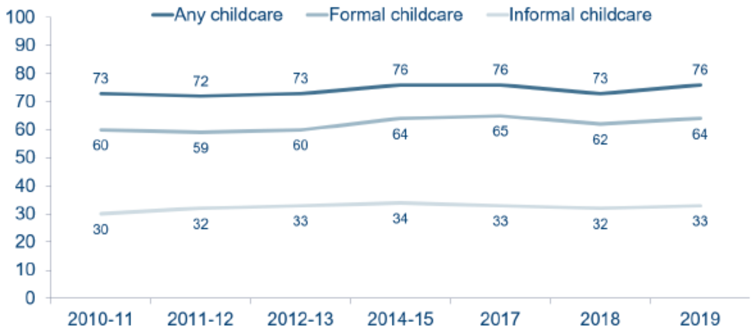
Department for Education

Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents in England, 2019

Official Statistics. 19 December 2019. Fieldwork: January – August 2019

Use of formal childcare broadly stable over time

Percentage of children aged 0 to 4 using childcare providers in most recent term-time week



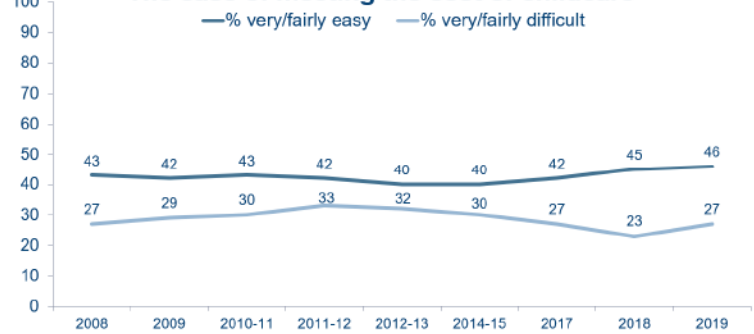
Base: All children aged 0 to 4 (2,681 in 2010-11; 2,651 in 2011-12; 2,507 in 2012-13; 2,353 in 2014-15; 2,273 in 2017; 2,724 in 2018; 5,057 in 2019)

Overall, in 2019, around three-quarters (76%) of children in England aged 0 to 4 had used some form of childcare during their most recent term-time week, equating to 1.9 million children.

Formal childcare was used by just under two-thirds (64%) of children, in line with 62% in 2018.

Ease of meeting childcare costs broadly stable over time

The ease of meeting the cost of childcare



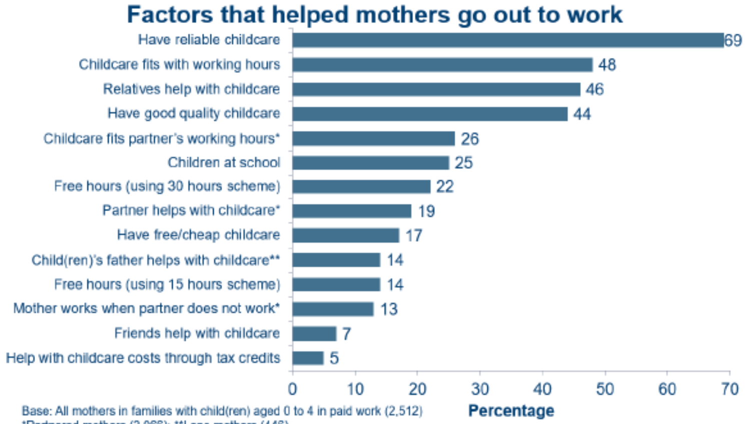
Base: All families with child(ren) aged 0 to 4 who paid for childcare in the reference week (1,896 in 2008; 1,739 in 2009; 1,438 in 2010-11; 1,780 in 2011-12; 1,746 in 2012-13; 1,664 in 2014-15; 1,572 in 2017; 1,651 in 2018; 2,288 in 2019)

Just under half (46%) of parents who paid for childcare said it was easy or very easy to meet their childcare costs, in line with 2018 (also 45%).

Just over a quarter (27%) found it difficult or very difficult to meet their childcare costs, a rise from 2018 (23%), but lower than in 2011-12 when a third (33%) of parents found it difficult to meet their childcare costs.

Reliable childcare is reported by mothers to help them make work choices

Factors that helped mothers go out to work



Base: All mothers in families with child(ren) aged 0 to 4 in paid work (2,512)
*Partnered mothers (2,066); **Lone mothers (446)

62% of mothers with children aged 0 to 4 were in work in 2019, in line with 61% in 2018.

Around seven in ten (69%) working mothers said that having reliable childcare helped them go out to work, a rise from 63% in 2018.

Contact: EY.ANALYSISANDRESEARCH@education.gov.uk Press office: 020 7783 8300 Public enquiries: 0370 000 2288

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About this release

This Official Statistics release provides the main findings of the 2019 wave in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents series. This includes: overall usage of childcare providers; receipt of the funded 15 hours of childcare or early education a week for disadvantaged 2-year-olds and for all 3- and 4-year-olds, and of the funded 30 hours of childcare or early education a week for all 3- and 4-year-olds with working parents; parents' perceptions of the quality and availability of childcare provision; the home learning environment, including children's use of digital electronic devices at home; the cost of childcare and perceptions of affordability; and factors influencing maternal employment decisions.

The 2019 survey reports the findings of face-to-face interviews, conducted between January and August 2019, with a nationally representative sample of 5,057 parents with children aged 0 to 4 in England. The prior survey wave was carried out in 2018 (with 5,922 parents of children aged 0 to 14 in England), and the next wave is due to be in field between January and August 2020 (also with parents of children aged 0 to 14 in England). For the 2019 wave the target sample size was lowered relative to previous waves (from 6,000 to 5,000 interviews), but the focus on children aged 0 to 4 increased the analytical opportunties for this age group by delivering a larger sample size of children aged 0 to 4, and by allowing new questions relevant to children aged 0 to 4 to be included in the questionnaire.

For ease of interpretation, data from the 2019 survey wave is compared to the 2018 wave (the 2018 data has been rebased to be comparable where relevant), but longer term trends are shown for some key time series questions. Where differences between survey waves, or between population sub-groups, are reported upon these differences are statistically significant, unless figures are explicitly reported as being 'in line with' or 'unchanged from' previous figures, in which case the differences are not statistically significant.

The survey was funded by the Department for Education (DfE), and managed by Ipsos MORI. It aims to provide information to help monitor the progress of policies and public attitudes in the area of childcare and early years education. The study has two key objectives. The first is to provide salient, up-to-date information on parents' use of childcare and early years provision, and their views and experiences. The second is to continue the time series – which has now been running for 15 years – on issues covered throughout the survey series.

This report summarises key findings from the survey. More detailed findings can be found in the accompanying Tables, and in the Technical Report, which is published on the DfE website alongside a report on a push-to-web mode trial conducted during 2019.

A follow-up survey will be conducted in 2020 with parents who consented to take part in future research and findings will be published in the Autumn of 2020. Equivalent follow-up surveys were conducted (and results published) for the 2017 wave, and the 2018 wave (publication forthcoming in 2020).

Defining childcare

The study uses a very inclusive definition of childcare and early years provision. Parents were asked to include any time that the child was not with a resident parent, or a resident parent's current (or ex-) husband, wife, or partner. Ex-husbands/wives/partners were counted as a type of informal provider prior to 2019, but following a surveys user consultation have been excluded from the definition of childcare from the 2019 wave for consistency with other with other national and international surveys about childcare.

Formal providers: include nursery schools, nursery classes, reception classes, special day schools, day nurseries, playgroups, childminders, nannies or au-pairs, baby-sitters, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and holiday clubs.

Informal providers: include grandparents, older brothers/sisters, other relatives, friends or neighbours.

In this publication

As detailed in section 8. Accompanying Tables, a set of data tables are published alongside this report: Tables (OpenDocument .ods). The accompanying Technical Report provides information on the data sources, their coverage and quality, and explains the methodology used in producing the survey data.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at EY.ANALYSISANDRESEARCH@education.gov.uk

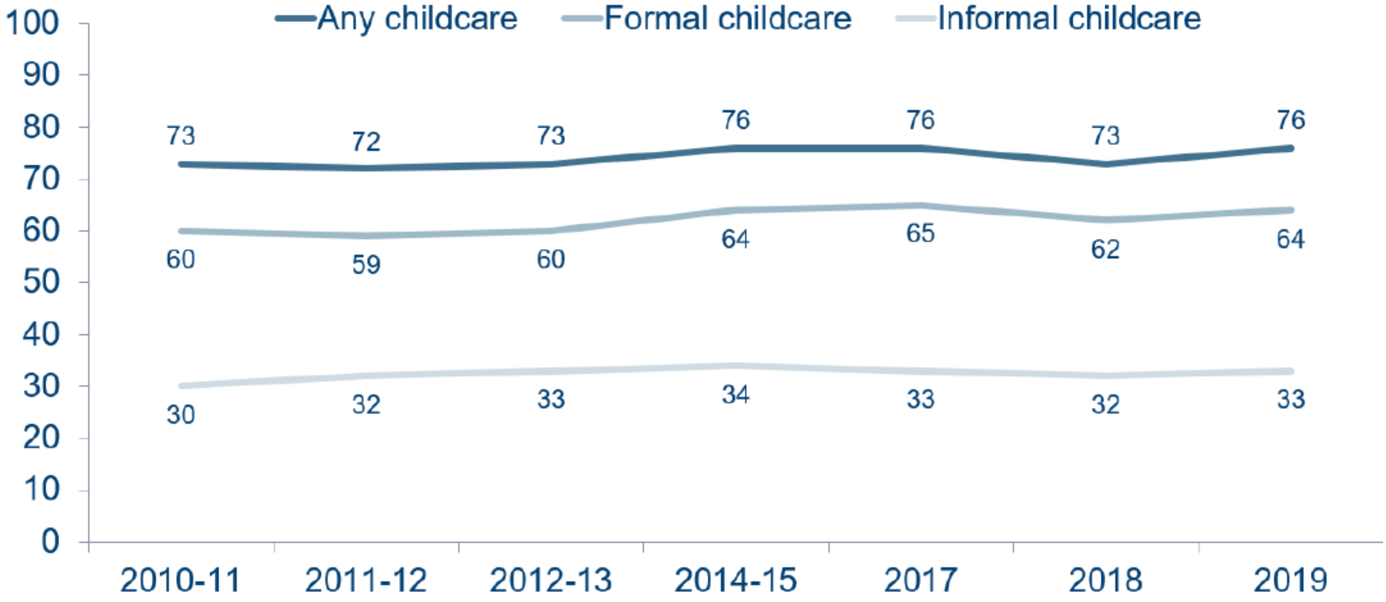
We undertook a user consultation during 2018 on the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents. A summary of the consultation responses and plans for the survey from 2019 onwards has been published on the DfE website. The 2019 survey focussed on parents of children aged 0 to 4, inclusive of children in Reception year, while the 2020 survey will cover the 0 to 14 age range, as per the 2018 and earlier surveys, continuing the survey series.

1. Use of childcare and early years provision

Overall use of childcare

Overall, in 2019, 76% of children in England aged 0 to 4 had received some form of childcare during their most recent term-time week (Table 1.3)[1], equating to 1,944,000 children (Table 1.2)[2].

Figure A: Percentage of children using childcare providers
England, most recent term-time week, 2010-11 to 2019



Base: All children aged 0 to 4 (2,681 in 2010-11; 2,651 in 2011-12; 2,507 in 2012-13; 2,353 in 2014-15; 2,273 in 2017; 2,724 in 2018; 5,057 in 2019)

Use of formal childcare among children

Almost two-thirds (64%) of children aged 0 to 4 received formal childcare in 2019 (Table 1.6), in line with the 2018 survey (62%). Receipt of formal childcare rose with age, being used by 11% of 0-year-olds, 36% of 1-year-olds, 57% of 2-year-olds, 84% of 3-year-olds, and 93% of 4-year-olds.

Children aged 0 to 2 were most likely to receive formal childcare from day nurseries (20%), followed by nursery schools (8%) and childminders (7%). Children aged 3 were most likely to receive formal childcare from day nurseries (31%), followed by nursery schools (20%) and nursery classes (18%). Children aged 4 were most likely to receive formal childcare from reception classes (28%), followed by nursery classes (20%), nursery schools (18%), and day nurseries (17%).

Since 2010-11, there has been a rise in the proportion of children aged 0 to 4 using nursery schools (from 11% to 13%), nursery classes (from 7% to 10%), and day nurseries (from 16% to 22%), and a fall in the proportion of children aged 0 to 4 using playgroups or pre-schools (from 12% to 8%).

Children aged 0 to 4 who received formal childcare spent on average 19.0 hours a week in formal childcare (Table 1.7), in line with 2018 (18.0 hours)[3]. The amount of time children spent in formal childcare rose with age: children aged 0 to 2 who received formal childcare spent 17.0 hours a week in formal childcare (in line with 16.0 hours in 2018), while children aged 3 to 4 who received formal childcare spent 21.0 hours a week in formal childcare (in line with 20.0 hours in 2018).

[1] Parents were asked in detail about their child's use of childcare during the most recent term-time week before the interview took place. Estimates for the use of 'any childcare' and 'informal childcare' prior to the 2019 wave include ex-husbands/wives/partners as a form of childcare, and this should be borne in mind when making comparisons across survey years.
[2] Figures are grossed to a national level using national estimates (number of families in England and number of children aged 0-4 in England) calculated from the Child Benefit Register as of January 2019.
[3] Median (rather than mean) numbers of hours are reported because they are less affected by extreme values.

The characteristics associated with children's likelihood of receiving formal childcare were consistent with those identified in previous waves in the survey series, and included:

- The child's age: children aged 3 and 4 were most likely to receive formal childcare (84% and 93% respectively) while children aged 0 and 1 were least likely to (11% and 36% respectively) (Table 1.6);
- The deprivation level of the local area: 74% of children living in the least deprived areas received formal childcare, compared to 57% of children living in the most deprived areas (Table 1.3);
- The family's (gross) annual income: 76% of children in families earning £45,000 or more received formal childcare, compared to 52% of those earning under £10,000 (Table 1.3);
- The family structure and work status: children in working lone-parent families (76%) and in dual-working couple families (73%) were most likely to receive formal childcare. Children in couple families with one parent in work (48%) and in couple families with neither parent in work (47%) were least likely to receive formal childcare (Table 1.3).

Use of informal childcare among children

A third (33%) of children aged 0 to 4 used informal childcare in 2019 (Table 1.6). Children were most likely to be cared for by grandparents (29%, a rise from 25% in 2018, and from 24% in 2010-11), followed by another relative (5%, in line with 4% in both 2018 and 2010-11).

Children aged 0 to 4 who received informal childcare spent on average 10.0 hours a week in informal childcare (Table 1.7), unchanged from 2018.

Use of holiday childcare among children

For children whose main formal provider closed throughout school holiday periods (including half terms), parents were asked whether their child had received any childcare in the most recent school holiday period. Six per cent of children had received formal childcare during the most recent school holiday period, when their main formal provider was closed, and 22% had received informal childcare (Table 7.2).

Children aged 3 to 4 were more likely than those aged 0 to 2 to receive formal childcare in holiday periods (7% vs 3% respectively). And children in higher-income families were more likely to receive formal childcare in holiday periods than those in lower-income families (10% of children in families earning £45,000 or more per year, compared to 2% in families earning under £10,000) (Table 7.2).

Reasons for using childcare

Around seven in ten (69%) children received childcare (formal or informal) for economic reasons (e.g. to enable their parents to work, look for work, or to study), and 59% received childcare for child-related reasons (e.g. for the child's educational or social development, or because the child likes attending). Reasons relating to parental time were less common (20%) (e.g. so the parents could conduct domestic activities, socialise, or look after other children) (Table 9.10). These proportions are in line with 2018 (66%, 58%, and 22% respectively).

Parents considered a range of factors when choosing a formal childcare provider for their child. The most common factors were the provider's convenience (mentioned by 62% of parents, in line with 60% in 2018), and the provider's reputation (57%, unchanged from 2018). Other factors included the quality of the care given (51%, in line with 50% in 2018), and the opportunity for the child to mix with other children (50%, unchanged from 2018) (Table 6.1).

Parents who had not used any childcare in the past year (neither formal nor informal) tended not to use childcare out of choice, rather than due to constraints. Around seven in ten (69%) parents who were not using childcare said they would rather look after their child(ren) themselves, while only 16% said it was because they could not afford childcare (Table 5.2).

Changes to local childcare provision

Parents were asked what changes to local childcare provision, if any, would be most helpful for making it better suited to their needs. Parents were most likely to say more affordable childcare (38%, a rise from 34% in 2018), more childcare available during the school holidays (20%, in line with 19% in 2018), and longer opening hours (17%, unchanged since 2018) (Table 5.15). Parents who wanted to see improvements made to local childcare provision were asked at which times of the year improvements should be made in order to meet their needs. Parents were most likely to say in the Summer holidays (49%), followed by the Easter holidays (29%), during half-term holidays (29%), and in the Christmas holidays (26%) (Table 5.14).

2. Receipt of the entitlement to government funded childcare or early education

Policy background on childcare or early education in England

Entitlements

All 3- and 4-year-olds in England are entitled to a defined number of hours of free childcare or early education. Some 2-year-olds are also eligible to access a defined number of hours of free childcare or early education, for example if their parent or guardian receives certain benefits, or they have a statement of special educational needs[4].

15 hours entitlement

All 3- and 4-year-olds, and eligible 2-year-olds, are entitled to 570 hours of funded early education or childcare per year. This is usually taken as 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year.

30 hours entitlement

Since September 2017, the funded childcare entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds increased to 30 hours a week for working parents that meet the eligibility criteria. Parents can usually get 30 hours of funded childcare if they (and their partner, if they have one) are in work (or getting parental leave, sick leave or annual leave), and are earning at least the National Minimum Wage or Living Wage for 16 hours a week.

Awareness and use of 15 hours of childcare or early education

Over nine in ten (93%) parents with a child aged 0 to 4 were aware of the 15 hours offer (Table 2.2), a rise from 90% in 2018. Parents in families with higher annual incomes were more likely to be aware of the offer (97% of those earning £45,000 or more per year, compared to 86% of those earning under £10,000).

Among parents with a 2-year-old, around four in five (79%) were aware that certain 2-year-olds are eligible for some free hours of childcare each week (Table 2.4), in line with 2018 (83%).

Official statistics from the DfE's Early Years Census and Schools Census[5] show that in January 2019, 95% of 4-year-olds, 92% of 3-year-olds, and 68% of eligible 2-year-olds benefitted from funded childcare or early education.

In 2019, over nine in ten (93%) parents using the 15 hours offer were satisfied with the way they could use the hours for their child (Table 2.5), in line with 2018 (92%). Almost all parents using the 2-year-old offer were satisfied with the way they were able to use the hours for their child (96%), unchanged from 2018.

[4] For more information on the eligibility criteria see https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-and-education-for2-to-4-year-olds

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2019 (Tables 1, 4 and 6). The Department for Education's Early Years Census and Schools Census are the official take up figures for funded childcare and early education, so are presented here.

3. 30 hours of childcare or early education for working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds

Awareness of the 30 hours

Among parents with a child aged 0 to 4, around four in five (81%) were aware of the 30 hours (Table 3.1), up from 78% in 2018. Awareness was higher among parents in couple families (82%, compared to 75% among lone parents), and among those with higher annual family incomes (90% of those earning £45,000 or more per year, compared to 66% of those earning under £10,000). Since 2018, awareness among parents in households earning between £10,000 and £20,000 rose from 67% to 73%.

Awareness also varied by the age of the child(ren) in the household. Among families with a child aged 0 to 2 (but no children aged 3 to 4) 75% were aware, while among families with a child aged 3 to 4 (but no children 0 to 2) 87% were aware (Table 3.5).

Take-up of the 30 hours

Official statistics from the DfE's Early Years Census and Schools Census show that in January 2019[6], 328,000 children aged 3 to 4 benefitted from the extended 30 hours entitlement. DfE's estimates suggest around 410,000 children were eligible for the extended hours nationally[7], suggesting that four out of five eligible children have taken up some extended hours.

Responses to the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents show that in 2019, parents who applied for the 30 hours were most likely to have done so to help with their childcare costs (72%), so they could maintain (39%) or increase (21%) their working hours, or to help prepare their child for school (30%) (Table 3.6).

Almost all (94%) parents using the 30 hours were satisfied with the way they were able to use the hours for their child (Table 2.5), unchanged since 2018.

Among working parents with a 3- or 4-year-old who had not applied for the 30 hours, the most common reason for not applying was that they did not think they were eligible (52%) (Table 3.7). The remaining almost half of parents had not applied because of a reason unrelated to eligibility, including that they would rather look after their child themselves (11%), that they did not need any more hours of childcare (11%), that they would rather family or friends looked after their child (8%), and that their current provider did not offer the 30 hours (7%) (Table 3.7).

Almost three in five (57%) non-working parents with a child aged 0 to 4, who were not already receiving or registered for the 30 hours, felt it was likely they would try to find paid work to become eligible for the 30 hours (Table 3.2), in line with 2018 (58%). Among parents whose partner was not in work, and who were not already receiving or registered for the 30 hours, over two in five (44%) felt it likely their partner would try and find paid work to become eligible for the 30 hours (not a statistically significant difference from 54% in 2018).

The vast majority (94%) of children receiving government funded hours received their hours from a single childcare provider, with the remaining 6% receiving their hours from two or more providers (Table 3.9). These proportions were unchanged from 2018 (94% and 6% respectively). Children using the 30 hours were the most likely to receive their hours from more than one provider (13%, compared to 4% for children using the 15 hours offer, and 2% for children using the 2-year-old offer). These proportions were unchanged from 2018 (13%, 4%, and 2% respectively).

[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2019 (Tables 3, 5 & 7). The Department for Education's Early Years Census and Schools Census are the official take up figures for funded childcare and early education, so are presented here.

[7] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811642/Provision_for_children_under_5_2019_-_technical_document.pdf (section 3.4).

Among children receiving government funded hours from more than one formal provider (whether under the 2-year-old offer, the 15 hours offer, or the 30 hours offer), the most common reasons for using more than one provider were so the parent could cover all the days for which they needed childcare (39%), so the parent could cover the times of day for which they needed childcare (27%), and because the child liked spending time at each provider (17%) (Table 3.10).

Among children receiving government funded hours from their main formal provider, almost nine in ten (89%) were attending their parents' first choice of provider (Table 2.9). The main reasons for children not attending their parents' first choice of provider were that the preferred provider was already fully booked (28%), wouldn't have fitted with the parents' working hours (12%), was too expensive (11%), was too difficult to get to (11%), or did not offer services that met their child's need (11%) (Table 2.10). For most (90%) children receiving government funded hours from their main formal provider, their parents had found it easy to get a place at the provider, including over half (55%) who had found it very easy (Table 2.11).

Perceived impacts of the 30 hours

Parents using the 30 hours were asked some questions to gauge the perceived impact of the hours on their work, and on their family finances.

Just over half (53%) of parents said that if the 30 hours were not available to them, they would still be working the same number of hours (Table 3.3), in line with the 2018 survey (55%). A third (33%), however, thought that in the absence of the 30 hours they would be working fewer hours, also in line with the 2018 survey (34%).

Lone parents were more likely than parents in couple families to say they would be working fewer hours, were the 30 hours not available to them (44% vs 31% respectively).

Only 5% of parents thought they would be working more hours were the 30 hours not available to them, unchanged since 2018.

Seven in ten parents (70%) felt the 30 hours had given them more flexibility in terms of the number of hours they could work, and just over half (54%) felt the 30 hours had given them more flexibility in terms of which jobs they could do (Table 3.3). These proportions were both in line with the 2018 survey (66% and 50% respectively).

Lone parents were more likely than those in couple families to feel that the 30 hours had given them more flexibility in terms of the number of hours they could work (82% vs 68% respectively), and were also more likely to feel that the 30 hours had given them more flexibility in terms of which jobs they could do (64% vs 52% respectively).

Almost four in five parents (78%) reported that the 30 hours had improved their family finances (in line with the 2018 survey, 74%), with 45% saying they had 'slightly more money' to spend than before, and 33% saying they had 'much more money' to spend than before (Table 3.4). Parents in couple families were more likely than lone parents to say that the 30 hours had improved their family finances (80% vs 67%).

4. Paying for childcare

Just under three in five (57%) families who used a childcare provider in the reference week reported paying for this childcare (Table 4.1), in line with 2018 (56%)[8]. Of families using formal provision, 59% reported paying for this childcare (in line with 2018, 60%), and of families using informal provision, 6% reported paying for this childcare (in line with 2018, 7%).

[8] These proportions relate to families with a child aged 0 to 4, who used a childcare provider (or providers) in the reference week for a child (or children) aged 0 to 14.

Weekly cost of childcare

The overall median weekly amount paid by families to childcare providers (including both formal and informal providers) was £45.00 (Table 4.5), unchanged from the 2018 survey[9]. The amount paid varied depending on the number of hours of childcare used across all children in the household, and the types of providers used. Costs statistics are subject to a number of caveats, as described in the Technical Report.

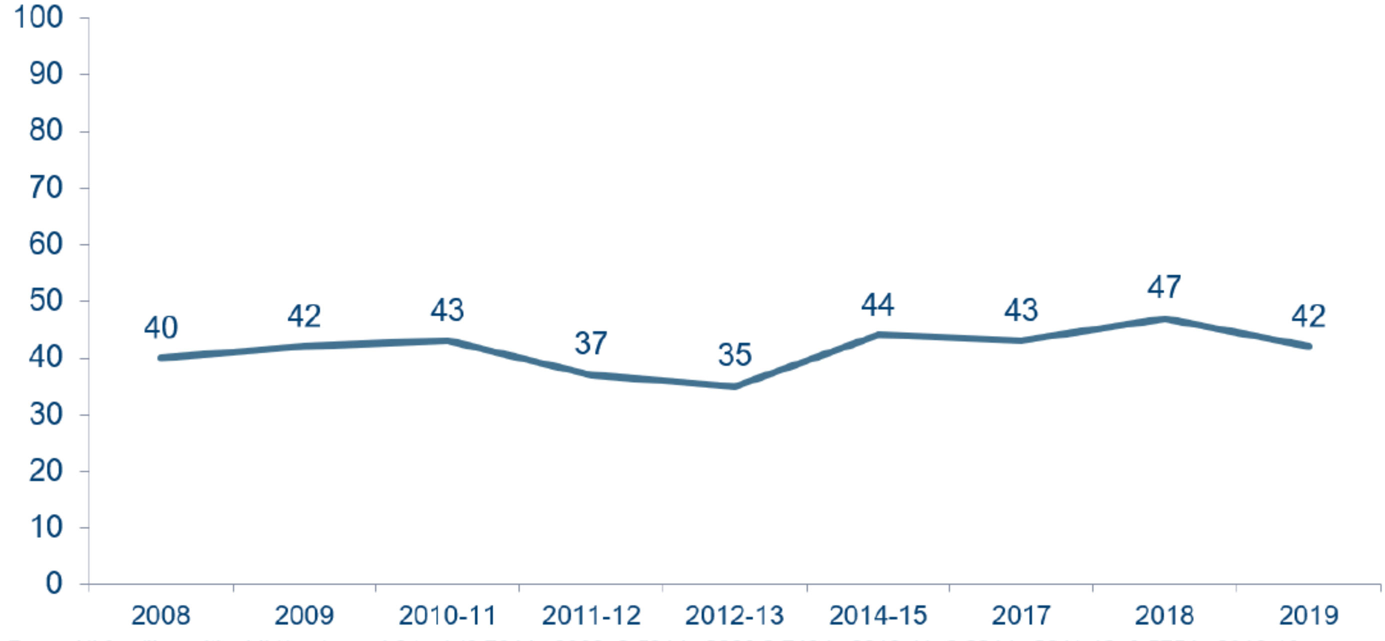
Turning to child-level (rather than family-level) payments, the overall median weekly amount paid to formal childcare providers was £46.00 (Table 4.6), in line with 2018 (£43.50). For children aged 0 to 2, the median amount was £85.00 (in line with 2018, £81.16), and for children aged 3 to 4 it was £22.50 (in line with 2018, £20.00).

Child-level payments are influenced by the total number of hours children spend in formal childcare, as well as the types of providers used. As such, any changes in payments since 2018 do not necessarily reflect changes in the fees and charges levied by childcare providers.

Perceptions around the cost of childcare

Just over two in five (42%) parents rated the affordability of local childcare as very or fairly good (Table 5.1), a fall from the 2018 survey (47%), but in line with earlier surveys in the series (for instance 40% in 2008, and 44% in 2014-15). Just over a third (36%) of parents rated the affordability of local childcare as very or faily poor, in line with 2018 (34%).

Figure B: Percentage of parents rating the affordability of local childcare as very or fairly good
England, 2008 to 2019



Base: All families with child(ren) aged 0 to 4 (3,784 in 2008; 3,501 in 2009 3,740 in 2010-11; 3,681 in 2011-12; 3,575 in 2012-13; 3,391 in 2014-15; 3,207 in 2017; 3,605 in 2018; 5,057 in 2019)

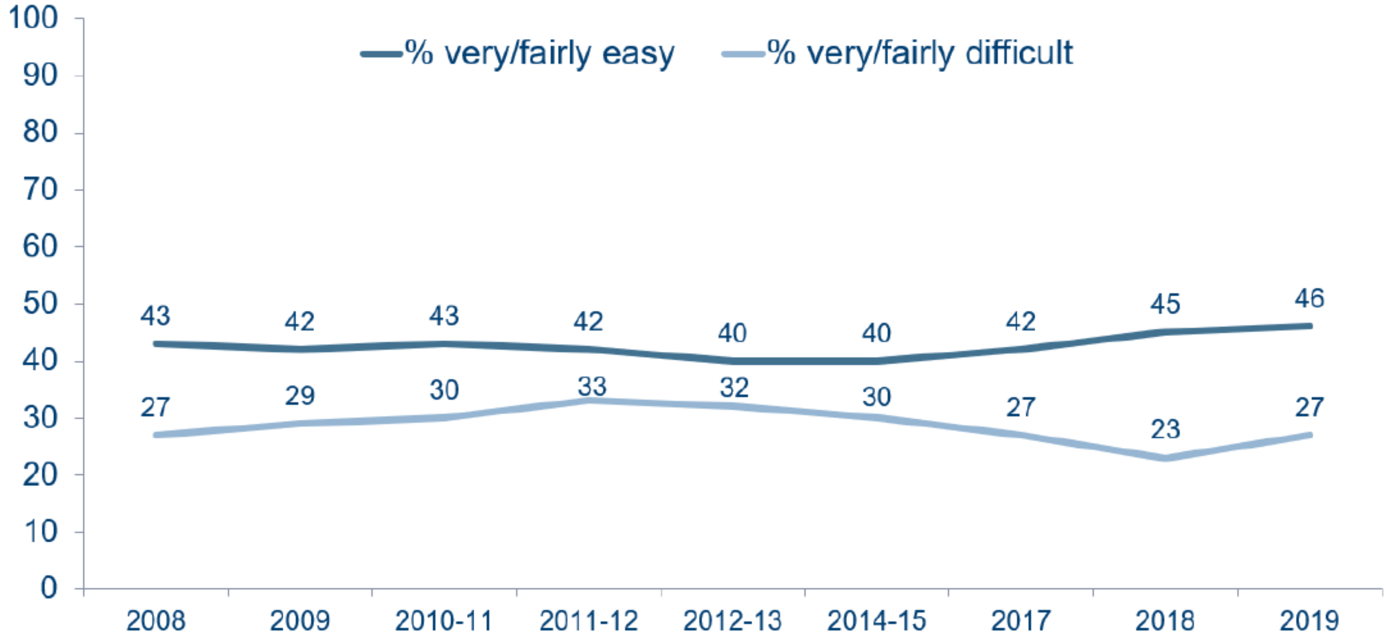
Just under half (46%) of parents who paid for childcare said it was easy or very easy to meet their childcare costs (Table 4.3), in line with 2018 (45%). Just over a quarter (27%) found it difficult or very difficult to meet their childcare costs, a rise from 2018 (23%), but lower than in 2011-12 when a third (33%) of parents found it difficult to meet their childcare costs. There is evidence that the rise in the proportion of parents finding it difficult to meet their childcare costs is largely attributable to families with a child aged 0 to 2. Specifically, among families with a child aged 0 to 2 (but no child aged 3 to 4) 33% found it difficult to meet

[9] These payments relate to families with a child aged 0 to 4, who paid a childcare provider (or providers) in the reference week for childcare used by their child (or children) aged 0 to 14.

their childcare costs, a rise from 25% in 2018. Among families with a child aged 3 to 4 (but not aged 0 to 2) 20% found it difficult to meet their childcare costs, in line with 19% in 2018.

By family type, lone parents were most likely to experience difficulties in meeting their childcare costs (40%, compared to 25% of couple households) (Table 4.3). Reflecting this pattern, difficulty in meeting childcare costs also varied by annual family income. Over two in five (44%) families earning under £10,000 per year found it difficult to meet their childcare costs, compared to a third (33%) of families earning between £10,000 and £45,000, and 22% of those earning £45,000 or more.

Figure C: The ease of meeting the cost of childcare
England, 2008 to 2019



Base: All families with child(ren) aged 0 to 4 who paid for childcare in the reference week (1,896 in 2008; 1,739 in 2009; 1,438 in 2010-11; 1,780 in 2011-12; 1,746 in 2012-13; 1,664 in 2014-15; 1,572 in 2017; 1,651 in 2018; 2,288 in 2019)

Financial help with childcare costs

Parents were asked whether they received any financial help towards childcare costs for any children in the household. This covered a variety of sources, including an employer (via childcare vouchers, direct payments to providers, or provision at the parent's place of work), the entitlement to government funded early education, and an ex-partner.

Among families who used formal childcare in the reference week, 27% reported that they received financial assistance from at least one external source (Table 4.9), in line with 2018 (30%). Parents were most likely to receive support from their employer (15%).

Impact of government-funded and employer-provided support

Parents in work and receiving one or more forms of government-funded or employer-provided support were asked what impact, if any, this support had had on their (and on their partner's) job[10].

Parents were most likely to say that the support they received had enabled them to stay in work (30%, a rise from 25% in 2018), or maintain their working hours (19%, in line with 22% in 2018) (Table 4.14). One in six (17%) parents said the support had enabled them to increase their working hours, and 3% said it had enabled them to decrease their working hours (both in line with 2018: 19% and 4% respectively).

[10] The forms of support were: Government funded hours of childcare under the 15 or 30 hours offers; Tax-Free Childcare; Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit; employer-provided childcare vouchers; direct payments to a childcare provider made by an employer; and a childcare provider located at the parent or partner's place of work.

For partners, the support was most likely to have enabled them to stay in work (17%, a rise from 11% in 2018), maintain their working hours (13%, a fall from 17% in 2018), or increase their working hours (8%, unchanged from 2018, also 8%) (Table 4.15). Two per cent of partners had decreased their working hours because of the support they had received (in line with 1% in 2018).

Tax-Free Childcare

Policy background on Tax-Free Childcare

Tax-Free Childcare launched to the public in April 2017 with a phased rollout that was completed in February 2018. Tax-Free Childcare provides help with childcare costs for working parents. For every £8, a parent pays into their Tax-Free Childcare account the government will add an extra £2, up to a maximum of £2,000 per child per year, for children aged 0 to 11. For disabled children the maximum is £4,000 per year up to the age of 16. Parents are then able to use the funds to pay for registered childcare.

Two in five (40%) parents with a child aged 0 to 4 were aware of the Tax-Free Childcare scheme (Table 5.17), a rise from 32% in 2018. By family work status, dual-working couple families were most likely to be aware of the scheme (52%), followed by working lone parent families (38%). Non-working couple and lone parent families were least likely to be aware (19% and 21% respectively).

Among working families (dual-working couple families, and working lone parent families) with a child aged 0 to 4, 13% had opened a Tax-Free Childcare account (a rise from 8% in 2018), and a further 2% had applied for, but had not opened, an account (a rise from 1% in 2018) (Table 5.17).

Almost nine in ten (86%) families who had opened a Tax-Free Childcare account had paid money into their account, and almost all (95%) who had paid money into their account had paid a childcare provider from their account (Table 5.18).

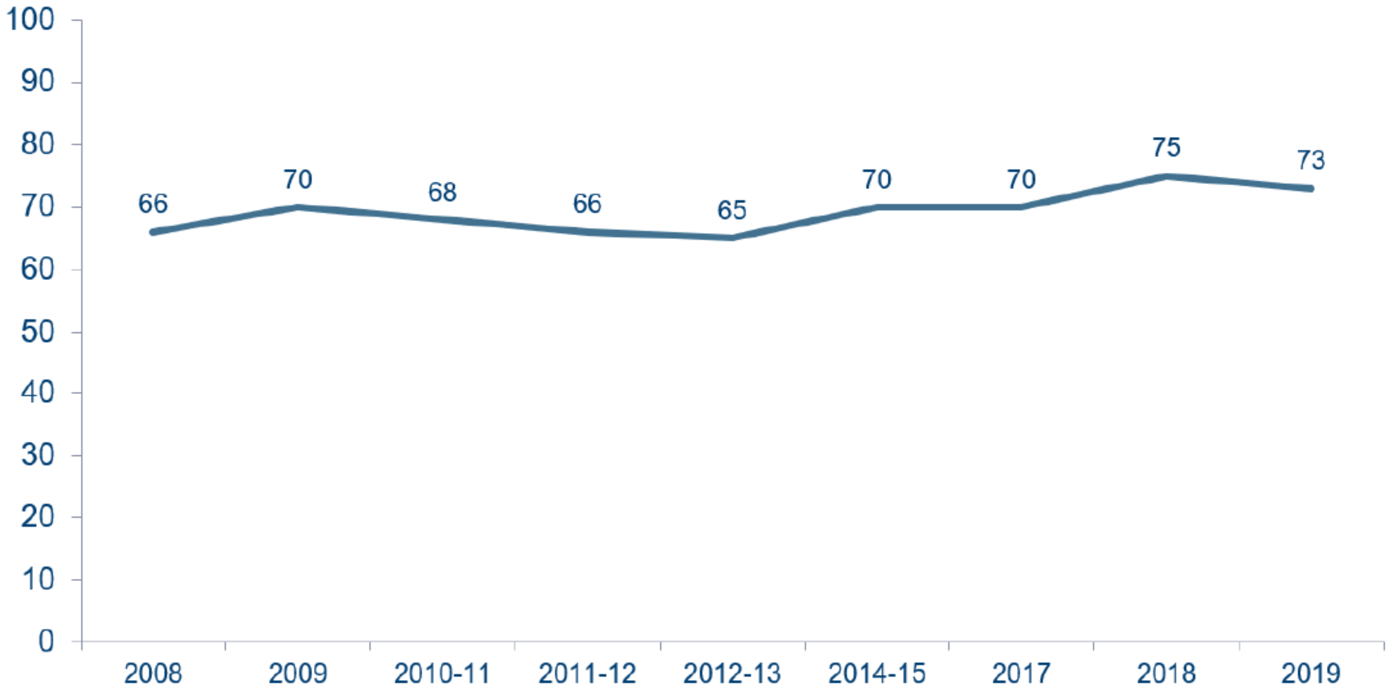
Among parents with a child aged 0 to 4 who had not applied for Tax-Free Childcare, over a quarter (28%) said they would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ apply for it in the future (Table 5.19). For those who did not intend to apply for Tax-Free Childcare in the future, the main reasons were because they claimed tax credits (23%), because they (or their partner) were not working (18%), or because they did not use formal childcare (12%) (Table 5.20).

5. Perceptions of childcare and early years provision

Perceptions of quality

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of parents rated the overall quality of local childcare provision as very or fairly good, with just 6% rating it as very or fairly poor (Table 5.1). These proportions are in line with the 2018 survey (75% and 7% respectively).

Figure D: Percentage of parents rating the quality of local childcare as very or fairly good
England, 2008 to 2019



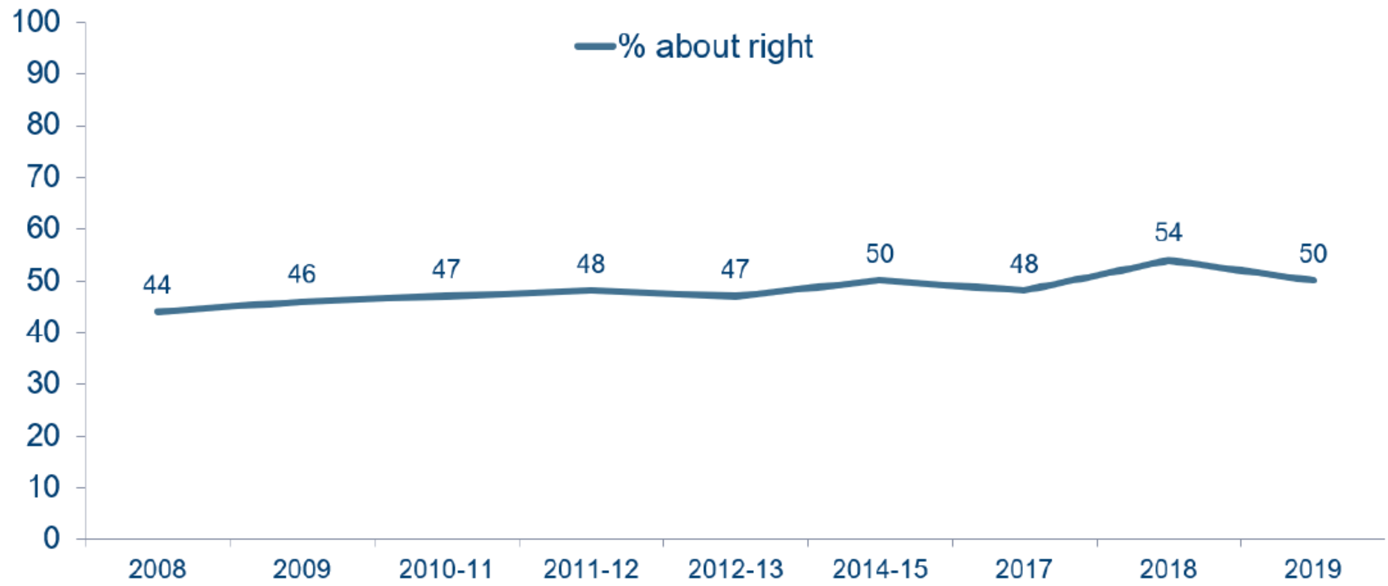
Base: All families with child(ren) aged 0 to 4 (3,784 in 2008; 3,501 in 2009 3,740 in 2010-11; 3,681 in 2011-12; 3,575 in 2012-13; 3,391 in 2014-15; 3,207 in 2017; 3,605 in 2018; 5,057 in 2019)

Perceptions of availability and flexibility

Half (50%) of parents felt the number of local childcare places was 'about right' (in line with 54% in 2018), while 28% said there were not enough places (unchanged from 2018) (Table 5.1).

One in five (22%) parents reported problems with finding childcare flexible enough to meet their needs, in line with 2018 (23%) (Table 5.13). Among couple families with one or both parents in work, and working lone-parent families, almost two-thirds (64%) felt that they were able to find term-time childcare that fitted in with their (and/or their partner's) working hours, up from 59% in 2018.

Figure E: Parents' perceptions of the availability of local childcare places
England, 2004 to 2019



Base: All families with child(ren) aged 0 to 4 (3,784 in 2008; 3,501 in 2009 3,740 in 2010-11; 3,681 in 2011-12; 3,575 in 2012-13; 3,391 in 2014-15; 3,207 in 2017; 3,605 in 2018; 5,057 in 2019)

Perceptions of males caring for children at formal childcare providers

Males are significantly under-represented in the early years workforce, with evidence from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2018[11] showing that 3% of the workforce are male.

Parents were asked to what extent they supported or opposed male staff caring for children at formal childcare providers. The great majority (79%) of parents supported male staff caring for children, with just 5% opposed (Table 5.21). Parents who did not use any childcare at all were more likely to be opposed to male staff caring for children (7%) than those who used formal childcare (5%), or who used informal childcare only (3%).

Parents who did not oppose male staff caring for children were asked whether male staff should have the same childcare duties and responsibilities as female staff. Almost nine in ten (86%) felt that male and female staff should have the same duties and responsibilities, with 8% feeling that the duties and responsibilities should differ (Table 5.21). Parents who did not use any childcare were more likely to think that the duties and responsibilities should differ (13%) than parents who used formal childcare (8%) or who used informal childcare only (also 8%).

Information about childcare

Over half (54%) of parents said the information available to them about childcare in their local area was 'about right', while 30% thought there was 'too little' information (Table 5.1)[12]. A further 14% of parents were unsure, and 2% felt there was too much information. These proportions are in line with the 2018 survey.

Parents were most likely to receive information about childcare via word of mouth, for example from friends or relatives (50% having done so in the last year), followed by from school (16%) and from social media (15%) (Table 5.3).

6. The home learning environment

Questions about the home learning environment were asked using a split-sample approach. A random half of parents were asked questions about their child's use of digital technology at home, with the remaining half asked questions about the frequency with which someone at home engages in home learning activities with their child.

Children's use of digital electronic devices

Around seven in ten (69%) children aged 0 to 4 used a digital electronic device at home, either alone or together with someone else[13] (Table 6.4), unchanged from 2018. There was substantial variation by age: just 20% of 0-year-olds used a digital electronic device at home, compared to 90% of 4-year-olds. Children aged 0 to 4 were most likely to use a tablet computer (55%) or a smartphone (36%) devices.

Among children that used a digital electronic device at home, the most common reasons were to support learning (67%), to encourage play and creativity (49%), or to keep them occupied or quiet (45%) (Table 6.7).

Parents used digital electronic devices as a tool for learning in a variety of ways. Among children who used a digital electronic device at home, two-thirds (67%) were helped by someone at home to learn songs, poems, nursery rhymes or to tell stories (in line with 69% in 2018); 63% were helped to learn numbers or to

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[11] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/provider-finances-evidence-from-early-years-providers

[12] Under s12 of the Childcare Act 2006, Local Authorities are required to publish information electronically on their website, and update this information at a minimum every term. Local Authorities are also required to provide information on which childcare providers provide the 30 hours offer.

[13] Digital electronic devices included: tablet computers; smartphones; video game consoles; PCs or laptop computers; E-Readers; and Apps or games on a Smart TV or Connected TV. Watching TV did not constitute using a digital electronic device for the purposes of the survey.

count (in line with 61% in 2018); and 61% were helped to learn the alphabet, to spell, or to recognise words (in line with 64% in 2018) (Table 6.6).

Among all children aged 0 to 4, around one in five (21%) used a digital electronic device with someone at home as a learning tool on a daily basis (in line with 22% in 2018), and a further 35% used one less often than daily, but at least once a week (in line with 34% in 2018) (Table 6.5).

As seen in the 2018 survey, there was variation by annual family income, with children in lower income households more likely to use a device with someone at home as a learning tool on a daily basis (32% of children in households earning under £10,000, compared to 13% of children in households earning £45,000 or more) (Table 6.5).

Children's use of apps

Parents whose children used a tablet computer, smartphone, or Smart TV at home were most likely to choose which apps their child should use by searching the app/Play store (39%), through recommendations from friends or relatives (26%), by allowing their child to choose from already installed apps (22%), and through recommendations from other parents (16%) (Table 6.8).

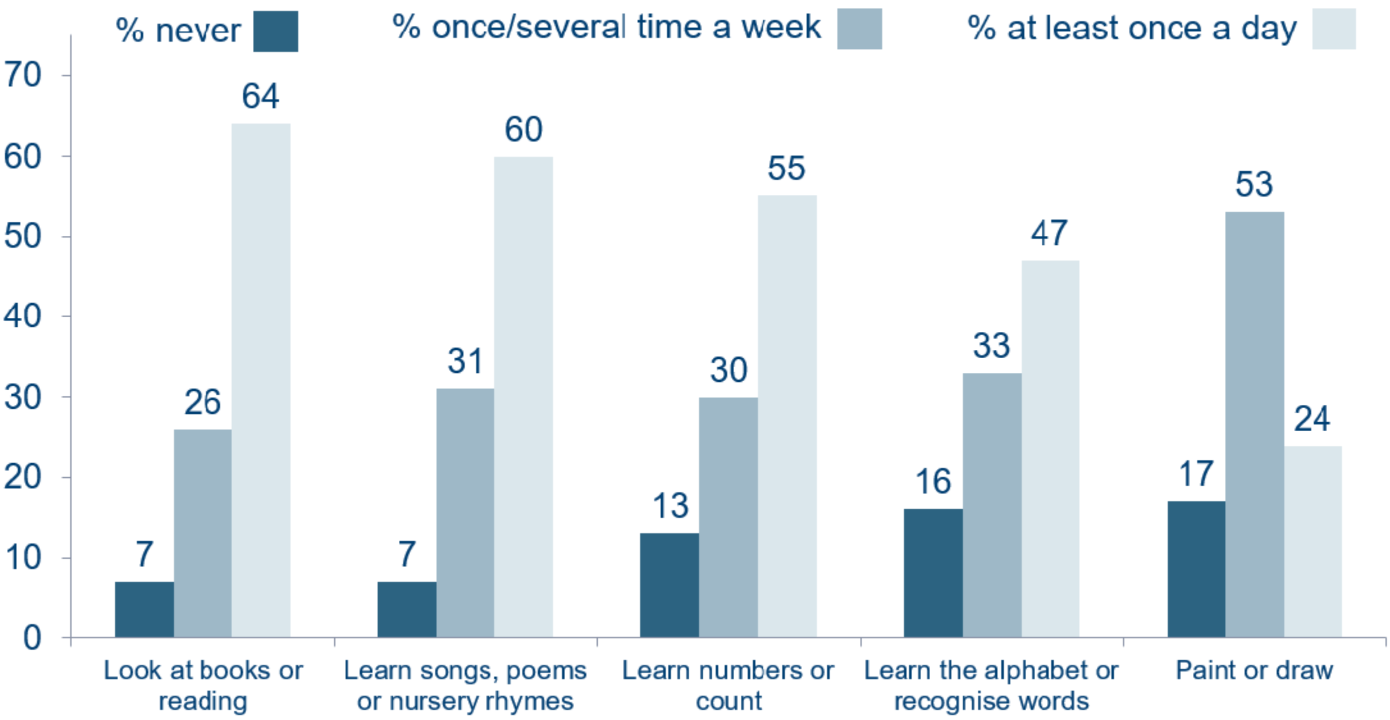
Most parents (78%) whose child used apps at home had never spent any money on an app for their child, while around one in five (19%) had paid to download an app for their child, and 5% had made an in-app purchase for their child (Table 6.9).

Frequency of home learning and play activities

Looking at books or reading was the home learning activity most frequently carried out with children aged 0 to 4, with 64% of parents reporting that someone at home does this activity at least once a day with their child (Table 6.11), a fall from 69% in 2017 when this question was last asked.

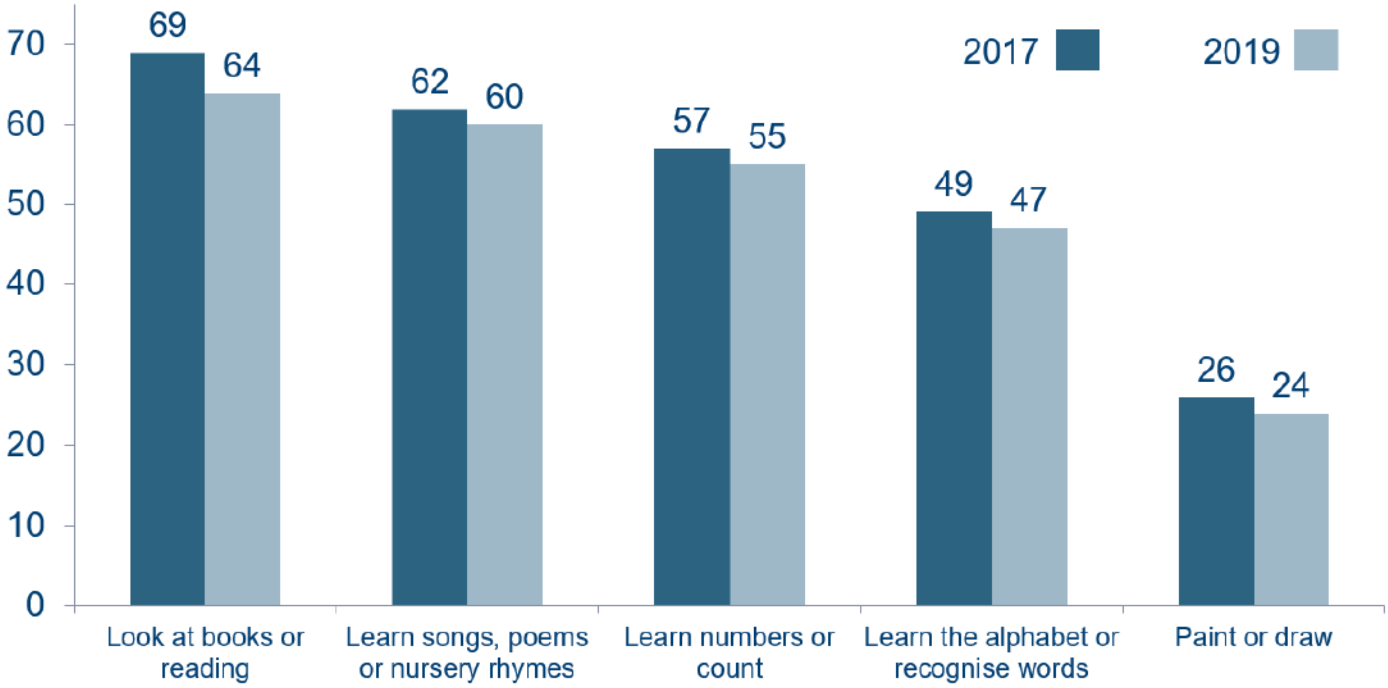
The next most frequently conducted home learning activities were learning songs, poems or nursery rhymes (60% of parents reported that someone at home does this at least once a day with their child, in line with 62% in 2017), and learning numbers or to count (55% of parents reported that someone at home does this at least once a day with their child, in line with 57% in 2017) (Table 6.11).

Figure F: Frequency with which someone at home engages in home learning activities
England, January to August 2019



Base: Randomly selected half of children aged 0 to 4 (2,533)

Figure G: Percentage of families engaging in home learning activities at least once a day
England, 2017 and 2019



Base: All children aged 0 to 4 in 2017 (2,685); Randomly selected half of children aged 0 to 4 in 2019 (2,533)

Information about home learning and play activities

A random half of parents were asked from where they would like to get information and ideas about learning and play activities they could do with their child, with the other half asked from where (apart from their childcare provider) they had ever got information about such activities.

Parents were most likely to mention informal networks including friends or relatives (42%) and other parents (28%) as their preferred sources of information. These were followed by their childcare provider (23%), from social media (23%), from school (22%), and from an internet site (22%) (Table 6.19).

The sources from which parents had actually got information reflected these preferences, with 57% having got information from friends or relatives, 38% from an internet site, 36% from other parents, and 36% from social media (Table 6.20). Around one in six (16%) parents said they had got information from school, lower than the 22% who expressed a preference for getting information from school, suggesting that there may be unmet demand from this source.

7. Mothers, work and childcare

While primary caregivers, or parents with primary responsibility for making childcare decisions, are not always female or mothers, this section focuses on mothers specifically to understand which factors influence mothers' decisions around work. In July 2019 the government set out a roadmap of their vision to enable everyone to contribute to the country's economy and balance caring responsibilities with a rewarding career. Information in this section helps to understand the role of childcare in mothers' decisions around work[14].

Levels of work among mothers

[14] Government Equalities Office (2019) Gender equality at every stage: a roadmap for change: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/821889/GEO_GEEE_Strategy_Gender_Equality_Roadmap_Rev_1__1_.pdf

Just over three in five (62%) mothers reported that they were in work (Table 8.5), in line with the 2018 survey (61%). Three in five (60%) non-working mothers said that if they could arrange good quality childcare that was convenient, reliable and affordable, they would prefer to go out to work (Table 8.12), in line with 2018 (59%).

Factors influencing going out to work

Among mothers who had entered the workforce in the past two years, the most common reason for this was that their child (or children) was old enough to use childcare (19%) (Table 8.8). Other reasons included finding a job that enabled them to combine work and childcare (17%), their maternity leave coming to an end (16%), wanting to get out of the house (15%), and their financial situation (15%).

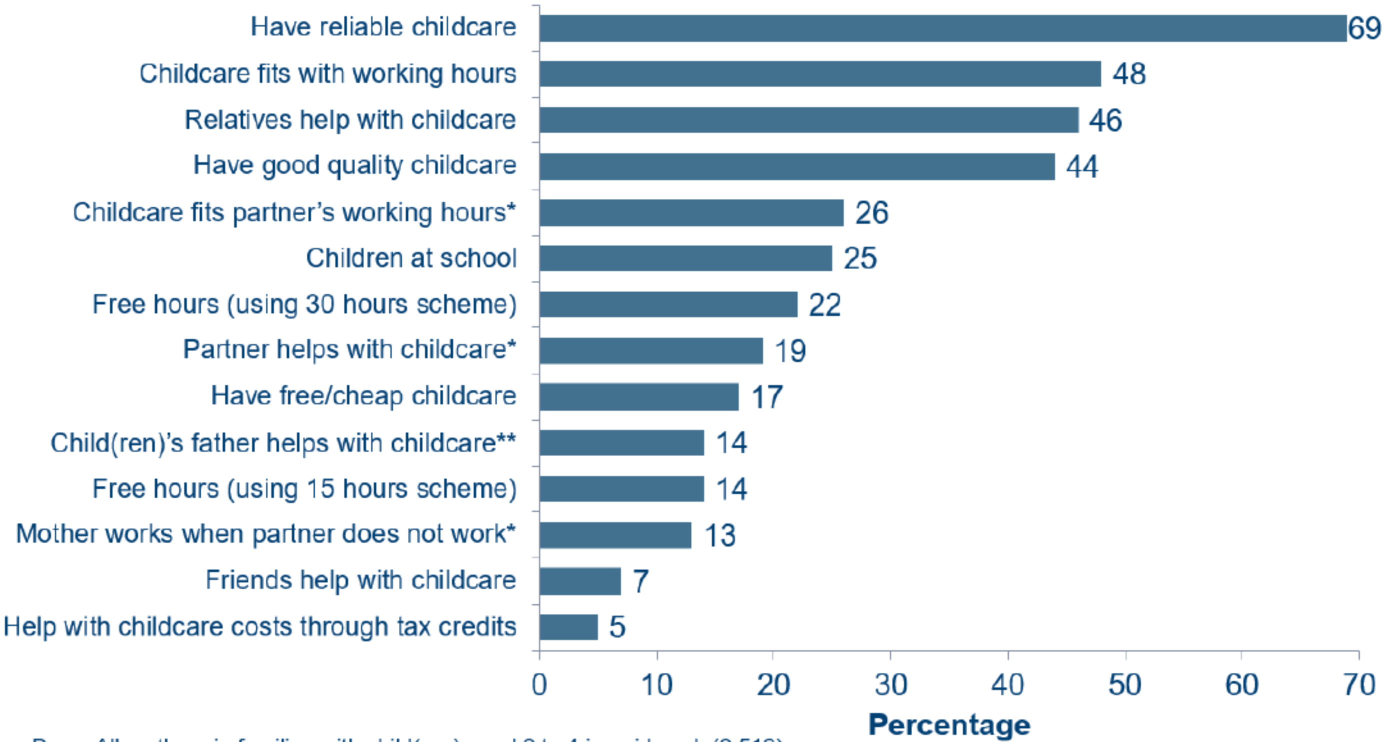
Six per cent of mothers said they entered the workforce to become eligible for the 30 hours, and among mothers with a child aged 2 to 4, this proportion was 9% (a rise from 5% in 2018).

Mothers who had transitioned from part-time to full-time work in the previous two years most commonly did so because of a job opportunity or promotion (25%), or because their child became old enough to use childcare (also 25%) (Table 8.9). One in six (17%) said they made this change to become eligible for the 30 hours.

Among working mothers, around seven in ten (69%) said that having reliable childcare helped them to go out to work (Table 8.3), a rise from 63% in 2018. Other frequently mentioned factors included having childcare that fitted with the parent's working hours (48%, a rise from 43% in 2018), having relatives available to help with childcare (46%, a rise from 41% in 2018), and having good quality childcare (44%, a rise from 39% in 2018).

More than one in five (22%) working mothers said the 30 hours helped them to work, and among those with a child aged 3 to 4 this proportion was 39% (a rise from 32% in 2018). One in seven (14%) working mothers said the 15 hours helped them to work, and among those with a child aged 3 to 4 this proportion was 23% (in line with 26% in 2018).

Figure H: Factors that helped mothers go out to work
England, January to August 2019



Base: All mothers in families with child(ren) aged 0 to 4 in paid work (2,512)
*Partnered mothers (2,066); **Lone mothers (446)

Among mothers working part-time, most (54%) said they would not change their working hours if there were no barriers to doing so (Table 8.1), in line with 2018 (52%). Almost a third (31%) said they would continue to work part-time but would increase their working hours, and 15% said they would move into full-time work. These proportions were in line with 2018 (35% and 14% respectively).

Mothers in lower-income households were more likely to want to increase the number of hours they worked part-time (48% of mothers in families earning under £10,000, compared to 23% of mothers in families earning £45,000 or more) and were also more likely to want to move from part-time to full-time work (23% of mothers in families earning under £10,000, compared to 9% of mothers in families earning £45,000 or more).

8. Accompanying tables

The tables from which the charts in this report are drawn, as well as further tables not reported upon, are available in ODS format on the department's statistics website, Statistics: childcare and early years.

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9. Technical information

The Technical Report which accompanies this report provides further methodological information on the survey design, sample, fieldwork, data analysis, interpretation, weighting and definitions used.

When reviewing these tables and the report please note that:

Interviews were conducted with parents of children aged 0 to 4 in England	The data represents children aged 0 to 4 in England (for child-level analyses), and families of children aged 0 to 4 in England (for family-level analyses). This contrasts with previous waves, where the age range was children aged 0 to 14. Where comparisons have made with previous waves, data from previous years have been rebased to be comparable.
The survey uses a broad definition of 'childcare'	Parents were asked to include any time that the child was not with a resident parent, a resident parent's current (or ex-) husband, wife, or partner, or at school. In order to remind parents to include all possible people or organisations that may have looked after their children, they were shown a list of childcare providers: nursery schools, nursery classes, reception classes, special day schools, day nurseries, playgroups, childminders, nannies or au-pairs, baby-sitters, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and holiday clubs, grandparents, older brother/sisters, other relatives, friends or neighbours.
Detailed information about childcare was collected for one 'reference child' in each household	Because of the constraint of interview length, detailed information on the use and needs of all children in the family could not be collected (unless the child was an only child). Rather, in families where there were two or more children, we obtained a broad picture about the childcare arrangements of all children, before asking more detailed questions about one randomly selected child.
Detailed information was collected for childcare use during term-time periods	As childcare arrangements may vary between school term-time and school holidays, most of the questions focused on a reference term-time week (which was the most recent term-time week). A separate set of questions was asked about the use of childcare during the school holidays.
Parents' classifications of the 'type' of childcare provider have been checked.	Deciding on the correct classification of the 'type' of provider can be complicated for parents. We therefore checked the classifications given by parents with some providers themselves in a separate telephone survey.

Cost estimates are based on self-reported data and are subject to some caveats	Estimates of childcare costs are based on the amounts families reported paying for the childcare they used for all children, during the reference week. They therefore represent an overall average, and take no account of the number of children in the household or the number of hours used. Respondents were asked about what they paid for 'out of their own pocket'. It is not possible to tell what parents have excluded or included in their calculations (e.g. childcare vouchers, government funded hours, tax credits). The analysis also takes no account of the fees policies of the relevant providers (because we did not collect this information).

10. Further information is available

For a detailed technical note	Please see the accompanying Technical Report.
Reports for previous years of the survey are available	Full reports for each year the survey has been conducted can be found on the DfE website.
For some related publications	Childcare and early years provider survey, published here. Provision for children under 5 years of age in England, published here.

11. Official Statistics

These are Official Statistics and have been produced in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

The Department has a set of statistical policies in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

12. Get in touch

Media enquiries

Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.

Tel: 020 7783 8300

Other enquiries/feedback

Early Years Analysis and Research, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD.

Tel: 0161 600 1675 Email: EY.ANALYSISANDRESEARCH@education.gov.uk

Department for Education

About this publication:

Enquiries: Early Years Analysis and Research, Department for Education, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD.
Tel: 0161 600 1675 Email: EY.ANALYSISANDRESEARCH@education.gov.uk

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