childcare (see Figure 18). Among those who said that it was very important to vary the time slots or days of childcare, 11 per cent said they had the ability to vary their days and 10 per cent were able to vary the time slots of their childcare.

Figure 18

## Ability to vary days and time slots for childcare

- Yes, always or most of the time
- Yes, sometime
- No
- I never need to/not relevant
- Don't know



Base: All who are current, past or future free hours users (712)

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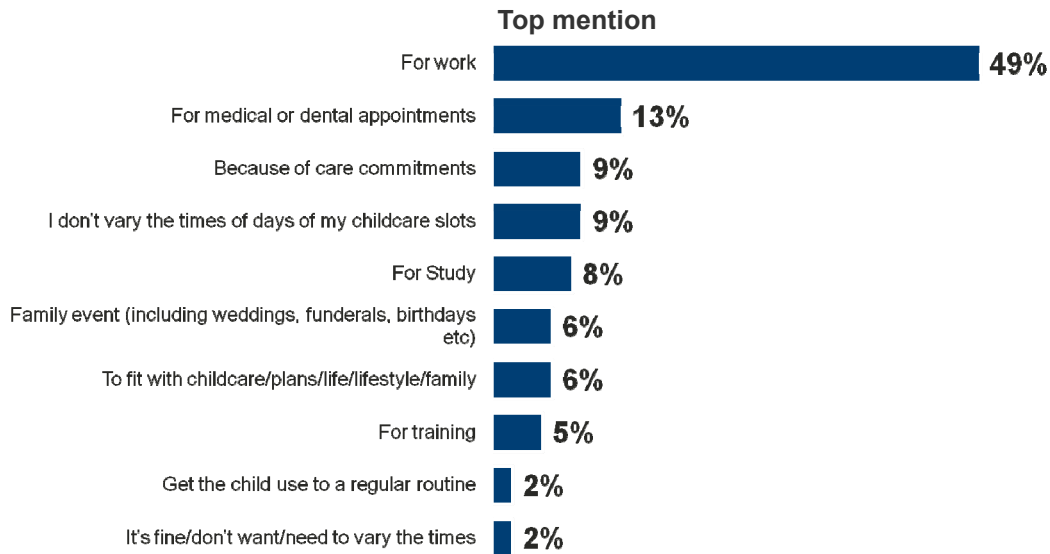


The most common reason for varying the days or time slots of childcare (among parents who are able to do this) was for work (49% - see Figure 19). Other reasons mentioned by parents included for medical appointments (13%), because of caring commitments (9%), for study (8%), for family events (6%), and for training (5%). Similarly, work was again the most common reason (52%) for wanting to vary the time or days of childcare among those who were not able to do this and thought it was important (see Figure 20).



**Figure 19**

## Why do you vary the times or days of your childcare slots?



Base: All who are able to vary days or time slots of childcare (334)

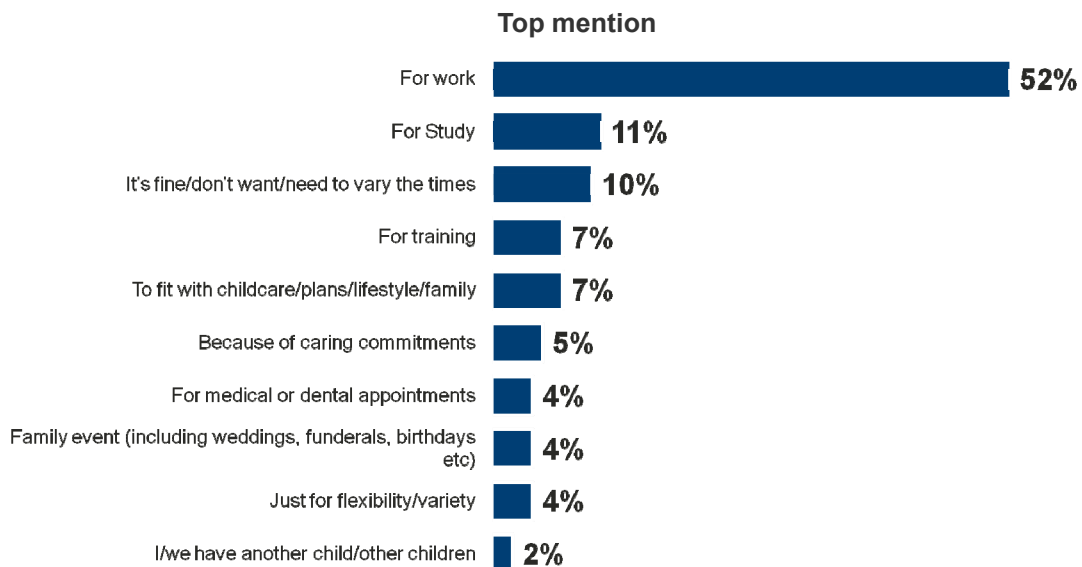
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**Figure 20**

## Why would you want to be able to vary the times or days of your childcare slots?



Base: All who are not able to vary days or time slots of childcare and say it is important to vary days or time slots (183)

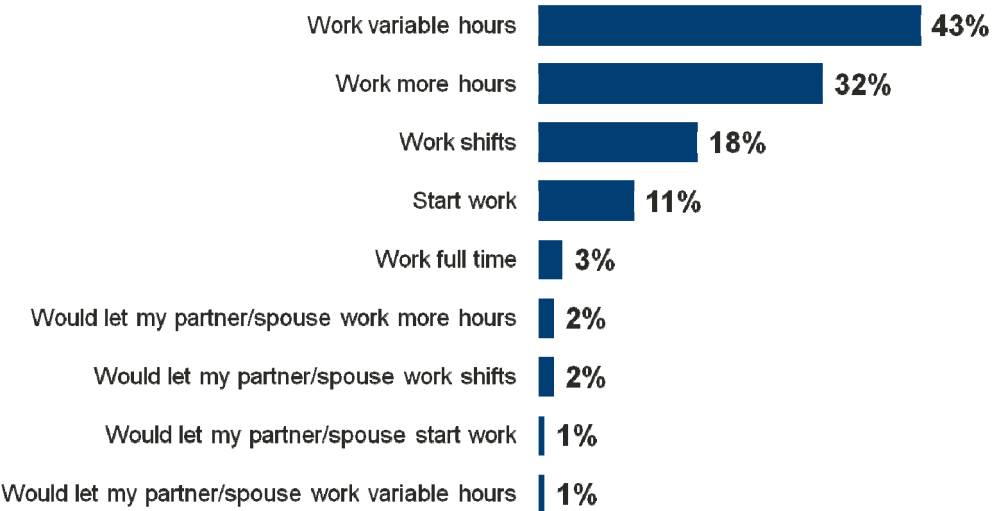
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Further detailed questions were asked to parents in relation to how varying the times and days of childcare would help them with work (see Figure 21). Helping to working variable hours (43%) and working more hours (32%) were the top two mentions by this group of parents. Some parents also reported that varying the times of days would help in particular with working shifts (18%) or starting work (11%).

**Figure 21**  
**Can you say a bit more about why varying the times or days would help you with work?**



Base: All who currently vary or would like to vary the days or time slots of childcare because of work (254) Ipsos MORI  
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As expected, those working irregular hours and shifts in their job were much more likely to mention being able to work shifts than the rest (42% compared to 18% overall). There were no statistically significant variations by type of free entitlement usage.

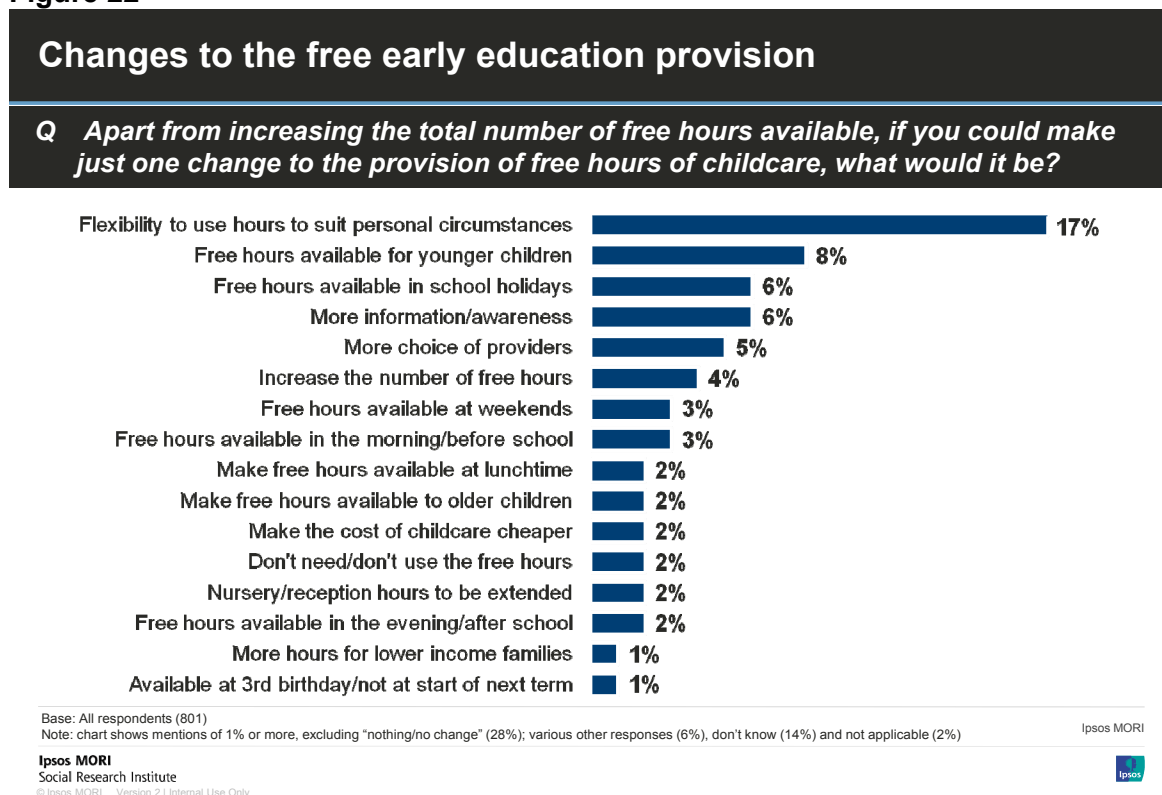
## 8. Desire for change

This section explores where the demand for change is with regards to the flexibility of free entitlement. The findings in this section include the key issues that came through both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the research. We have analysed the in-depth discussions with parents from the qualitative interviews as well as a variety of questions from the quantitative study. These included open questions on improvement of the entitlement, as well as closed questions comparing different options and preferences for using the free entitlement. As such, the results provided for each analysis cannot be compared like with like across other analyses but should be viewed separately.

We asked all parents in the telephone survey what one thing – apart from increasing the number of hours available (though some ignored this) – they would make to the provision of the free early education. The most common responses were variants on there being no need for change (28%), suggesting that there is a significant core level of satisfaction with the way the free early education is delivered, as illustrated earlier.

More than 20 different suggestions for improving the provision were made by 56 per cent of survey respondents; the most frequent are illustrated in Figure 22 below. (The chart does not include the 28% who did not want any change.)

Figure 22



There was clearly a desire for greater flexibility, particularly in relation to the existing constraints on when parents can use the free early education (these will relate to a combination of the parameters on delivery set by government and the constraints imposed locally by their childcare providers). Seventeen per cent of all those interviewed made suggestions which were variations of requiring greater flexibility about when parents could use the free hours so as to meet their individual or family needs. A number of other specific suggestions related to flexibility and so *in total* 30 per cent of all respondents raised issues

that related to flexibility for one reason or another. The following section explores in detail the above responses on demand for change.

## 8.1 Reducing restrictions on minimum number of days

Relaxing the restriction of using the free hours over the current minimum of three days was widely discussed by parents who took part in the qualitative interviews. This parameter was seen as too restrictive for parents, and especially those in work, because of parents having fewer available hours to do something or complete a full day's work.

Similarly, there were discussions during the interviews that related specifically to the three-hour sessions available at some childcare providers. These were considered to be very short for parents to go to work or do something useful during this time. Therefore, a suggestion was proposed to make the provision more flexible by allowing the use of the full 15 hours over two full days, by using more hours on one day or by removing the restrictions completely.

The following comments by parents who took part in the qualitative study illustrate this point.

**'Longer days is better because we don't have to rush back for 12.30pm ... I would rather do two full days and then have him home for three days, because there's lots of to-ing and fro-ing if it's just for the morning.'**

Qualitative interview, Partial user, Pre-school

**'Up to 10 hours a day, you could have a full day from 8am in the morning through to 6pm in the evening ... which is fantastic ... Say you were a working parent that would be two full days.'**

Qualitative interview, Partial user, Pre-school

**'No job starts at 9.30 and finishes at 11.30.'**

Qualitative interview, Partial user, Pre-school

A similar suggestion in response to an open question on preferences for using the free entitlement was also *spontaneously* mentioned by parents who took part in the telephone survey: 18% of free entitlement users expressed preference for using the free entitlement over a full day.

The following comments from the telephone survey illustrate the above points.

**'I would prefer if we could have more hours in a day because the maximum is six at the moment.'**

Quantitative survey respondent

**'Being able to condense the hours to two full days as opposed to five half days.'**

Quantitative survey respondent

## 8.2 Extension to two-year-olds

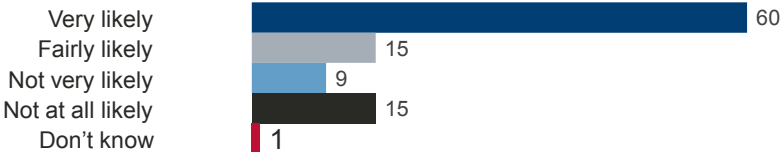
A number of parents during the qualitative interviews as well as eight per cent of all parents who took part in the telephone survey spontaneously suggested that the flexibility of the free entitlement can be improved by extending the offer to younger children. Sixty per cent of respondents in the telephone survey said they would have been *very likely* to use the free hours if this option was available while their child was between two- and three-years-old. Out of this group, half of parents (50%) said that they would have still used the hours if it meant using fewer hours overall after that age.

While these questions are based on a hypothetical situation there appears to be a significant level of demand for this option. This apparent level of demand held when looking at household income category as 75 per cent of those earning less than £20,000 per year (a similar group to those being target by the two-year-old policy) said that they would be either very or fairly likely to take up a place if it were available. This evidence supports the Government’s forthcoming extension of the free entitlement to early education that will include 40 per cent of two-year-olds<sup>19</sup> from 2013 (see Figure 23).

Figure 23

### Importance and likelihood of using free early education between the ages of two and three years

*If you were able to use the free hours when your child was aged between 2 and 3 years, how likely is it that you would have actually used the free hours then?*



Base: All (801)

*And would you still have liked to used them if it meant using fewer free hours after the age of three?*



Base: All who say they are likely to have used the free hours when their child was aged between two and three years (614)

19

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/delivery/free%20entitlement%20to%20early%20education/b0070114/elfordisadvantaged>

### 8.3 The 38-week limit per year

The 38 weeks limitation was the third most frequently mentioned area for potential improvement of the flexibility of the offer (6%), especially among working parents (9%). The question around the 38 weeks limitation was asked based on the assumption that the free early education was provided mostly during the 38 weeks of school term, which was the option available to most parents in practice.

**‘I don’t understand why there is a difference when it comes to school holidays - that’s when we need them to be looked after the most.’**

Quantitative survey respondent

Parents who took part in the qualitative interviews also discussed extensively the advantages for the child having the option to continue the routine of formal childcare throughout the whole year, as well as splitting the costs of childcare more evenly over 52 weeks in the year. The potential extension of the free hours to cover the long summer holiday period was especially important for some parents.

**‘You don’t work term-time only.’**

Qualitative interview, Full user, Nursery

**‘Holiday time would be perfect because people still have to work during the holidays.’**

Qualitative interview, Partial user, Pre-school

**‘In the summer holidays especially they do get very, very bored because they’re so used to being so active all the time ... I think there should be some sort of entitlement for the summer holidays at least because it’s a long, long time for them to have off. Much as I love having them here they just get so bored and it’s a lot of money to keep them entertained, to keep doing things I suppose yeah there should be more.’**

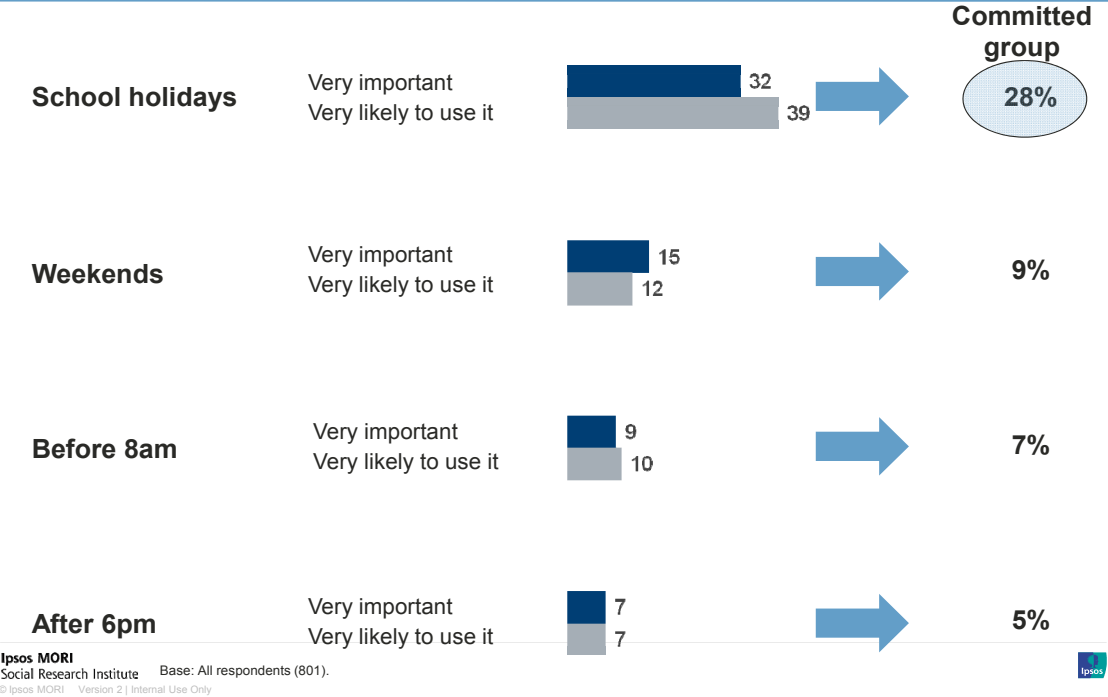
Qualitative interview, Full user, Pre-school

Figure 24 provides further details on a proposed extension to cover the school holiday by looking at the proportion of parents who considered the holiday cover to be *very important* and who also said they would be *very likely* to use it. We have categorised these parents as the ‘committed group’.

Over a quarter of survey respondents (28%) out of the whole sample fall into the ‘committed group’ category for holiday cover. We carried out the same analysis for other potential options for increasing the flexibility of the free hours. These included provision during weekends, provision before 8am, and provision after 6pm and are also presented in Figure 24. There was more limited interest in these options with between five and nine per cent of parents falling into the committed group category.

Figure 24

**Importance and likelihood of using free early education options**



It is important to note that some parents who took part in the qualitative interviews discussed the advantages of using the free entitlement during 38 weeks of the year only (which usually overlapped with school term-times). Parents with older children preferred not to use childcare and the free entitlement for their younger child during school holidays so that all children could be together during this period. As such, preferences would tend to differ between one child and two or more children families. This was confirmed by the telephone survey where parents with one child only were significantly more likely than parents with two or more children to say that use of free hours during school holidays was very important for them (42% compared to 30% respectively) and more likely to say they were likely to use it too (71% compared to 58% respectively).

The interviews also demonstrated how parents’ preferences were also likely to be influenced by other factors. There were cases where the main carers was not in work or had informal childcare availability did not require the free hours during the holidays because parents or family/friends could look after the child during these periods when the free hours were not provided.

**8.4 Gradual increase of the free hours**

The option of gradual increase of the free hours allowance was identified as another area of improving the flexibility of the provision to fit some parents’ preferences and current patterns of usage. As outlined earlier, a common practice as well as a strong preference among some parents was using fewer than 15 hours while their child was young and gradually building up to the full 15 hours as they grew older and closer to going to primary school. Seventy per cent of respondents rated the ability to increase the number of free hours used over time (up to the maximum of 15) as their child grew older as very important.

Furthermore, based on evidence from the qualitative interviews improving the flexibility of this condition can be helpful for parents who prefer to use fewer than 15 hours because it fits

better with their work and family arrangements. Including an option for using fewer than 15 hours can be particularly useful where parents are not otherwise able to use a provider because of specific rules set out by some providers. For example, as illustrated earlier, a parent reported that the only option available at their childcare provider was for children to attend three hours a day over five days in the week and there was no option for attending on fewer days, which was seen as very restrictive.

Finally, introducing a gradual increase of free hours could also be achieved in combination with extending the free entitlement to younger children whilst keeping the same hours allowance over the period. For example, the current allowance of up to 1,140 hours over two years could be extended to cover the same number of hours but over three years to allow younger children to benefit from the free hours.

## 8.5 Communications

Provision of more information and awareness was the fourth most common change in the provision of free early education, suggested by survey respondents (6%). The issue was also discussed by parents in the qualitative study and there was further evidence from the telephone survey presented earlier (see section five) that this was a key area for improvement. These findings suggested there was a need for systematic information provision for parents, targeted communication for groups of parents where awareness was particularly low and raising awareness among parents generally of the *specific* parameters of how the free entitlement operates.

## 8.6 Reducing restrictions on length of sessions

The current limit on the length of session is between no less than 2.5 hours and no more than 10 hours in the day.

A session under 2.5 hours was seen by some parents who took part in the qualitative interviews as too short and inconvenient for parents and sessions longer than 10 hours were not seen as appropriate for young children.

However, relaxing the minimum number of hours was suggested during qualitative discussions as a potential way to improve flexibility, especially where two providers are used. For example, one family pointed out that if a combination of two providers was used (e.g. a nursery during the day followed by an hour with a childminder who would collect the child), the family would not be able to use the free hours for the second provider as the session would be shorter than the minimum restriction.

## 8.7 Other suggestions for improving flexibility

Other ideas put forward by parents for improving the flexibility of the offer included the option of using the hours during the weekend (3%), morning/before school (3%), evening/after school (2%) or lunchtime (2%). Ad hoc or emergency cover was discussed as an option during some of the qualitative interviews. Other interesting suggestions mentioned in isolated cases only included transferring some of the unused free hours to cover the costs for sports and activities of other children in the family, or the ability to sell unused allowance to other parents.



### 8.8 Preferred patterns of accessing free entitlement

Any potential changes to the free entitlement offer would need to take into account parents' preferred patterns of accessing the free entitlement.

As part of the quantitative survey we asked all respondents what times of day they would prefer to use the free hours (see Table 14). The clearest preference was for parents to be able to use the free hours in the morning (59%) and a third of survey respondents said they prefer afternoons (33%).

**Table 14**

Parents' preferences for free hours time slots	
	Percentage choosing this option
<i>Base: All respondents who are current, past or future users of the free hours (n=628)</i>	%
Mornings	59%
Afternoons	33%
Full days	18%
Anytime	12%
Over lunch	6%
Evenings	5%
Other	1%
Not relevant to me	3%
Don't know	1%

Note: respondents could choose more than one option so percentages total more than 100.

These statistics reflect some of the issues that came through discussions during the qualitative interviews. Some of these related to consistency and regularity for the use of the free hours. This included, for example, using the same number of hours every day with preferences for a morning or starting and finishing at the same time every day.

Any improvement in the flexibility of the provision needs to allow for the different ways parents would like to access the provision.

## 8.9 Implications for providers

This research looked only at the views of parents. Clearly, any changes to the parameters on availability or flexibility will have implications for childcare providers as well as parents and children. Providers need to be able to plan opening times and staffing levels and the financial implications of any changes in response to levels of local demand. These considerations were explicitly acknowledged by some of the parents interviewed in the qualitative research. For childcare providers attached to a primary school, any change to providing childcare during the school holidays is likely to be a very significant change to current practice.

## 9. Conclusions

This research was commissioned to help understand how use of the free early education could be increased, both by reducing the proportion of non-users and increasing the number of hours taken up by partial users. In particular, we were asked to look at how improved flexibility of the offer might increase use of the free entitlement.

Personal preferences will always mean that a proportion of parents will not use the entitlement or will use only some of their hours. However, evidence from this research suggests that number of parents using the entitlement may be improved if some key obstacles are addressed. We set out below some of the key issues leading to partial and non-use and make some recommendations to tackle them.

A key finding of this research was that non-use and partial-use of the free early education entitlement was not strongly associated with any inherent problems with the provision itself. Rather, they were due to a lack of sufficient awareness of the entitlement, constraints coming from childcare providers and parental preferences and attitudes.

Among both non-users and partial users, parental preferences and attitudes play an important part in the decisions about whether, and how much, to use the free hours. Such preferences will mean that some people choose not to use all or even any of their entitlement. However, respondents in the qualitative research emphasised the importance of the social development and school readiness that early education can foster so further information and promotion of this may encourage some non-users and partial users to take up the offer.

For non-users, the main barrier (in addition to parental preference) was a lack of awareness of the free offer. A key finding has been the lack of any systematic way of informing parents of the free hours and providing sufficient information on eligibility and flexibility of the provision. The haphazard way in which parents hear about the free hours means that more deprived or marginalised families are less likely to find out.

To overcome this bias there needs to be a way in which *all* families are able to be informed about the offer. One way might be to inform all parents via Child Benefit mailings a few months before their child becomes eligible, though to be effective, this should be combined with other approaches. Changes to Child Benefit will soon mean this will no longer be a universal benefit but an approach such as this could overcome some of the bias in the current communications arrangements.

In particular, there should be specific strategies for informing:

- parents who do not currently use formal childcare, possibly through GPs or health visitors;
- parents from BME communities, including information translated into the main community languages;
- parents who are not in work;
- parents who are receiving benefits; and
- parents with low educational attainment.

For partial users, the second main obstacle to greater use of the free entitlement was constraints in the delivery of the free hours by childcare providers. Some constraints related to capacity (e.g. whether there were places available at all) while others related to flexibility (e.g. whether the provider actually offered sufficient free hours).

Although there was little *expectation* of flexibility, there was certainly some interest in *improving* the flexibility of the free entitlement. When asked about how the entitlement could be improved, 30 per cent of all the various suggestions by survey respondents related to making the provision more flexible in some way. The proposals are listed below and an indication of the level of demand is provided.

- **The ability to use the free hours during the school holidays and, to a lesser degree, at weekends, before 8am, after 6pm and during lunchtime.** Over one quarter of survey respondents (28%) out of the whole sample said it was *very important* and they were *very likely* to use the hours during school holidays. There was more limited interest in the provision during weekends, provision before 8am, and provision after 6pm these options with between five and eight per cent of parents falling into this category of respondents. In response to an open question, six per cent of parents said they would like to use the free hours over lunchtime.
- **The freedom to increase the number of hours per week as children get older.** This was raised by parents in the qualitative interviews. Some parents delay the start of using the free hours (or using all 15) until they feel their child is ready. Seventy per cent of respondents rated the ability to increase the number of free hours used over time (up to the maximum of 15) as their child grew older as very important. The survey indicated that the youngest eligible children (those aged three to three-and-a-half) were less likely to receive free hours than older children (78% compared to 86% among those aged three-and-a-half four).
- **The ability to access the free hours before the age of three.** Sixty per cent of respondents in the telephone survey said they would have been *very likely* to use the free hours if this option was available while their child was between two- and three-years-old. Out of this group, half of parents (50%) said that they would have still used the hours if it meant using fewer hours overall after that age. This evidence supports the Government's forthcoming extension of the free entitlement to early education that will include 40 per cent of two-year-olds<sup>20</sup> from 2013.
- **Removing restrictions on minimum number of days for using the free hours.** Eighteen per cent of survey respondents (3<sup>rd</sup> suggestion in importance) said they preferred to use the entitlement over a *full day*. Some suggestions from the qualitative interviews related to changing the free entitlement so that parents could use the hours on *fewer days* (for example over two days) or more hours on one day.

The above results were in line with the qualitative findings.

While some of these changes could be agreed in principle by the Government, their implementation would involve changes in the practice of childcare providers. Not all providers would find it easy to extend their provision; for example, those attached to primary schools might find it difficult to operate in the school holidays when hitherto they had been closed.

All providers would need a degree of certainty about the number of places they would have filled at any time. They would need to plan the levels of staffing required and the possible associated costs of increasing the flexibility of their offer. This might mean some form of incentivisation by central or local government to enable greater flexibility. In the current economic climate, a starting point might be a dialogue with providers about changes in flexibility that might be implemented at little or no cost.

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<sup>20</sup><http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/delivery/free%20entitlement%20to%20early%20education/b0070114/elfordisadvantaged>

Current parental approval, of and support for, the free entitlement is very high. Any changes to the existing provision would need to ensure that the existing highly-valued free entitlement continues to be available to parents. And any changes to flexibility will need to meet the family and employment needs of parents as well as being workable for providers.

Finally, while not the focus of this research study, parents' take-up of free early education and the potential for improving its flexibility cannot be isolated from other key factors which play a crucial role in childcare take-up generally, such as the cost of childcare, financial childcare help for parents (such as childcare vouchers or childcare tax credits) and the flexibility of employers.

## Appendix A. Response analysis of the telephone survey

The telephone survey was designed as a follow-up to the 2010 Childcare Survey. The key eligibility criteria were that the respondent:

- had at least one child born between September 2006 and March 2009;
- agreed to be recontacted for research; and
- provided a telephone number.

The table shows the response analysis for the total initial sample, broken down by whether the telephone numbers were working, whether contact was made and whether an interview was achieved.

**Table A.1 Response analysis for the free entitlement telephone survey**

<b>Response category</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage of whole sample</b>	<b>Percentage of contactable numbers</b>	<b>Percentage of numbers successfully contacted</b>
<b>Total sample initially identified</b>	<b>2,236</b>	<b>100%</b>		
Successful contact but not eligible (deadwood)	3	*		
No contact – bad or suspect telephone number	429	19%		
<b>Contactable numbers</b>	<b>1,804</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>100%</b>	
No contact but number appears to be working	513	23%	28%	
<b>Numbers successfully contacted</b>	<b>1,291</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Successful contact but no interview possible because of language problem	28	1%	2%	2%
Successful contact but no interview achieved in the fieldwork period	61	3%	4%	5%
Refusal	401	18%	22%	31%
<b>Completed interview</b>	<b>801</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>62%</b>

Where we were able to make contact with the sampled person, the participation rate was

very high- 62 per cent. However, the target of 1,000+ interviews was made impossible by the large number of bad numbers in the sample (19% of the total sample available) and the even larger number where the telephone number appeared to be working but was never answered (23% of the total sample).

The bad numbers would not have yielded more interviews. A telephone directory look-up exercise yielded on this group made only a very small addition to the total number of interviews; most of the numbers obtained through the exercise proved to be bad numbers too.

A longer fieldwork period might have yielded more interviews, both from those numbers where we made contact and from the numbers that were never answered. A significant but unknown proportion of the latter group would probably still have been uncontactable numbers, but it is likely that some would have been answered eventually. As the table shows, the co-operation rate was high when we were able to make contact.

The implications for future work would be:

- to allow for a relatively large proportion of unproductive numbers from follow-up samples with this respondent group – although many respondents in the 2010 Childcare Survey agreed to be recontacted and gave contact details, the telephone numbers were not tested until the start of fieldwork;
- to allow as long a fieldwork period as possible
- to consider additional sample cleaning/checking activities from the beginning (while recognising the low yield that might come from directory look-ups, for example).

## Appendix B. Profile of achieved sample for the telephone survey

Table B.1

Base: all	Unweighted		Weighted	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
	<b>801</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>801</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Region</b>				
<i>South East</i>	161	20%	139	17%
<i>London</i>	99	12%	101	13%
<i>South West</i>	84	10%	78	10%
<i>East of England</i>	80	10%	77	10%
<i>East Midlands</i>	60	7%	63	8%
<i>West Midlands</i>	85	11%	85	11%
<i>Yorkshire and the Humber</i>	85	11%	92	11%
<i>North West</i>	109	14%	122	15%
<i>North East</i>	37	5%	42	5%
<b>Rural</b>	616	77%	639	80%
<b>Urban</b>	184	23%	161	20%
<b>Age of respondent</b>				
<i>Up to 29</i>	108	13%	139	17%
<i>30-39</i>	430	54%	414	52%
<i>40+</i>	263	33%	248	31%
<b>Sex of respondent</b>				
<i>Male</i>	93	12%	93	11%
<i>Female</i>	708	88%	708	89%
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
<i>White</i>	686	86%	670	84%
<i>BME</i>	113	14%	129	16%
<b>Household Composition</b>				
<i>Single Parent</i>	115	14%	173	22%
<i>Single parent with other adult</i>	5	1%	7	1%
<i>Two Parents</i>	681	85%	622	78%
<b>Number of children</b>				
<i>1 child</i>	107	13%	112	14%
<i>2 or more children</i>	691	86%	689	86%
<b>Disability</b>				
<i>Respondent yes</i>	55	7%	62	8%
<i>Respondent no</i>	746	93%	739	92%
<i>Target child yes</i>	45	6%	52	6%
<i>Target child no</i>	756	94%	749	94%
<i>Other child yes</i>	80	10%	90	11%
<i>Other child no</i>	696	87%	676	84%



Table B.2

Base: all	Unweighted		Weighted	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
	<b>801</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>801</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Household Income</b>				
£0-£20,799	166	20%	219	27%
£20,800-£36,399	200	24%	184	23%
£36,400-£51,999	173	21%	152	19%
£52,000 and over	183	22%	151	19%
<b>Employment of respondent</b>				
<i>Working</i>	497	62%	444	55%
<i>Not Working</i>	304	38%	357	45%
<i>(Full Time working)</i>	(192)	(24%)	(170)	(21%)
<i>(Part time working)</i>	(305)	(38%)	(273)	(34%)
<i>(Looking after home/family)</i>	(179)	(22%)	(204)	(25%)
<b>Household Employment</b>				
<i>Couple, both working</i>	397	50%	332	41%
<i>Couple, one working</i>	245	31%	240	30%
<i>Couple, none working</i>	39	5%	50	6%
<i>Lone parent working</i>	56	7%	68	8%
<i>Lone parent, non working</i>	64	8%	111	14%
<b>Age of Target child</b>				
<i>Up to 3 years old</i>	19	2%	20	2%
<i>3 to 3 and 6 months</i>	122	15%	115	14%
<i>Three and 7 months to 4</i>	142	17%	139	17%
<i>4 and above</i>	518	64%	527	66%
<i>(4 and above who are not in reception or year 1)</i>	(186)	(23%)	(188)	(23%)
<b>Eligibility for free hours</b>				
<i>Currently eligible</i>	653	82%	654	82%
<i>Eligible until recently</i>	106	13%	107	13%
<i>Soon be eligible</i>	42	5%	40	5%
<b>Type of free hours user (ever)</b>				
<i>Full user</i>	485	61%	475	59%
<i>Partial user</i>	144	18%	131	16%
<i>Non-user</i>	172	21%	195	24%
<b>Type of currently eligible free hours user</b>				
<i>Full user</i>	266	41%	258	32%
<i>Partial user</i>	111	17%	100	12%
<i>Non-user in education</i>	215	33%	225	28%
<i>Non-user not in education</i>	61	9%	70	9%

# **Appendix C. Definition of childcare providers**

The following definitions were used in the telephone survey questionnaire and the qualitative interviews.

## **Nursery school**

A school in its own right, with most children aged 3-5 years. Sessions normally run for 2 ½ to 3 hours morning and/or afternoon

## **Nursery class attached to a primary or infants' school**

A separate unit within the school, with those in the nursery class aged 3 or 4. Sessions normally run for 2 ½ to 3 hours morning and/or afternoon

## **Reception class at a primary or infants' school**

This usually provides full-time education during normal school hours, and most children in the reception class are aged 4 or 5

## **Special day school/nursery or unit for children with special educational needs**

A nursery/school or unit for children with special educational needs. This can be a nursery solely for children with special educational needs, or a nursery which offers places for children with special needs alongside the mainstream.

## **Day nursery**

This runs for the whole working day and is only closed for a few weeks in summer, if at all. This may be run by employers, private companies, volunteers or the Local Authority, and can take children from a few months to 5 years of age.

## **Playgroup or pre-school**

The term 'Pre-school' is commonly used to describe many types of nursery education. For the purposes of this research, pre-school is used to describe a type of playgroup. This service is often run by a community/voluntary group, parents themselves, or privately. Fees are charged, with sessions of up to 4 hours.

## **Crèche**

A work based crèche or a crèche at a university or college is likely to be a day nursery. A crèche at a shopping centre or leisure facility used for a short time period is not covered by the codes used in this research and in particular in the telephone survey and is be coded under 'other childcare providers'.

## **Kindergarten**

This is a European term which can mean different things and is most closely allied with 'Nursery Education'. A Kindergarten is most likely to be a nursery school, day nursery or could even be a playgroup.

## Appendix D. Typology of full users, partial users and non-users

Table D1

Base : All who are currently eligible for free hours and not in education (454)	Total	Region									Ethnicity of respondent		Age of respondent		
		South East	London	South West	East of England	East Midlands	West Midlands	Yorkshire and the Humber	North West	North East	White	BME	Up to 29	30-39	40+
Unweighted total	454	85	55	46	42	39	47	46	70	24	390	64	68	252	134
<b>Full user</b>	55%	53%	40%	53%	48%	70% <sup>b</sup>	51%	67%	56%	62%	57%	44%	53%	57%	52%
<b>Partial user</b>	22%	34%	11%	31%	32%	11%	25%	16%	16%	18%	24%	8%	11%	24%	25%
<b>Non-user not in education</b>	23%	13%	47%	16%	18%	19%	22%	16%	27%	21%	18%	47%	36%	19%	20%

Table D2

Base : All who are currently eligible for free hours and not in education (454)	Total	Number of children			Age of target child			Awareness of free early education provision		Household Income			
		1-child household	2-child household	3 or more children household	3 years to 3 years and 6 months	3 years and 7 months and up to 4 years old	4 years old and above	Yes	No	£0 - £20,799	£20,800 £36,399	£36,400 £51,999	£52,000 and over
Unweighted Total	454	65	235	154	98	138	218	398	56	96	122	106	94
<b>Full user</b>	55%	71%	51%	53%	51%	65%	51%	61%	18%	52%	59%	66%	53%
<b>Partial user</b>	22%	16%	27%	16%	27%	23%	19%	24%	9%	17%	22%	21%	33%
<b>Non-user not in education</b>	23%	12%	21%	30%	19%	13%	30%	14%	71%	30%	19%	11%	14%

**Table D3**

<i>Base : All who are currently eligible for free hours and not in education (454)</i>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Respondent employment</b>								<b>Household employment</b>				
		<b>Working</b>	<b>Not working</b>	<b>Full time work</b>	<b>Part time work</b>	<b>Looking after home/family</b>	<b>Works irregular hours only</b>	<b>Works shift/irregular hours</b>	<b>Regular hours only</b>	<b>Couple both working</b>	<b>Couple one working</b>	<b>Couple neither working</b>	<b>Lone parent working</b>	<b>Lone parent not working</b>
Unweighted Total	454	283	171	106	177	104	120	73	87	221	140	25	35	33
<b>Full user</b>	55%	<b>60%</b>	48%	<b>66%</b>	57%	52%	62%	59%	57%	<b>61%</b>	52%	46%	52%	48%
<b>Partial user</b>	22%	<b>25%</b>	17%	20%	<b>29%</b>	15%	27%	24%	26%	<b>27%</b>	21%	5%	25%	14%
<b>Non-user not in education</b>	23%	14%	<b>34%</b>	14%	14%	<b>31%</b>	11%	17%	15%	11%	26%	46%	24%	<b>39%</b>

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