



Department
for Education

Delayed school admissions for summer born pupils (2020)

**Surveys of local authorities and of
parents and carers**

Research report

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Introduction

1. The School Admissions Code (“the Code”) requires school admission authorities to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. This is when children usually start school, but a child does not reach compulsory school age until the “prescribed day” following their fifth birthday (or on their fifth birthday if it falls on a prescribed day¹). This means that summer born children (born between 1 April and 31 August) do not need to start reception until the September following their fifth birthday - a full academic year after they are first entitled to a place. Currently the admission authority for the relevant school is responsible for making the decision on which year group the child should be admitted to and must make a decision on the circumstances of the case and in the best interests of the child concerned.

2. This report is based on the third in a series of surveys of all local authorities (LAs) in England issued by the Department for Education (DfE) about the requests they receive to delay admission to reception for summer born children. It also reports on a second survey of parents and carers who requested to delay admission to reception for their summer born child.

3. Local authorities (LAs): The LA surveys have explored the number of requests they receive, along with their approach to approvals. The first survey of LAs was conducted in February 2017 and asked about requests to delay entry until September 2016 and September 2017. The second survey conducted in July 2018 asked about requests to delay entry to September 2018 and 2019. Findings from the earlier surveys indicated a significant rise in requests (and approvals) in the first two years that data was collected but demand began to level off in 2018 and 2019. One of the aims of this third survey is to explore the extent to which requests for delayed entry to reception have continued to plateau or not.

4. Parent and Carers: In 2018, four LAs² which automatically accepted requests to delay entry to reception for their summer born child agreed to distribute a survey to those parents and carers which had applied. We aimed to test these previous findings with a larger sample and geographical spread in the latest parent/carer survey.

Aims and objectives

5. The main aims of the research were to understand:
- Trends in the number of requests for delayed entry into reception for summer born children.

¹ The prescribed days are 31 December, 31 March and 31 August.

² Liverpool City Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Devon County Council and Lewisham Council.

- Whether LAs are changing their approach to handling requests (including for children born prematurely).
- Factors which may be affecting demand for requests to delay entry for summer born children.
- Parent/carers' reasons for requesting delayed entry for their summer born children, as well as their demographics and their childcare arrangements.

Methodology

Survey of Local Authorities (LAs)

6. DfE issued an online survey to admissions leads in all LAs in England, and the survey was live between 12 October and 31 October 2020. There are 152 LAs in England although in a couple of areas a single admissions service covers more than one LA.

7. Responses were collected from 114 LAs (representing a 75% response rate). Of these, 52 LAs had also responded to the two previous surveys meaning that we were able to look at trends for a consistent sample of LAs covering the past five years, as well as the latest data since 2019 from a wider set of 105 LAs³.

Survey of parents and carers

8. Forty-two LAs agreed to distribute the survey to parents/carers who had made a request for delayed entry and who they had contact details for. That survey was live between 8 December and 22 December 2020. Within these LAs, responses were received from 804 parents/carers who had applied to delay their summer born child's entry to September 2020 or September 2021. This response represents roughly a quarter of the parent/carers invited to complete the survey.

Key Findings

Survey of Local Authorities (LAs)

- Survey data from LAs indicates a shift towards more requests being automatically accepted by LAs. Almost a quarter (22%) had a policy of agreeing all requests, compared to nine per cent in 2019.
- Requests and approvals for delayed entry for summer born children have increased annually since 2016, but the rate of increase has slowed over time.

³ Not all of the 114 LAs responding provided complete data

- Looking at the 52 LAs that provided data for each year since 2016 via our surveys allows us to assess trends amongst a consistent sample. Amongst these, the annual rate of increase in requests was 89% between 2016 and 2017, 37% to 2018, 17% to 2019 and 14% to 2020.
- Similarly, amongst the 105 LAs providing data for 2019 and 2020 there is also an indication of an increase in requests between these years, and a similar level of approval (88% of requests agreed in 2020). This suggests that the trends based on the 52 LAs may apply more generally.
- The acceptance rate of applications made to these 52 LAs has held relatively steady since 2017. Responses from these LAs indicates 81% of requests were agreed in 2016; 86% in 2017; 89% in 2018 and 2019; and 88% in 2020. LAs explained that requests often come in after the admissions round closes. This means that data for 2021 was incomplete at the time of survey and a number of LAs were still in the process of approving requests.
- This survey data is consistent with school census data that suggests take-up of delayed entry for summer born pupils is rising but growth is slowing: as of January 2020, 1.2% of summer born pupils delayed entry, up from 1.0% in January 2019.

Survey of parents and carers

- Parents/carers who had delayed their child's admission to reception were significantly more likely to have higher than national average incomes. Of respondents providing a figure, two-thirds (67%) had a total household income of over £35,000 per year, over half had a total household income of more than £50,000 per year, and for 1 in 8 (12%) it was over £100,000 per year. In 2019/20, the median household income in the UK was just under £30,000⁴.
- Eighty-four per cent of respondents' children were White (compared to 74% of all state-funded primary school pupils in England). Within this, 71% were 'White British' and 12% were 'White Other' (compared to 66% and 8% of pupils overall⁵).
- Overall, children who delayed entry were more likely to be using more hours of fully-funded childcare in the period after they could have started school, compared to beforehand (Figure 11). Fifty-four per cent were in more than 20 hours of fully-funded childcare per week before they could have started school (33% in 30 hours or more) which rose to 62 per cent in the period afterwards (34% in 30 hours or more).

⁴ £29,900 in 2019/2020 according to [Average household income, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employment-and-productivity/earnings-and-productivity/average-household-income).

⁵ [SFR template National Statistics 240815 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424815/sfr-template-national-statistics-240815.pdf)

- Numbers of requests increased the closer the child's date of birth was to the 31 August cut-off date. Over half of respondents indicated that their child was born in August (53%) and a fifth were born in July (21%). Just five per cent of respondents reported that their child was born in April.
- Open feedback from parents/carers shows that they were very positive about the opportunity to delay their child's entry to school. In general, parents/carers felt it was the right decision for their child to allow them the time to mature or catch-up emotionally, socially, physically or developmentally. Parents/carers' views on the process varied from those describing it as 'very easy' and 'straightforward', to others who felt it was 'complicated' and 'very stressful'. Parents mentioned it was too much of a lottery, depending on the support of the LA and the school, over whether the request was likely to be agreed. There was felt to be varying practice across LAs and schools in terms of whether they treated requests favourably or not, and some felt that a general lack of awareness and understanding made the process more difficult than necessary.

Limitations of the data

9. The data presented in this report comes with a number of caveats which means that they should be treated as good indicators rather than absolute statistics.

Data from LAs

- The level of detail held by LAs on summer born requests varies and they do not always collect data in a consistent way, meaning it is sometimes incomplete or has been estimated. Around four in five LAs providing data indicated that they were using actual data rather than estimates. LAs also vary in the coverage of schools they handle or coordinate requests for (see 'School Coverage' section), again resulting in gaps in their knowledge.
- Trend data has been established using returns from 52 LAs which provided data via our surveys for each year since 2016, which allows us to assess trends over time amongst a consistent sample. This covers about a third of LAs and whilst they do provide a valuable indication, they may not be fully representative all LAs. Overall, LAs appear to have a good overview of applications and requests for delayed entry in their area.
- There is some over-reporting and under-reporting in numbers. We are aware from one LA that they have provided data as number of applications (which may be to more than one school) rather than reflecting the number of individual children. Others were also aware that they may not have captured all requests made as sometimes arrangements are made at a school level and may have under-reported cases in their area.

- The number of requests received by individual LAs ranges from one or two per year in some areas, to over 100 in others. This means that small increases in numbers in lots of LAs have the potential to distort changes in proportions, as do a large change in number amongst a few LAs with the most requests.
- The most recent survey collected data on requests to delay entry to 2019, 2020 and 2021. 2021 data is interim as LAs explained that requests often come in after the admissions round. A number of LAs were also still in the process of approving requests.

Data from parents and carers

- The survey was distributed to parents/carers who had applied to delay their child's entry in the previous two years within the 42 LAs that circulated the survey. As noted above, there was wide variation across areas in the number of requests received so respondents were not evenly distributed geographically. Over a third of respondents were located in just two LAs so, although the sample could be representative of those delaying, it is not intended to represent the national population.
- Given differences with the sample of parents/carers in 2018 (all of whom were located in just four LAs) comparisons with the previous parent and survey should be treated with caution.

10. There was some evidence that Covid-19 may have had some impact on increasing demand for delayed entry. A few LAs reported it had been mentioned as a reason in some late requests for delayed entry - often referring to lost learning/nursery care, or lack of progress in securing Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs). Other LAs said they although they had anticipated the pandemic would drive up requests, it was not actually being borne out by the numbers. Feedback from the parent/carer survey indicated that although about one in eight parents agreed Covid-19 was a consideration in their decision, just one per cent reported it was the main reason.

Background on the admissions process

11. The School Admissions Code ('the Code') requires school admission authorities to provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. This is when children usually start school although a child does not reach compulsory school age (CSA) until the "prescribed day" following their fifth birthday. Summer born children do not need to start school until the September following their fifth birthday. Where a parent decides to delay their child's start at school and wants their child to start in reception, rather than year 1 alongside the rest of their age cohort, they must make a request to the admission authority for the school concerned. The admission authority is

responsible for making the decision on which year group the child should be admitted to. The department has issued guidance to LAs and to parents/carers to inform their decisions⁶. Many requests are treated favourably by admission authorities though policies do vary.

12. The applications round takes place each Autumn term for the subsequent academic year, hence parents/carers would be invited to apply for a school place in the Autumn term after their child's third birthday⁷. LAs must provide a common application form that enables parents to express their preference for a minimum of three schools. Admission authorities are responsible for allocating places on the basis of their determined admission arrangements. For community and voluntary controlled schools (sometimes known as LA maintained schools) the admission authority is the LA. For voluntary aided and foundation schools it is the governing body, and for academies (including free schools, studio schools and UTCs) it is the academy trust. The Code requires admission authorities to make clear the process for requesting admission out of the normal year group, but it does not prescribe a particular process. As shown below, in many cases there is an agreement that the LA co-ordinates requests across schools.

School coverage

13. For the first time as part of this research, we asked LAs to indicate the types of schools they handle requests for delayed admission to reception for, and for which they hold data on delayed admissions.

14. As shown in Figure 1, 95 per cent of LAs handle delayed entry requests for all LA maintained schools in their area and just under three quarters of LAs also handle all such requests for other types of school in their area. In the few areas where LAs don't provide such a central co-ordinating role, this is because there are very few primary schools in their area and/or the local primaries handle the requests themselves.

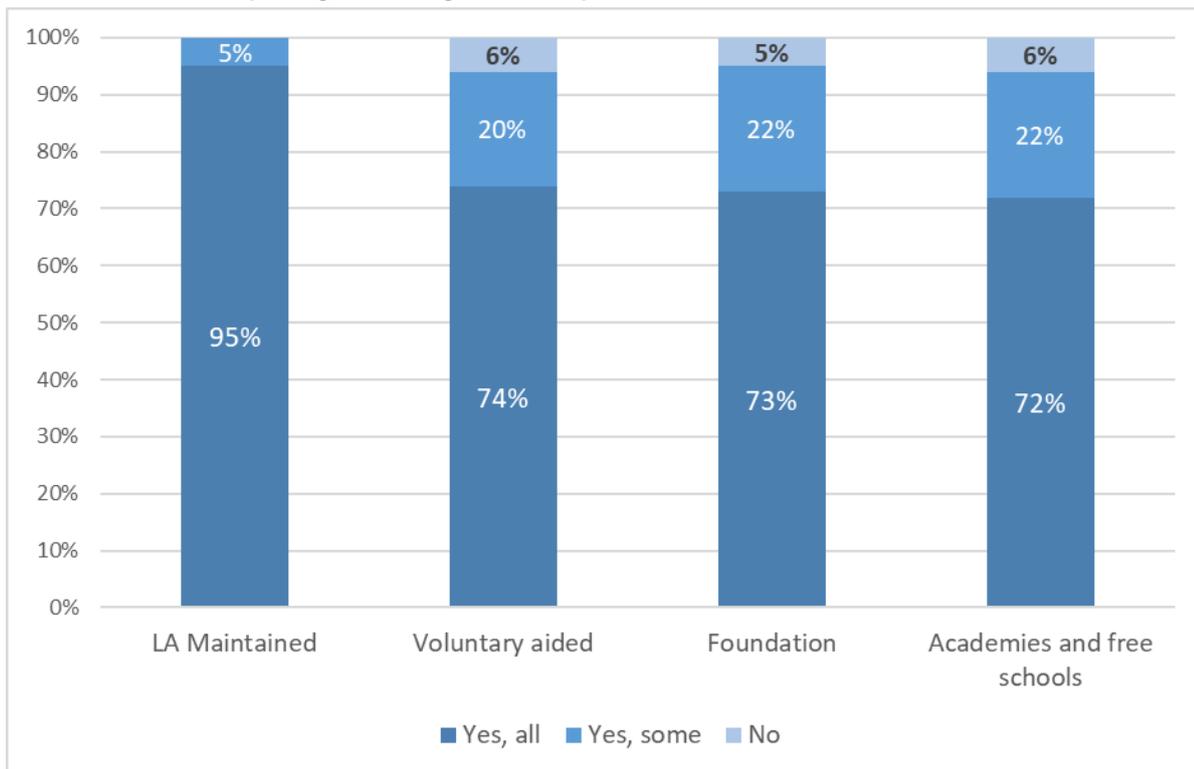
15. Around one in five also handle the requests for some (but not all) academies/free-schools, voluntary aided and foundation schools. Only a few LAs (under 6%) do not handle any delayed admission requests for voluntary aided, foundation or academies and free schools in their area.

16. Overall, LAs appear to have a good overview of requests for delayed entry in their area, but feedback indicates that schools do not always provide information to LAs even where agreements are in place. As noted in 'Limitations of the data', numbers in this report therefore should be treated as good indicators rather than absolute statistics.

⁶ .See [Advice on the admission of summer born children for local authorities and school admission authorities](#) and [Summer born children - advice for parents](#).

⁷ Although applications are invited in the autumn term, closing dates can vary across LAs. They are usually between January and March.

Figure 1: Types of school which local authorities coordinate delayed entry admissions for (delayed entry to 2020)



Base: 113 LAs. Excludes 'not applicable' where none of the school types are located in the area.

17. Feedback from open text boxes illustrate various models employed, including:

“All delayed entry requested come through the School Admissions team, which are then passed to the appropriate admission authority.”

“All schools regardless of status - have agreed to apply our local summer born policy.”

“We make the decisions regarding applications to community schools as the admission authority. We receive information from academies and voluntary aided schools regarding decisions to agree to applicants delaying their applications, but we cannot guarantee that we receive all information from these schools about all requests that they receive”.

“Parents may apply directly to own admission authorities and they do not always make us aware of the request and outcome.”

“... it has been agreed with schools that requests will be managed centrally for primary schools by [redacted] which carries out the Admissions function for both LAs.”

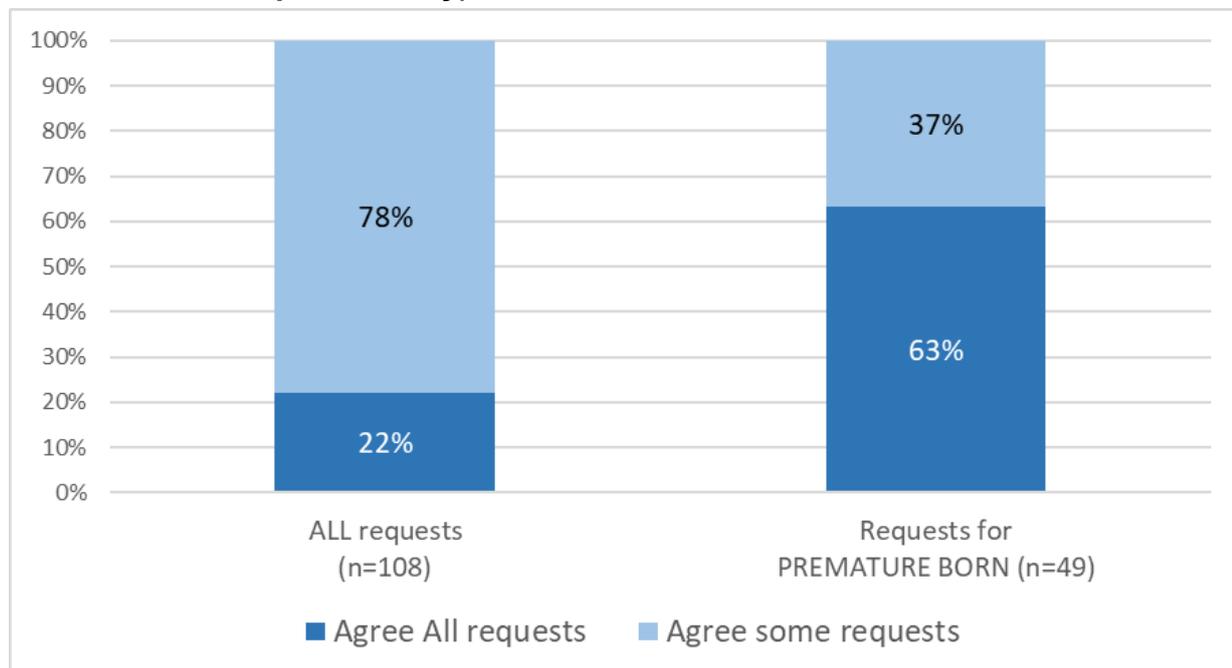
“There is one school in [redacted] which is an Academy and all admissions to the school are handled directly by the Academy.”

Admissions policies

18. Compared to previous findings, there appears to have been a shift towards more LAs now more readily agreeing requests for delayed entry to reception. In 2018, nearly a third of LAs (30%) agreed only to very strong cases being made whereas none of the LAs reported this in 2020. In 2018, just nine per cent of LAs agreed all requests which rose to 22% in 2020.

19. When asked about their policy for handling requests for delayed entry, Figure 2 shows that more than a fifth (22%) of LAs responding agree all such requests and 78% agreed some of them. Amongst the 49 LAs providing data on requests relating to a child born prematurely, almost two-thirds (63%) indicated that they agreed all such requests. Therefore, LAs appear to be more likely to approve requests for children born prematurely (and hence, may have fallen into the following school year).

Figure 2: Local authorities’ summer born policy, 2020 (for all requests, and those for children born prematurely)



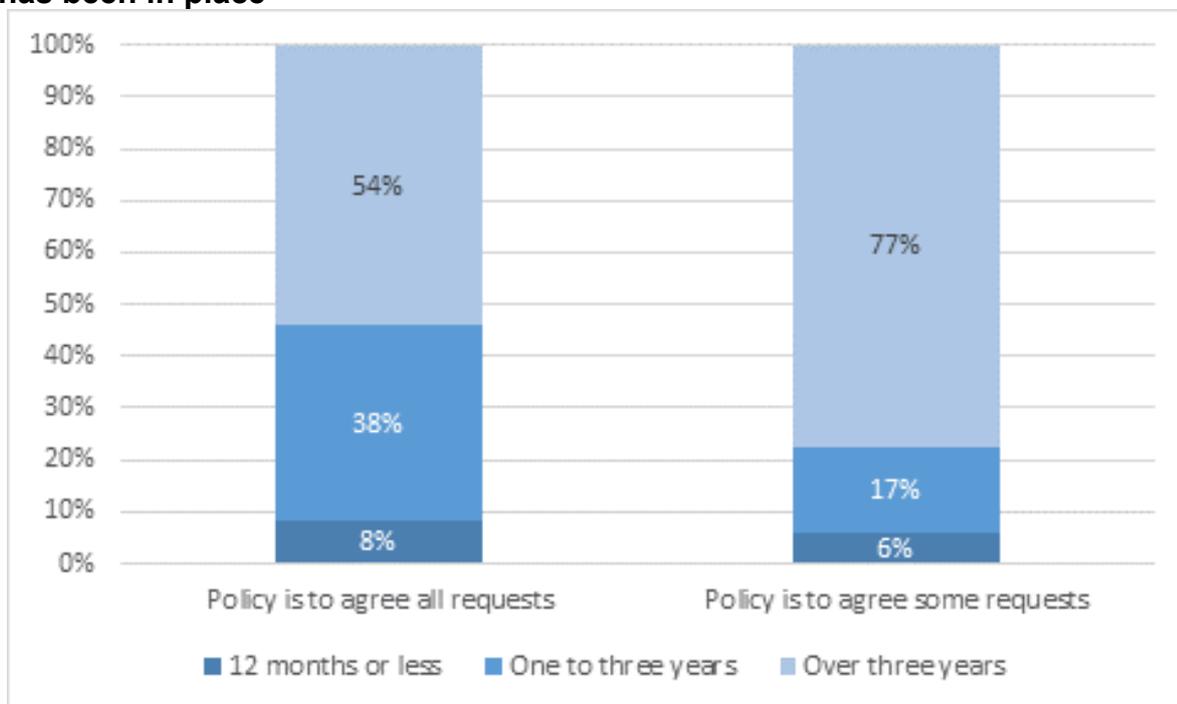
Base: 108 LAs responding about all requests received, and 49 LAs responding about requests received for children born prematurely.

Note: ‘Agree some requests’ includes positive responses to ‘agree some requests’ and ‘agree only the strongest cases’. In 2020, no LA indicated that they agreed only the strongest cases from all requests they receive, although ambiguously 8 LAs (16% of those responding to the question) indicated that they only accepted the strongest cases for premature born children.

20. When LAs were asked for how long their current policy had been in place, 72% indicated that it had been in place for over three years; 21% had updated their approach in the past one to three years and 6% had updated their current policy in the past year. There was little difference in terms of how long their policy for premature born children had been in place.

21. Figure 3 indicates a shift towards more requests being automatically accepted. Looking at how long current policies have been held, 46 per cent of LAs have moved to 'accepting all requests' within the past three years and 23 per cent have moved to 'agreeing some requests' - some of which will have moved from a policy of agreeing only the strongest cases⁸.

Figure 3: Policy on requests (whether agree all or some) and how long the policy has been in place



Base: 108 LAs

Number of requests and approvals for delayed entry

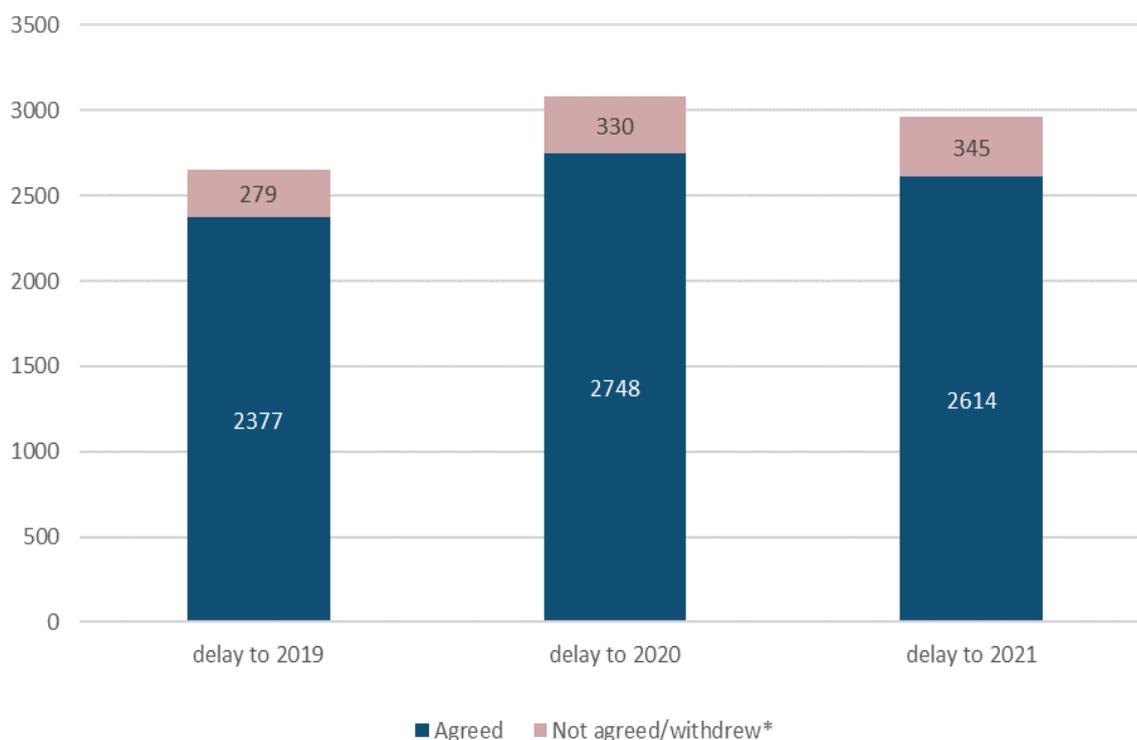
22. This section describes the number of requests and approvals for delayed entry to reception which LAs reported in the most recent survey; covering data for delays into 2019, 2020 and 2021. Trends over a longer time period, since 2016, are reported using data from 52 LAs that participated in two previous surveys, as well as this one.

23. Data from 105 LAs providing the data in 2020 (wave 3 survey) is shown in Figure 4. It shows a rise in the number of requests - 3078 requests to delay entry to 2020

⁸ Nine per cent of LAs agreed only the strongest cases in 2018, whereas no LA selected this option in 2020.

compared to 2656 for the previous year⁹.

Figure 4: Number of requests for delayed admission - reported in 2020 by those LAs providing data for 2019, 2020 and 2021



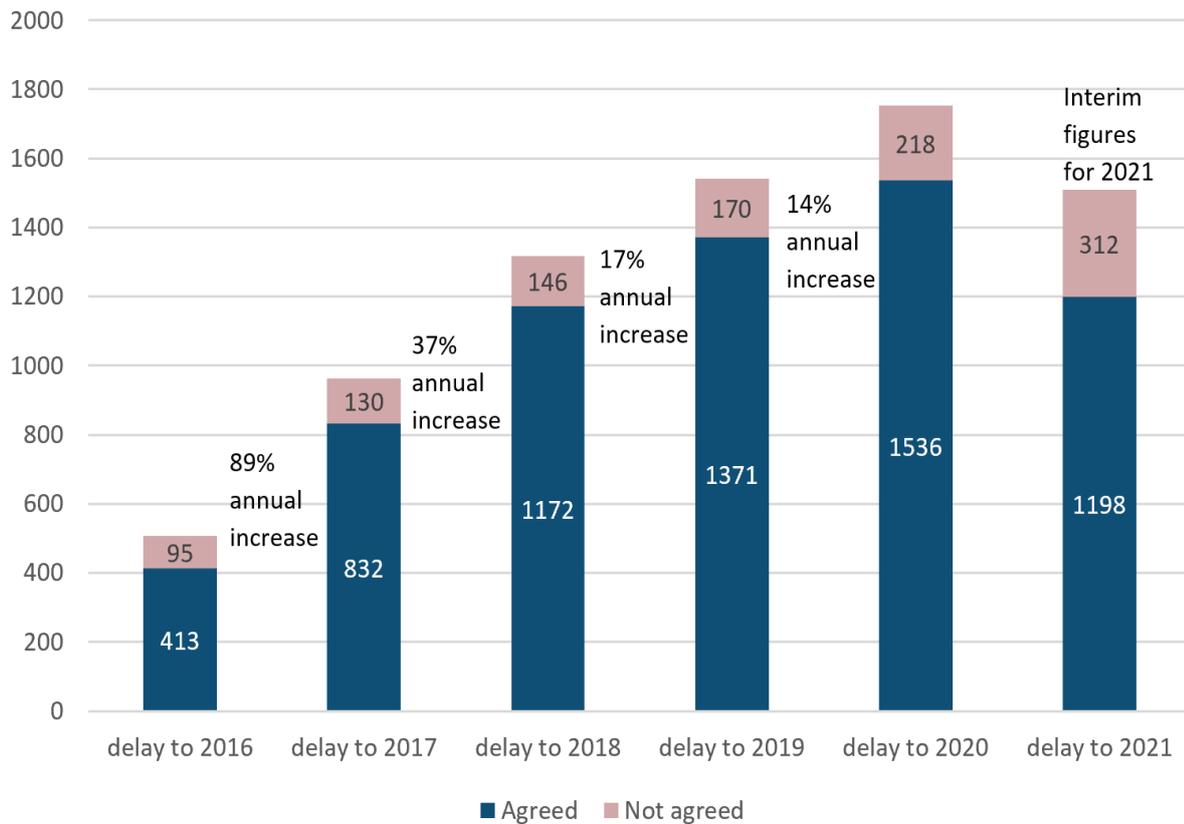
Base: 105 LAs providing data for 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Notes: Overall, around a fifth of the data provided by LAs was estimated and the remainder was based on actual records. Figures reported for 2021 are interim and are likely to increase as the year progresses

24. To assess trends amongst a consistent sample, data was compiled from 52 LAs that provided data across the three survey waves, covering the period 2016 to 2021. Figure 5 shows that amongst this group of LAs, between 2016 and 2017 there was almost a doubling of requests (89% increase). Numbers continued to rise each year but at a slower rate: 37%; 17%; and 14% increase per year respectively to 2020. Data for 2021 is interim and likely to increase as more requests are made in-year (see section on 'In-year requests').

⁹ School census data reports a total of 633,462 children in Reception in 2019/2020, so these figures represent a small minority of the annual intake.

Figure 5: Requests to delay admission – reported by LAs providing data for all years 2016 - 2021 (responses from waves 1, 2 and 3)



Base: 52 LAs responding to waves 1, 2 and 3, and providing data for each year.¹⁰

Note: Overall, around a fifth of the data provided was estimated by LAs.

25. Table 1 shows the percentage of requests agreed each year, as a proportion of all requests made. Between 2017 and 2020, the overall proportion has held reasonably steady with between 86 and 89 per cent of all requests being agreed across our sample.

Table 1: Requests made and agreed to delay admission to years 2016 – 2021

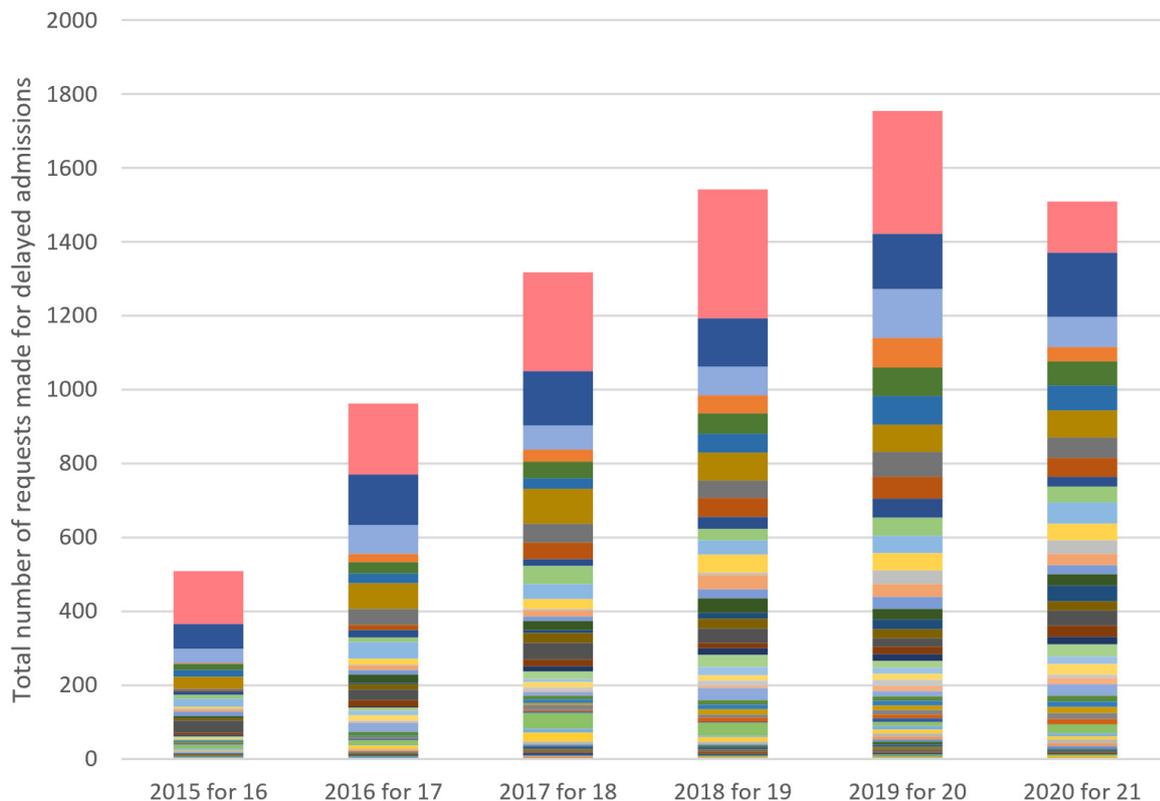
	delay to 2016	delay to 2017	delay to 2018	delay to 2019	delay to 2020	delay to 2021*
No. requests	508	962	1318	1541	1754	1510 (to date)
No. agreed	413	832	1172	1371	1536	1198 (to date)
% agreed	81%	86%	89%	89%	88%	*still in process

Base: 51 LAs responding to waves 1, 2 and 3, and providing data for each year. Overall, around a fifth of the data provided was estimated by LAs.

¹⁰ Information on requests to delay entry to 2019 was collected in both wave 2 and wave 3 surveys. We use data from wave 3 only (supplemented in 4 cases with wave 2 data for 2019 where 2019 data was missing, or estimated in wave 3 and actual in wave 2).

26. It is important to note that the number of requests varies a great deal between LAs. Each year, a few LAs received high numbers of requests, whilst most receive much fewer. For example, Figure 6 shows the number of requests received, with each colour representing the same LA each year. It shows that one LA¹¹ received the highest number of requests every year since the data has been collected. In contrast, over half of responding LAs reported fewer than 16 requests for 2020 (median value for this year is 15.5, Table 2).

Figure 6: Number of requests for delayed admission per year – reported by LAs providing data for all years 2016 - 2021 (responses from waves 1, 2 and 3)



Base: 52 LAs responding to waves 1, 2 and 3, and providing data for each year

Notes: Each LA is represented by the same colour. Data for 2021 is interim. More requests will be received mid-year. Overall, around a fifth of the data provided was estimated by LAs.

27. Table 2, like Figure 6, provides information about the variation between LAs in the numbers of requests they have received each year. It presents average values (means and medians) and interquartile ranges for the 52 LAs that provided data for each year. For almost all LAs, the number of requests received annually was below 40, with a mean

¹¹ Hertfordshire County Council.

in 2020 of 33.7. The wide variation between LAs is indicated by the inter-quartile ranges¹² and maximum values, which are mostly much higher than the average values.

Table 2: Mean, median and interquartile ranges of requests made – reported by LAs providing data for all years 2016 - 2021 (responses from waves 1, 2 and 3)

	delay to 2016	delay to 2017	delay to 2018	delay to 2019	delay to 2020	delay to 2021 (interim)
mean	9.8	18.5	25.3	29.6	33.7	29.0
median	3.0	6.0	10.5	14.0	15.5	21.0
Q1	1.0	2.8	4.0	5.0	7.8	6.3
Q3	6.3	17.8	27.8	39.0	39.3	39.5
IQ range	5.3	15.0	23.8	34.0	31.5	33.3
maximum	142	192	267	348	332	172

Base: 52 LAs responding to waves 1, 2 and 3, and providing data for each year.

Data on children born prematurely

28. Information that LAs provided about their policies for children born prematurely indicated that they are generally more likely to accept those requests to delay entry to reception than they are of such requests in general. As shown in Figure 2, in 2020 63% of LAs had a policy to agree all requests for premature born children (compared to 22% of them accepting all requests received). These figures have risen from 15% and 9% respectively in 2018.

29. Most LAs have not routinely kept records on the specific number of requests received in relation to children born prematurely, but looking forward it appears that more LAs are now routinely collecting this information; over four in five LAs (93 out of 114) responding were able to provide interim data for 2021.

30. Open text responses from LAs referred to cases where the child was born prematurely or had clear development needs which were easier to agree than cases where it was less clear whether delaying entry to reception would be in the best interest of the child.

Requests made to other non-LA admission authorities

31. LAs vary in the proportion of schools in their areas for which they handle requests for delayed entry. In order to help fill any gaps in the number of requests being made for delayed entry, respondents were asked to indicate what they knew about requests to schools not handled by the LA or mentioned in the figures provided above. Indicative information provided by 11 LAs on this reveals that those other admission authorities are receiving and agreeing some requests and the numbers appear to have increased

¹² The inter-quartile range is the range in values for half of the LAs around the median value.

between 2019 and 2020, but LAs were not always fully informed by those schools and it was difficult to know what data is missing.

In-year requests

32. Feedback from the survey indicated that many requests for delayed entry are made after the LA's formal admissions round closes¹³. Eighty-one per cent of LAs indicated that they had received requests for delayed entry since the primary admissions round closed earlier this year. The numbers received outside of the normal admissions round varies across LAs from one to 81 requests reported by one LA. Open feedback also suggested that it was common for requests to come in after formal admissions round closed. Reasons for late requests in 2020 offered by LAs included anxiety amongst some parents/carers over their child missing too much nursery due to Coronavirus (Covid-19) restrictions. Some late requests resulted from parents/carers moving into the area and some LAs commented that they saw a spike in numbers shortly after national offer day, suggesting that in some cases they were made as a result of not being offered their preferred school and wanting to have another try.

Entry into Year 1

33. In most cases, children whose entry was delayed go on to enter reception with the younger age cohort (out of year group). Parents/carers also have the option for their child to skip reception and join their peers in Year 1.

34. Some feedback indicated that in cases where entry into Year 1 was requested, the LA suspected that the underlying reason was to secure the preferred choice of school for their child. One LA explained:

“We find this applies mainly to those parents who failed to get admission into their preferred schools and rejected the alternative school offered. We don't record such cases [and] parents don't always make this clear when submitting an in-year application.”

35. Nine in ten LAs (91%) agreed that they routinely encourage parents/carers seeking to delay entry to speak to schools about how their child's needs could be met in reception at age four.

36. A third of LAs (32%) responding indicated that they received requests from parents/carers for their child to enter school in Year 1 with their peers, and thereby skipping reception. Most of them report receiving just one or two such requests, although three of the 35 LAs that had these requests reported 'more than a couple of cases'. Some LAs described how they attempted to dissuade parents/carers from the option of

¹³ Usually in January each year but varies in some schools and LAs.

entering school in Year 1 as they did not consider skipping reception to be in the best interest of the child.

Open feedback from LAs

37. Before the survey closed, respondents were given an opportunity to provide any other feedback on the demand for delayed school entry.

Coronavirus (Covid-19)

38. One of the most common issues mentioned was the potential effect of Coronavirus (Covid-19) upon requests to delay entry. This was mentioned by a significant minority of LAs in that they had either begun to see this provided as a reason for the request, it has been evidenced in the increased number of late requests received already or that they expected it to drive additional requests they receive. In many of these cases, the LAs explained that the child had had their nursery provision disrupted during the lockdown period. There were also reasons connected to particular needs of the child. As one LA explained:

“Covid 19 pandemic has led to a number of later than usual requests this year. Many of the children have varying levels of health or SEN difficulties and were awaiting relevant appointments/assessments which were delayed due to restrictions as a result of the virus. Requests from parents suggested that they did not feel in a position for their children to take up places offered for 2020 admission as the children had missed so much time in early years settings as well as necessary medical appointments.”

Medical or SEND

39. Feedback relating to requests for delayed entry because of premature birth, SEND or medical reasons pupils confirmed that these cases were general treated more favourably, according to the individual medical or developmental interests of the child. One LA explained that such requests were more likely to be received before national offer day.

School Preference

40. A number of LAs described cases where they felt parents' motive for delaying entry was driven by school preference rather than the best interests of the child. One LA described that this was mainly the case where there had been requests for their child to enter school in Year 1. Requests where it was felt the motive was primarily connected to school preference rather than a genuine developmental need were reported to be more likely to come after national offer day, i.e. after the parents/carers had been informed the

child had not gained a place at their first preference school, with the request giving them another bite of the cherry.

41. One LA reported that some parents/carers have tried to use the delayed entry process as a reason for not sending their child to school, potentially with safeguarding implications or meaning that the child is not getting the support they need. As another LA put it:

“Often it is felt that the reasons parents give for deferred entry are the very reasons that a child should be in school receiving professional support as soon as possible.”

Applications Process

42. It was noted by some parents/carers that different approaches across LAs, and sometimes across schools within an LA means that there is no level playing field for parents/carers. This results in uncertainty for families over an extended period of time if they wish to change schools or when transitioning to secondary school, where the receiving school may not accept them ‘out of year’ resulting in a missed year of education.

43. Some LAs also noted that parents/carers have the discretion to change their mind after their request has been approved, which causes uncertainty for schools and LAs about the allocation of places.

44. The issue of there being no deadline for applications was raised in the open feedback provided. A number of LAs reported that they ‘typically’ get requests after national offer day (similarly, four in five LAs responding indicated that they had received a request for delayed entry since their applications round closed). One LA reported having cases recently where requests had been received after children had begun reception. Given that there is no formal cut-off date for requests, this situation left officers uncertain as to what to do other than grant approval in line with their usual position of approving all requests. In these cases, it was felt that better guidance or primary legislation would mitigate this and remove the decision-making burden (which can be inconsistent and can be time-consuming) away from admission authorities.

45. One LA described the challenge for them when making their decision on delayed entry;

“for pupils who are not in nursery it can be very difficult to ascertain whether or not it’s in the best interests of the child to agree the request as we have no baseline or pupil information as they are not known to our schools. A few LAs were anxious that their decisions to refuse delayed entry can be overturned by the Ombudsman “and no local authority wants that”.

Financial implications

46. There are financial implications for schools keeping places open for children in the event that parents/carers change their mind about delaying entry. As also noted above, there are often cases where requests are submitted after the child's been offered a place with their usual age cohort, making it tricky for LAs and schools to allocate and finance places. A LA noted that sometimes this was encouraged by the child's nursery who can claim funding for them for a further year.

Barriers to making requests

47. One LA cited a number of factors which they considered prevented parents/carers from making a request. They felt families believed the process of applying is complicated; that the decision to delay entry might not be upheld by (all) schools, causing nervousness about any impact on missed education and secondary transition.

Survey of parents and carers of summer born children

48. Forty-two LAs indicated that they were able to distribute a survey to parents and carers on behalf of the department. It was sent to parents/carers in those LAs who had made a request to delay their summer born child's entry to reception in either September 2020 or September 2021; just over 3000 parents/carers according to the data. The survey was live between 7th and 22nd December 2020 and 804 responses were received, or around one in four parents/carers invited to complete the survey in those LAs.

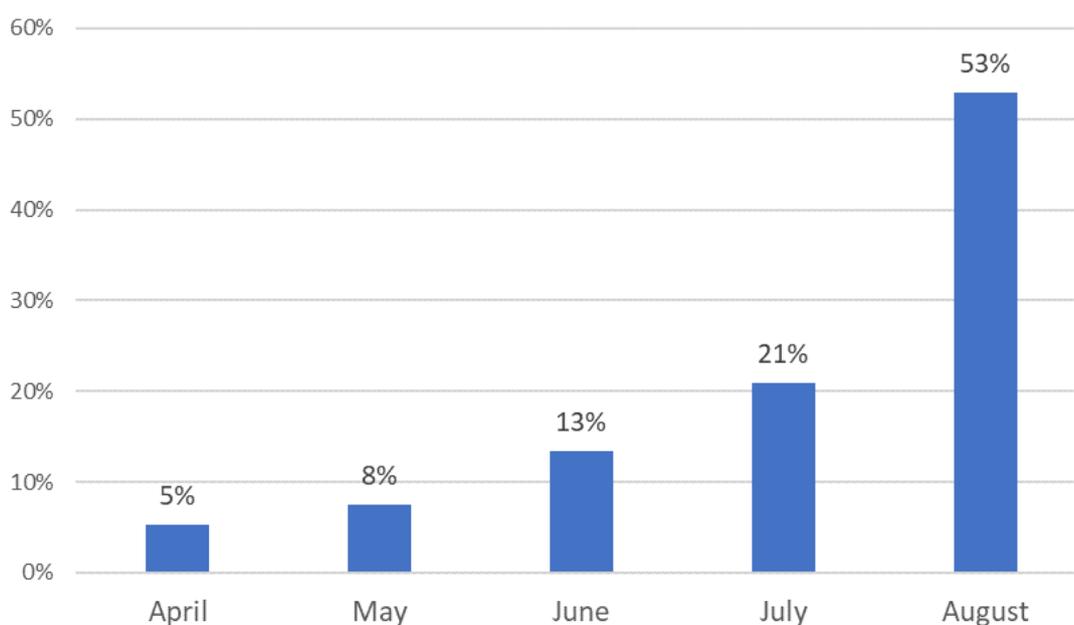
Characteristics

49. More respondents (57%) had a child born in summer 2016 (requesting delayed entry to September 2021), versus 43 per cent who had a child born in summer 2015 (requesting delayed entry to September 2020).

50. Requests for delayed entry was more common for boys than girls (62% and 37% respectively). Five per cent of requests were for twins and 17 per cent for children born premature¹⁴; four per cent of requests related to children born more than ten weeks premature, and 13 per cent born between four and ten weeks before their due date.

51. The proportion of requests was highest amongst the youngest summer born children, i.e. the closer they were to the cut-off date of 31 August. Over half of respondents indicated their child was born in August (53%) and just five per cent of respondents reported that their child was in April (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Requests to delay entry by child's month of birth



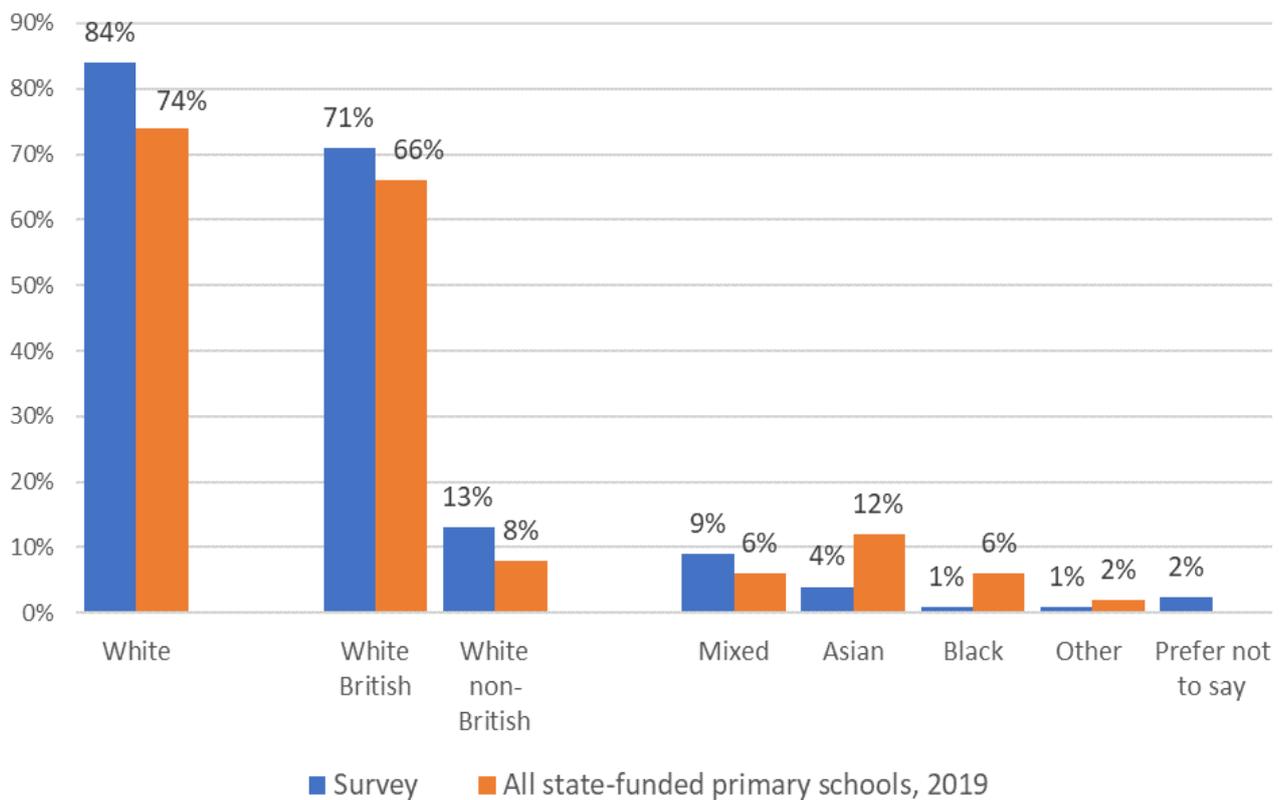
Base: 730 parents and carers

¹⁴ This is around double the national average of premature births.

52. One in six respondents (17%) indicated that their child had been diagnosed as having a special educational need or disability (SEND) and a further 12 per cent reported that they suspected their child has SEND but it had not (yet) been diagnosed.

53. Eighty-four per cent of children (whose parents/carers requested delayed entry for them) were White (compared to 74% of all state-funded primary school pupils in England). Within this, 71% were 'White British' and 12% were 'White Other' (compared to 66% and 8% of all primary pupils)¹⁵. Figure 8 shows the ethnic breakdown of respondents' children compared to all primary school children.

Figure 8: Ethnicity of children for whom the parents/carers requested delayed admission compared to all state-funded primary school pupils in England 2019

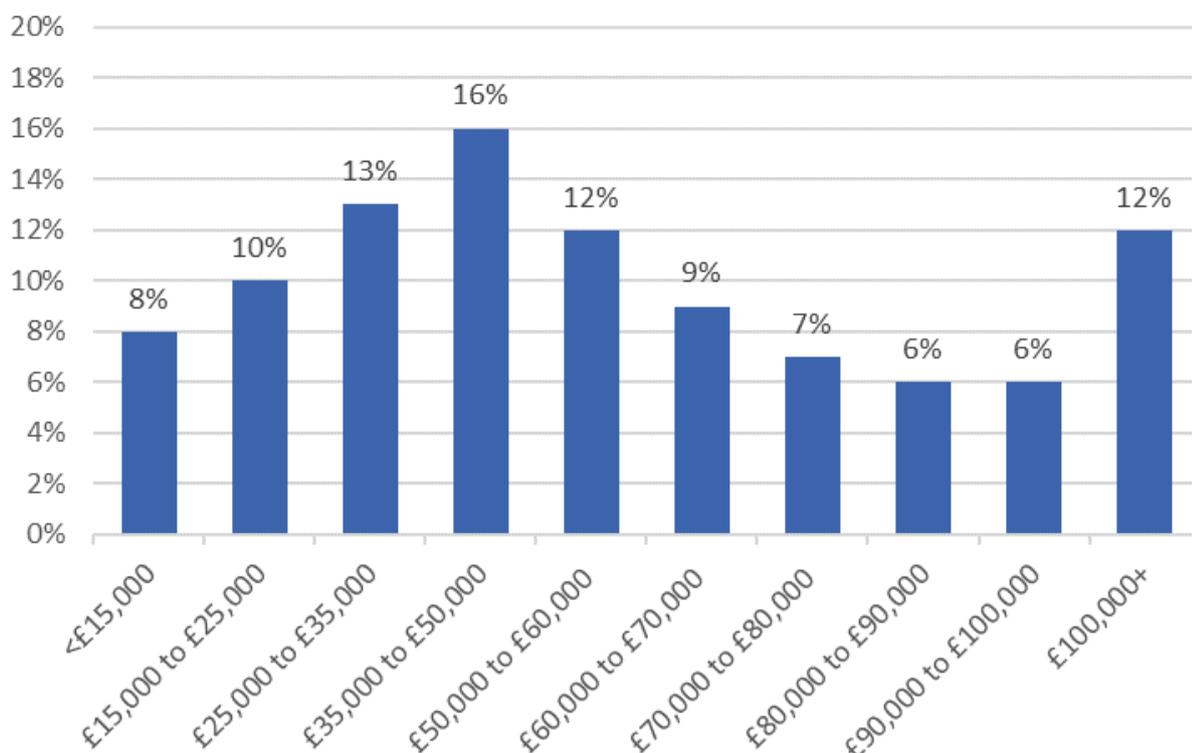


Base: 732 parents and carers, and National statistics on all state funded primary schools in 2019: [SFR template National Statistics 240815 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414815/SFR-template-National-Statistics-240815.pdf)

¹⁵ [SFR template National Statistics 240815 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414815/SFR-template-National-Statistics-240815.pdf) In 2019 among state-funded primary schools in England, 66% were White British, 8% were White non-British, 12% were Asian (inc. 0.5% Chinese), 6% had Mixed ethnicity, 6% were Black, and 2% were from another ethnic group.

54. Parents/carers who requested to delay their child’s admission to reception were significantly more likely to have higher than national average incomes. Of respondents providing a figure, two-thirds (67%) had a total household income of over £35,000 per year, over half had a total household income of more than £50,000 per year, and for 1 in 8 (12%) it was over £100,000 per year (Figure 9). In 2019/20, the median household income in the UK was just under £30,000¹⁶.

Figure 9: Total income per year in households that requested delayed entry to reception



Base: all parents and carers providing annual household income (n=727).

Awareness

55. From the options presented, parents/carers most commonly reported ‘other parents’ to be how they found out about the option to delay entry for their child (41%), followed by social media (27%) ‘other’ ways (23%) and advice from pre-school or nursery (21%). Fourteen per cent of parents/carers were informed about the policy by the LA, 11 per cent by medical/healthcare professionals and 9 per cent by the school. Examples given of ‘other’ ways parents/carers found out about the policy included that they

¹⁶ £29,900 according to [Average household income, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employment-and-labour-markets/earnings-and-wages/bulletins/averagehouseholdincome)

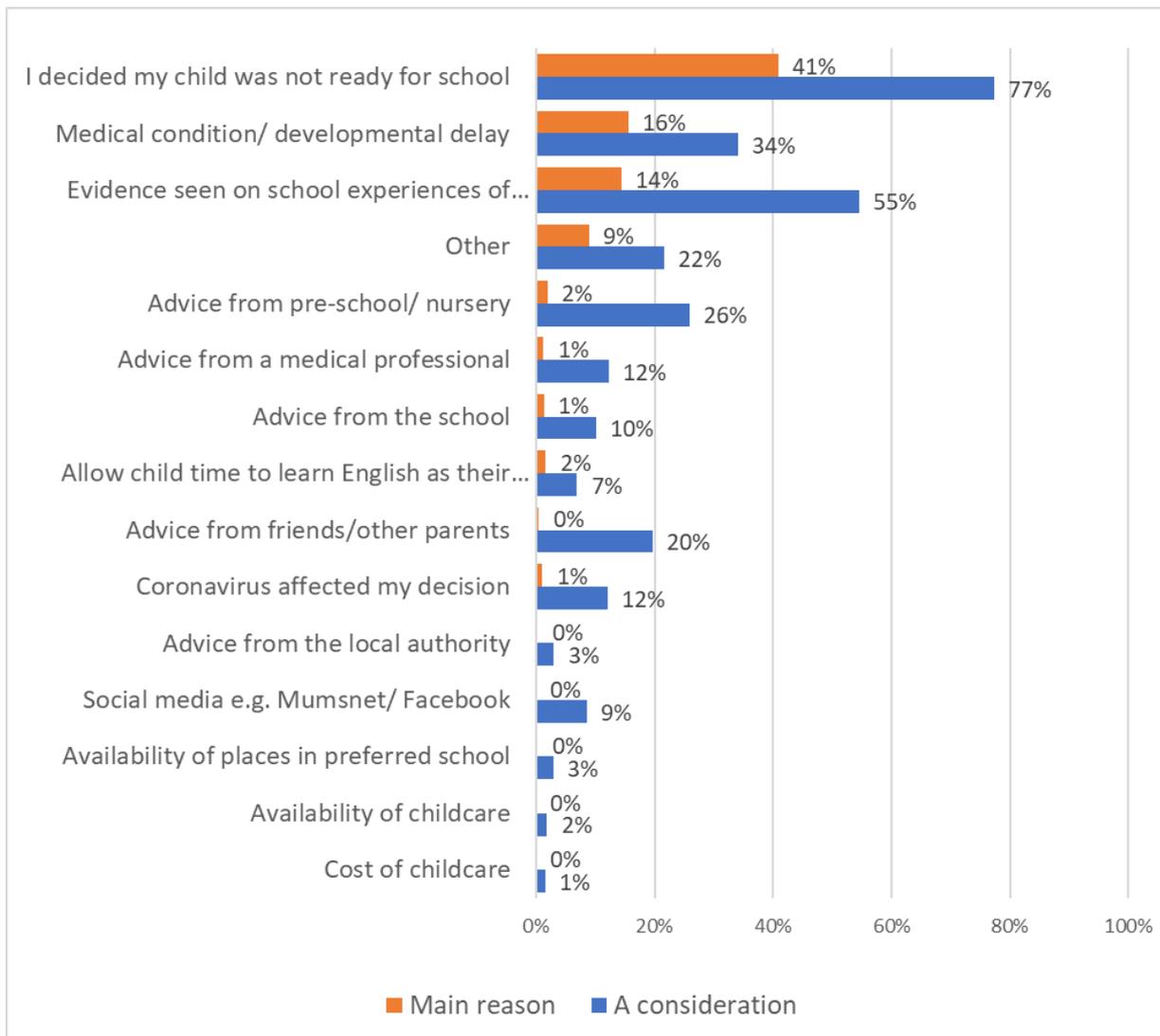
researched themselves, they had experience with an older child, or knew about other cases in school.

Factors relevant to requests to delay entry

56. When asked to cite the main reason for their decision to request a delayed entry for their child, 41 per cent of parents/carers selected 'I decided my child was not ready for school'. Their child's 'medical condition/developmental delay' and 'evidence seen on the school experience of summer born children' were the next most common main factors relevant to their decision (16% and 14% respectively).

57. Over three quarters of parents/carers (77%) cited 'I decided my child was not ready for school' as a consideration. Over half (55%) considered 'evidence seen on the school experience of summer born children' as part of their decision, and a third (34%) considered a medical condition or development delay of their child as a reason. A quarter of parents/carers (26%) considered advice from their child's pre-school or nursery as relevant to their decision and a fifth considered advice from family or friends (20%) or 'other' reasons (22%). (Figure 10)

Figure 10: Factors relevant in parents’ decision to delay entry to reception (main reason and a consideration)



Base: 805 parents/carers responding. Respondents were able to select more than one consideration so %s do not total 100. Not every respondent selected a main reason so %s do not total 100.

58. Of those that specified ‘other’ reasons affecting their decision, many were simply expanding on their response to one of the existing categories, for example;

“My child didn't seem ready in that he wasn't interested at all in sitting down at a table and drawing/reading. I don't think he's delayed, just too young. The UK sends children to school much earlier than most of Europe.”

Others explained that they felt that their child was not yet emotionally, socially or physically mature enough for school, with some pointing to the negative experiences they had personally experienced as a child or their other summer born children had experienced. A small number mentioned personal circumstances such as moving city or

home which would have interfered with a smooth transition into a stable educational environment. A few also said that their child was adopted and they wanted to their child to have more time to 'attach' and catch up on developmental delays resulting from early life upheaval or trauma.

Timing of decision

59. Almost six in ten (59%) respondents initially decided to delay their child's entry when the child was three years old. Almost a third (30%) decided earlier than that, and nine per cent decided after the child had turned four.

60. Around a third of parents/carers (37%) indicated that they applied for a place in their child's normal year group as well as requesting a delayed entry into the following academic year. Parent/carer's final decision about their child's year of entry was often made close to the date when they were due to start school aged four. Six in ten parents/carers (60%) reported that they made the final decision after their first offer of a school place. Open feedback indicated that many of these felt that their child simply wasn't ready for school once the start date approached – *"I wanted to see how he [developed]. It was too early when applied for the place to decide 100% whether to delay"*. Most others explained that they had always intended for their child to delay entry but they either wanted to keep their options open or they were required by their LA to make an application in both the 'normal' year and in the delayed year. A few parents/carers fed back that they did not think the original school offered was suitable for their child and chose to delay in the hope of securing their preferred school.

Childcare provision

61. The vast majority of parents/carers (97%) reported that their child attended a nursery or preschool¹⁷. Amongst the small proportion that didn't, most reported that they used a childminder. Very few (five respondents) indicated that they did not require childcare and could look after their child at home.

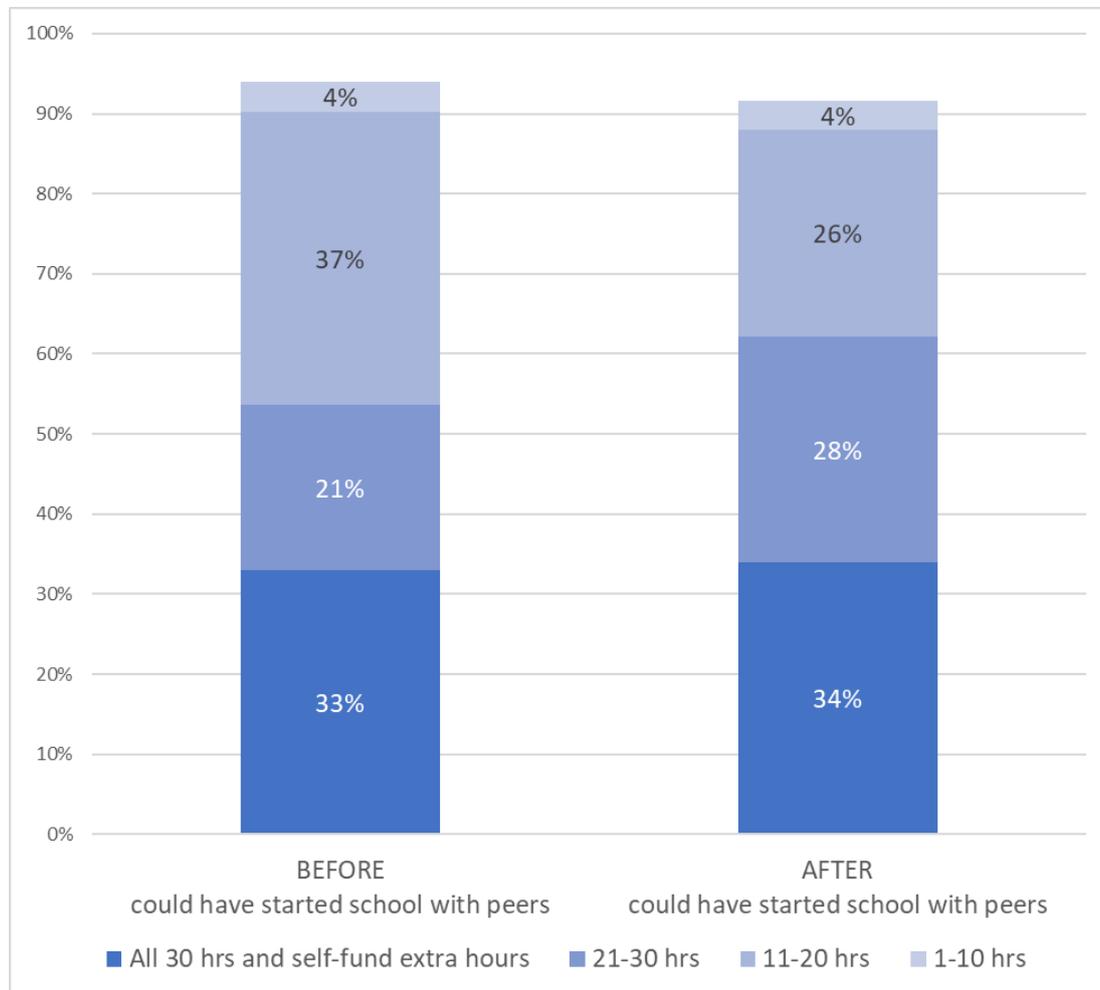
62. Amongst children attending a nursery or preschool the median number of hours attended when they were aged four was 17 hours per week (mean 20.16 hours, mode 15 hours).

63. Overall, children with delayed entry were more likely to be using more hours of fully-funded childcare in the period after they could have started school, compared to beforehand (Figure 11). Fifty-four per cent were in more than 20 hours of fully-funded childcare per week before they could have started school (33% in 30 hours or more) which rose to 62 per cent in the period afterwards (34% in 30 hours or more). Six per

¹⁷ Parents were asked to include nursery schools, nursery classes attached to a primary or infants' school, day nurseries, pre-schools, and special day nurseries or units for children with special educational needs

cent of respondents did not use any funded childcare before, and 8% did not use any after they could have started school.

Figure 11: Fully-funded hours of childcare used before and after child could have started school with peers



Base: 418 parents and carers

Open feedback from parents and carers

64. Overall, parents/carers were very positive about the opportunity to delay their child's entry to school. In general, parents/carers felt it was the right decision for their child in order to allow them the time to mature or catch up emotionally, socially, physically or developmentally. Parent's views on the process varied from those describing it as very easy and straightforward, to others who felt it was complicated and very stressful. Parents/carers mentioned it was too much of a lottery depending on the support of the LA and the school over whether the request was likely to be agreed. It was felt that in some cases this was because of a conscious effort to treat requests favourably or not, but some felt that a general lack of awareness and understanding made the process more difficult than necessary.

Conclusion

65. Overall, there has been an annual increase in the number of requests for delayed admission reported by LAs responding to the past three surveys, but this rate of increase has slowed over time and the total number remains a small proportion of the eligible cohort.

66. The main reason for requesting delayed entry to reception reported by parents/carers was that they felt their child was not ready for school. In some cases this was because of a medical or development delay, and/or because of the evidence parents had seen on the educational experience of summer born children. Parents/cares often indicated in their feedback that they felt it was the right thing to do for their children, who they felt benefited from having more time to develop emotionally, socially and/or physically. There were clear differences amongst parents/carers in terms of reporting a smooth and easy process in some LA areas and it being a more difficult and stressful experience in other areas. Some also mentioned that they felt awareness of the policy was low or variable amongst schools, LAs and amongst parents/carers in general.

67. Parents/carers who requested to delay their child's admission to reception were significantly more likely to have higher than national average incomes. The children were more likely to be White than other primary school pupils.

68. According to the parent/carer survey, over half of all the children for whom a request had been made to delay their entry were born in August, and nearly a further quarter were born in July (just 5% were born in April). In most cases, the children attended as much, or more hours of fully funded childcare in the period after they could have started school until their delayed date of entry.



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