

# Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England: January 2012

## Methodology Document

### Contents

1. Data Summary .....	2
2. Background .....	2
2.1 <i>Eligibility for free early education places</i> .....	2
2.2 <i>Funded places</i> .....	2
2.3 <i>Sources of Information</i> .....	2
2.4 <i>Population Estimates</i> .....	3
3. Data Collection Methodology .....	4
3.1 <i>Data cleaning</i> .....	4
4. Methodological Changes .....	4
5. Production of Statistical First Release .....	6
5.1 <i>Defining Counts in the SFR tables</i> .....	6
6. Definitions .....	8
7. Process map .....	9

## **1. Data Summary**

Information on the education of children under five is collected from more than one data source:

- The School Census collects information on maintained schools
- The School Level Annual School Census collects information on independent schools/providers, and
- The Early Years Census collects information from private and voluntary providers.

To obtain a picture of the education of under-fives data from each of these sources is combined in this publication.

## **2. Background**

### ***2.1 Eligibility for free early education places***

All four year olds have been entitled to a free early education place since 1998 and from April 2004 this entitlement was extended to all three year olds. Children are eligible for a free part-time funded place from the 1 September, 1 January or 1 April following their third birthday, for up to two years before they reach compulsory school age. Free places can be accessed in a variety of settings in the maintained and private, voluntary and independent sectors and Local Authorities (LAs) make funding available to all providers to enable them to provide free places.

### ***2.2 Funded places***

A funded place currently consists of a *minimum of 15 hours* of free early education per week for thirty-eight weeks of the year.

From September 2010, the free entitlement has been extended to 15 hours a week, up from 12.5 hours a week, and it can be delivered more flexibly. Flexibility means delivery of a flexible free entitlement in a way which is useful for parents and meets their needs; that maximises and safeguards child development; and is workable for local authorities and providers – within a consistent framework of National Minimum Standards of flexibility. Local authorities will broker and publish a Local Offer of flexibility, based on assessments of parental demand and negotiations with providers about their capacity.

The extended 15 hour entitlement has been available to the 25% most disadvantaged children in every LA since September 2009 and to all children in Pathfinder LAs since April 2007

### ***2.3 Sources of Information***

The main sources of data for this publication are the annual Early Years Census (EYC), the School Census (SC), and the School Level Annual School Census (SLASC).

**Early Years Census** - The Early Years census (EYC) collects child level information for every three and four year old who are taking up some or all of their entitlement to part time free early education at private, voluntary or independent providers. This is the fifth year that LAs have undertaken this statutory collection. The return also records the aggregate numbers of three and four year olds **taking up** early education places in those private and voluntary providers and independent schools that are registered with LAs and receive some government funding for delivery of the free entitlement. The census takes place on the third Thursday in January and information on all children accessing funded provision during the census week is included. Providers supply their data annually to their Local Authority and the Local Authority returns the data to the DfE.

**School Census** - The School Census is a statutory return collecting pupil level information on a termly basis from all Maintained Nursery, Primary, Middle, Secondary, Special and Non-Maintained Special Schools, Academies (including Free Schools) and City Technology Colleges in England. Specifically, information on the number of three and four year olds benefiting from some early years education in maintained schools, at January of each year, is used in this publication.

**School Level Annual School Census (SLASC)** - SLASC is an aggregated school level return collected annually from registered independent schools and general hospital schools. The data collected from registered independent schools includes details of teaching and pupil numbers, courses of study, pupils with SEN and children looked after by a local authority. SLASC data is used only to provide numbers of children taking up early education places at independent schools. As EYC only collects data from funded providers, SLASC provides a better indication of numbers taking up early education places at independent schools as it covers all independent schools. It does not collect numbers benefiting from some free early education therefore this is derived from EYC.

## ***2.4 Population Estimates***

The population estimates are derived from mid-year estimates and projections provided by the Office for National Statistics. They are subject to a margin of error and should be considered to be approximations.

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

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

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

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

### **3. Data Collection Methodology**

Early Years providers submit data to their Local Authority. Local Authorities then load the data into to the Department for Education's (DfE) bespoke data collection system; COLLECT (Collections On-Line for Learning, Education, Children and Teachers).

The system is stored securely on DfE servers and is accessed by Local Authorities over the internet, with each LA given secure log in details.

#### **3.1 Data cleaning**

COLLECT has built-in validation rules which flag up data which is invalid or the quality is questionable. This allows LAs to identify errors and clean the data before they submit it to DfE. Validation rules can either be errors (data is invalid) or queries (data quality is questionable but could be accurate in certain circumstances).

LAs are encouraged to clean all errors and double-check data where queries are flagged. LAs can add notes to their return if there is a genuine reason for "unusual" data.

Guidance notes and specifications (including validation rules) for each of the collections which feed this publication can be accessed from the following site:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/schooladmin/ims/datacollections>

### **4. Methodological Changes**

#### Change in 2012:

In previous publications in this series, an intermediary count of **Number free early education places taken up** was provided. Prior to 2008, Local Authorities recorded the number of children benefiting from some free early education as part of the provider-level EYC data collection. This meant that any children attending more than one provider were counted more than once, at each provider they attended and therefore this count referred to places rather than number of children. The lack of child-level data meant that cases where children were at more than one provider could not be identified by the Department. These figures were included in order to show trends over a longer time period. This count has been removed from this publication now that a full five year time series for the number of children benefiting from some free early education can be provided.

### Change in 2011:

Up to 2010, data for academies were included as part of the independent category. From 2011, due to the large increase in academies, these were taken out of the Independent category and included in a category of "state-funded primary" or "state-funded secondary". These categories included all through schools. Numbers increased slightly as a result, but the time series data was backdated with this change so previous years are still comparable.

Data for maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools will include dually registered pupils. Previously, only solely registered pupils were included but this missed out on a small number of dual main registered pupils. The time series was backdated with this change.

Academies were incorporated into tables on PART-TIME EQUIVALENT places were they were previously excluded. The time series was backdated with this change.

Up to 2010, 12.5 hours was equal to one PART-TIME EQUIVALENT place and this was comparable with 2007 and before. Up until the introduction of the Early Years Census at child level, aggregate banded information on funded hours was collected, with each band equating to a decimal number of PART-TIME EQUIVALENT places filled (0.5 to 2.5 hours per week as 0.2 places, 3 to 5 hours as 0.4 places, 5.5 to 7.5 as 0.6 places, 8 to 10 as 0.8 places, and 10.5 to 12.5 as 1 PART-TIME EQUIVALENT place). However, as the free entitlement has been extended to 15 hours for all children, PART-TIME EQUIVALENT places filled is now based on one PART-TIME EQUIVALENT being equal to 15 hours. Therefore the previous bands for equating funded hours to PART-TIME EQUIVALENT places are no longer applicable. Instead, for 2011 onwards, PART-TIME EQUIVALENT places are an exact representation of the number of hours per week of education received by each child. The time series was backdated with this change.

Up to 2010, the free entitlement consisted of up to 12.5 hours per week. However, in certain circumstances some children were eligible to receive up to 15 hours per week. As a PART-TIME EQUIVALENT place was based on the standard 12.5 hours per week, children accessing 15 hours were recorded as 1.2 PART-TIME EQUIVALENT places filled. As all children in 2011 were entitled to up to 15 hours a week, 1 PART-TIME EQUIVALENT place was redefined as 15 hours and no children were shown as accessing more than 1 PART-TIME EQUIVALENT place. This change in methodology could be wholly or partly responsible for the drop in PART-TIME EQUIVALENT places filled in Private, Voluntary, and Independent providers seen in 2011 which may not have been a true change but as a result of this change in methodology required to reflect policy change.

## 5. Production of Statistical First Release

### 5.1 Defining Counts in the SFR tables

*Note: Further clarification on the definitions used in the tables is given in section 6.*

There are three key counts reported in these tables:

A – The number and proportion of children **benefiting from some free early education**. This is a count of children in receipt of some free early education, but where they are receiving free provision at more than one provider, they have only been counted once; it is a unique count of children.

B – The **part-time equivalent number of places filled**. This is the number of complete 15 hour places filled (for example: a child taking 7 hours entitlement and a child taking 8 hours entitlement would equate to 1 part time equivalent place filled)

C – Following on from the number of children benefiting from some free early education, figures are also available on the number and proportion of children **taking up early education places**. This is a count of the number of children that attend funded early education providers; it is not a count of children at all early years providers. This will include children benefiting from some free early education as included in the number benefiting from some free early education, and will also include children attending funded providers who are not receiving free early education at that provider (they may already have accessed their free entitlement elsewhere).

#### **Tables 1-3: Number of three and four year old children taking up or benefiting from early education places, by type of provider**

##### Calculating numbers

For private and voluntary providers, counts A and C are taken from the EYC data.

For independent providers, count A is taken from the EYC and count C is taken from SLASC.

Figures for other providers are taken from SC.

*Note: Three and four year olds attending maintained nursery and primary schools are always counted as one PART-TIME EQUIVALENT funded place and all maintained school provision is termed 'free'. There is no distinction between the numbers benefiting from some early education and the PART-TIME EQUIVALENT number of funded places filled and these terms are used interchangeably.*

### Calculating take-up rates

*Percentage of three and four year olds benefiting from early education places are expressed as percentages of the relevant three and/or four year old population.*

Note: The number taking up early education places can exceed 100% in some instances and may be overstated or understated in others because:

- Children may be counted more than once (if they take up a place at more than one provider);
- The counts of children taking up or benefiting from free places do not correspond exactly to the counts of children in the population: or
- Children not resident in England are included in the counts of children taking up places but are not included in population estimates.

The issues mentioned above have a greater impact on the data at Local Authority level therefore some caution is advised on the use of these statistics.

ONS mid-year population estimates and projections are used to calculate take-up rates. In previous years, take-up rates have only been provided at a national level. For the first time this year, we are publishing take-up rates at LA level.

For comparison purposes, we will publish the LA take-up rates as a five year time series. To do this, we need population estimates for those years. Data used in this publication for population estimates for 2012 and for previous years is based on the latest population estimates, which are revised annually. As such, revised population estimates used to calculate past years LA level take-up rates are not the same as previous population estimates used to calculate national take-up rates for previous years. Therefore as part of this publication, we have revised some previous national take-up rates using the latest population estimates.

The level of change is minimal but is required this year so that national and LA take-up rates are based on the same source data.

### **Table 4: Part time equivalent number of free early education places filled by three and four year olds by type of provider and age**

#### Calculating numbers:

For private, voluntary and independent providers, count B is calculated from the EYC data.

For maintained and state funded providers, count B is calculated from SC.

The master dataset is used to table, by LA, the number of children by funded hours and age. These are summed across the LA, and nationally, to count how many 15 hour places have been taken up. For example, if a LA has 3 children, child 1 takes up 4 hours, child 2 takes up 12 hours and child 3 takes up 14 hours, this equates to 30 (=4+12+14) hours which is 2 PART-TIME EQUIVALENT places.

### Calculating percentages:

*Percentage of PART-TIME EQUIVALENT funded places filled by three and four year olds are expressed as places per 100 children.*

### **Tables 5 and 6: Number of three and four year olds in free early education, by banded number of funded hours**

This is the number of children by the number of funded hours they receive, where the funded hours have been grouped together into bands.

### **Table 7: Number of three and four year olds in free early education, in private, voluntary and independent providers, and in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools by type of provider.**

This is a count of providers by type of provider, and also the number of children benefitting from some free early education at those providers.

## **6. Definitions**

The full Guidance Notes and Frequently Asked Questions relating to the EY Census can be viewed on the DFE website at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/schooladmin/ims/datacollections/earlyyearsensus/a00192274/early-years-census-2012>

**a. Number of children benefiting from some free early education** – This is the number of children returned as being in receipt of some free early education. As data is returned at child level from 2008, children who access more than one provider have been identified and counted once only. In previous publications this count was referred to as Actual number of children benefiting from some free early education. Descriptions have been changed this year to avoid confusion but methodology for calculating remains the same.

**b. Part-Time Equivalent places filled** – A part-time equivalent place is equivalent to 15 hours. The part-time equivalent places filled is the number of funded places filled according to the amount of free entitlement a child is receiving. It is derived by dividing the number of funded hours a child is receiving by 15 hours and summing for all children. A three or four year old taking up a place at a maintained nursery or primary school is counted as one part-time equivalent funded place. The free entitlement for three and four year olds is 15 hours but LAs may decide to offer up to 25 hours per week (one full-time equivalent) to help manage the transition for four year olds into compulsory education. As this is discretionary, the hours that four year olds attend above the free entitlement are not included in the calculation of the part-time equivalent number of funded places in this SFR.

Children do not necessarily take up their full entitlement so one part-time equivalent funded place may be taken up by more than one child accessing less than their full entitlement e.g. a 15 hour place could be filled by two children, one child attending 7 hours and the other attending 8 hours. Consequently, the **number of children benefiting** from some free early education exceeds the **part-time equivalent number of funded places filled** by children.

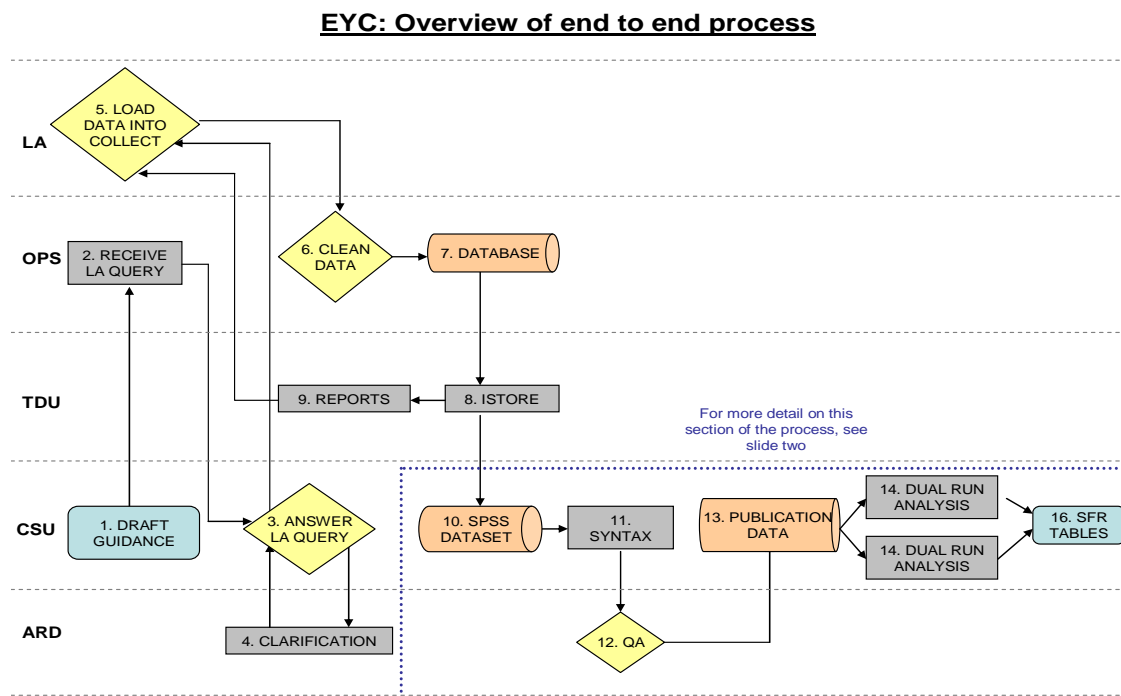


**c. Number of children taking up early education places** –This is a count of the number of children that attend funded early education providers; it is not a count of children at all early years providers. This will include children benefiting from some free early education as included in the number benefiting from some free early education, and will also include children attending funded providers who are not receiving free early education at that provider (they may already have accessed their free entitlement elsewhere).

## 7. Process map

The process map shown in Figure 1 covers the end to end process of the Early Years Census return, from data collection through to publication of the SFR.

**Figure 1: Overview of end to end process of Early Years data collection and publication**



### Definitions:

- LA: Local Authority
- OPS: Data Services Division, Operations
- TDU: Data Services Division, Technical Development Unit
- CSU: Data Services Division, Customer Services Unit
- ARD: Analysis and Research Division
- QA: Quality Assurance
- SFR: Statistical Release