



Department  
for Education

# Parents' views and demand for 30 hours free childcare

Research report

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Social Science in Government

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## Summary

This research brief summarises findings from a survey which aimed to examine parents' views and demand for the 30 hours free childcare extended entitlement for working parents of three- and four- year olds, due to be rolled out in September 2017. The study was a follow-up survey of parents with pre-school children who took part in the 2014-2015 DfE Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents. It was conducted by Ipsos MORI, on behalf of the Department for Education. Interviews were conducted by telephone with 851 parents from 17 March to 13 April 2016.

## Main Findings

### Current childcare arrangements and use of 15 funded hours

Nearly all three and four year olds in the survey received some form of childcare with just over a third (35%) of these children receiving a mix of informal and formal childcare. The majority of parents asked (88%) said they were aware of the existing government entitlement of 15 hours of free childcare, with 65% reporting they currently receive it. Out of these parents, 86% reported they use all 15 hours of the current entitlement.

### Intentions to use the additional 15 hour entitlement

Of those currently using the free hours 83% said they would likely or would definitely take up the additional 15 hours of free childcare if they were available to them now.

Responses were similarly high for those that had been eligible in the past - 85% who said they would likely or would definitely have taken up these additional hours. Of those who intend to use the existing free hours in the future when their child became potentially eligible, 82% would likely or would definitely take up additional hours.

Parents who said they would use the additional 15 free hours if these were available to them were asked why. The top reasons for using the additional hours included:

- 'The extra hours will cover the cost for the childcare I already pay for/ will reduce my childcare costs' (29%)
- 'I can go back to work' (26%)
- 'I can increase my working hours/ days (17%)

### Expected impact of additional 15 hours on working

Forty-seven per cent of respondents in work (64% of those interviewed) said they would change the number of hours they work in the week if they could use the additional 15 free hours. Of this group, 54% would increase the number of hours they worked in a week and 26% would work longer hours over fewer days. Of those not in work (35% of those interviewed), 60% said they would likely or would definitely look for work to become

eligible for the additional 15 hours of free childcare (21% definitely would, 27% very likely, 12% fairly likely). Those parents in work were asked how likely or unlikely it would be that they would look for a more suitable job (i.e. one that met their needs in terms of salary, flexibility and working hours) if they were able to use the additional 15 free hours of childcare per week. 39% said they would likely or would definitely look for a more suitable job, whereas 51% said they would not (10% not very likely, 19% very unlikely and 21% definitely would not).

Out of all the 46% of parents who currently pay for childcare over the current free 15 hour entitlement for their three or four year old, 81% agreed (67% strongly agreed, 14% tend to agree) that the additional 15 free hours of childcare would significantly reduce the cost of childcare for their household. The majority of respondents who pay for childcare agreed (88% overall, with 71% strongly and 16% tend to agree) that they would use the additional 15 free hours towards the childcare that they currently pay for.

Forty-five per cent (24% strongly agreed, 21% tend to agree) of all respondents<sup>1</sup> with two or more children aged 0-4 stated that they would use all or some of the additional 15 hours even if it meant their children had to go to different childcare providers (i.e from their sibling) with 38% disagreeing (12% tend to disagree, 26% strongly disagree). Fifty-five per cent of these parents interviewed agreed (39% strongly agreed 16% tend to agree) that they would use the additional 15 hours if they could use the same provider for all their children with 31% disagreeing (22% tend to disagree, 9% strongly disagree).

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<sup>1</sup> Base: All respondents with two or more children aged 0-4 years old (132).

# Introduction

## Background

As part of the Childcare Act 2016<sup>2</sup> the government entitlement of 15 hours free childcare, which is currently available to all three- and four- year-olds and some eligible two – year- olds will be increased to 30 hours for some eligible parents<sup>3</sup> of three- and four-year-olds over 38 weeks or the equivalent number of hours across more weeks per year. The 30 hours free childcare, due to be rolled out nationally from September 2017, will help working families by reducing the cost of childcare and will support parents into work or to work more hours, should they wish to do so.<sup>4</sup>

## Aim

This research brief summarises findings from a survey commissioned by the Department for Education, and undertaken by Ipsos MORI, to understand parents' views and demand for the three- and four- year old extended free entitlement. The aims of the research were to explore parents' responses to questions on:

- Their current childcare arrangements and use of the existing 15 hour free entitlement;
- Their intentions to take up the additional 15 hour free entitlement; and
- The potential impact of this use on their childcare and working arrangements.

## Methodology

### Sampling

The sample for the survey was drawn from the most recent Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents which took place in 2014-15.<sup>5</sup> All parents from the 2014-15 Survey of Parents who agreed to be re-contacted and who had a child aged three or four at the start of fieldwork or those who would have a child aged three or four in September 2017

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/5/contents/enacted>

<sup>3</sup> To be eligible, both parents will need to be working (or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family); each parent will have to have a weekly minimum income equivalent to 16 hours at national minimum wage or living wage; and neither parent has an income of more than £100,000 per year.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-bill-policy-statement>

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the aims, methodology, findings of the 2014-15 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-and-early-years-survey-of-parents-2014-to-2015>

when the 30 hours will be rolled out were invited to take part in a short follow-up telephone survey. As a result the survey comprised the following groups:

- Parents of children who would be potentially eligible<sup>6</sup> (i.e. aged three or four) in September 2017 when the additional hours will be rolled out;
- Parents of children who currently have children aged three or four who would be potentially eligible for the additional hours if they were available now; and
- Parents of children aged four who are slightly older and would have previously been potentially eligible but are now in school / reception / full-time education.

Fieldwork took place between 17 March and 13 April 2016. The findings below are based on the responses of 851 parents (an achieved response rate of 38%) who completed telephone interviews lasting an average of 15 minutes. 91% of all the respondents were mothers.

## Questions

Different questions were used to the 2014-15 DfE Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, however a similar classification of childcare providers was used.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that questions in the survey required parents to speculate about what they would have done and or what they might do in the future, depending on the age of their child.

## Statistical Weighting

The data in this survey was weighted to the profile of the eligible parents in the main 2014-2015 DfE Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, where all data is weighted to reflect the national profile of parents of children aged 0-14 years old. Please note, where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to multiple responses and computer rounding.

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<sup>6</sup> Here we are stating that all parents would be 'potentially' eligible for the free additional hours, however this will depend on their working patterns and earnings as outlined in footnote 3.

<sup>7</sup> Please see Annex 2 for further details on the classifications used for informal and formal providers.

## Main Findings

### Current childcare arrangements

**Nearly all three and four year olds in the sample received some form of childcare with just over a third (35%) of these children receiving a mix of informal and formal childcare.**

Ninety-three per cent of three and four year olds in the sample were receiving some childcare.<sup>8</sup> Most (90%) were receiving formal provision, with 38% receiving some informal childcare.<sup>9</sup> Around a third of the children (35%) were receiving a mix, whilst just over half (55%) received only formal childcare. Only receiving informal childcare was uncommon, with just 3% doing so.

Half of families (51%) reported using two or more providers, with most of these (95%) using a mix of formal and informal providers. The most frequently used combination of childcare providers for three and four year olds was 'playgroup or preschool with a grandparent' (12%) followed by 'nursery school with grandparent' (9%). Cost was identified as the most important factor for using a second provider (36% of parents said 'it's cheaper that way') however the family role was also important – 24% said they preferred if family/ friends helped to look after their child.

### Current use of the 15 funded free hours

**The majority of parents (88%) said they were aware of the existing government entitlement of 15 hours, with 65% reporting they currently receive it. Out of these parents, 86% reported they use all 15 hours.**

The majority of parents (88%) reported that they were aware of the existing government entitlement to the 15 hours of free childcare. Out of all parents interviewed with a child aged three or four, 65% reported they currently received the existing entitlement. Of those parents, the vast majority (86%) reported they use all 15 hours (an additional 10% used 11-14 hours, equalling a total of 96% parents using 11-15 hours). Use of these

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<sup>8</sup> Base: All children aged 3-4, excluding those not eligible for free hours (603) (CWT).

<sup>9</sup> Please see Annex 2 for further details on the classifications used for informal and formal providers.

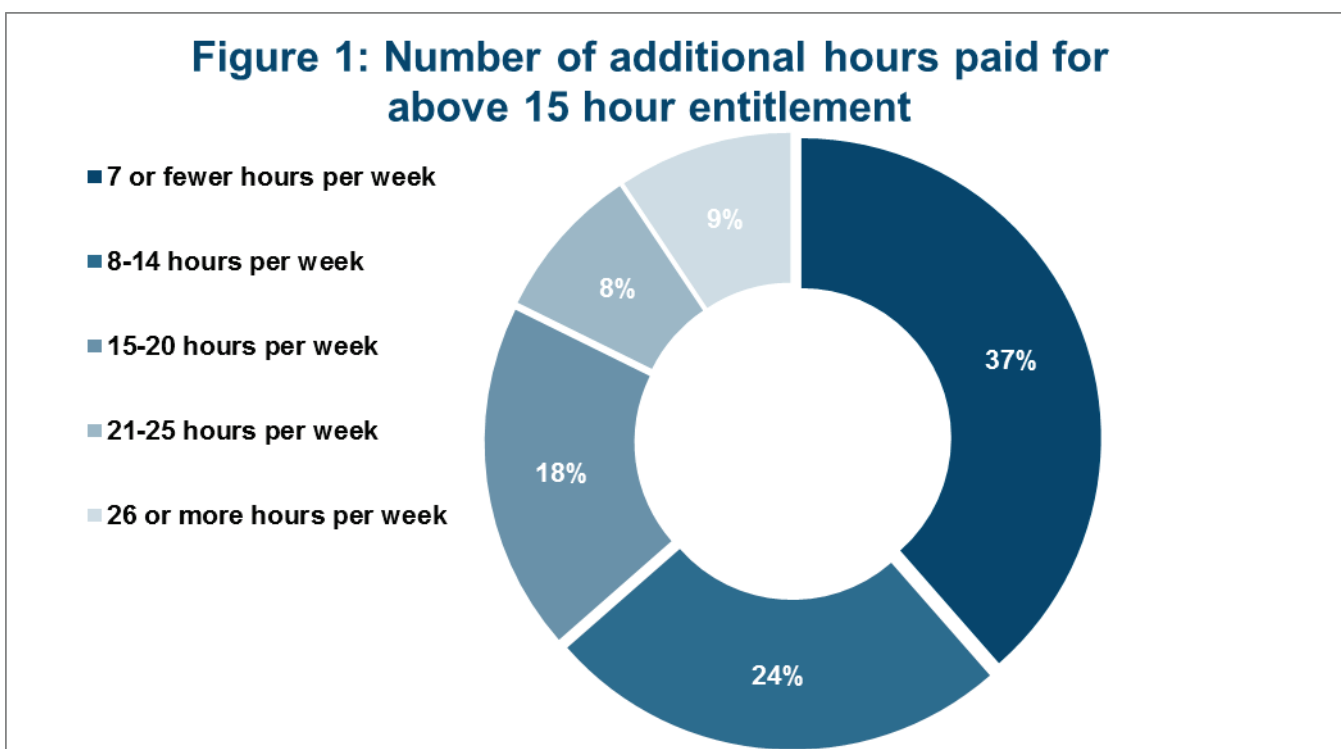


hours was evenly spread across weekdays. The majority (87%) of those who used the free hours said they were satisfied with the way they were able to use the provision of the 15 free hours of childcare (in terms of the days and times the hours are available). The most common setting where parents used their free hours was at a nursery school (36%) followed by at a playgroup or pre-school (30%), a nursery class attached to a primary or infants' school (16%) and at a day nursery (16%). Use of childminders for the free hours was less common (3%).

Child and economic benefits of the free hours were important for parents. The top three benefits identified for the whole household from using the current 15 free hour entitlement were: 'their child having more time to socialise with other children at childcare provider' (36%), 'reducing the cost of childcare' (30%) and it allowing them 'to be able to work' (20%). Nearly half of respondents (46%) with a child aged three or four who reported using the 15 free hour entitlement said they also pay for some additional hours of childcare. Of these parents, 37% pay for 7 or fewer hours, 24% pay for between 8-14 and 18% pay for between 15-20 hours. The median hours paid for above the free entitlement was 9 hours.

Those in full-time work were more likely to pay for additional hours. For example, 66% of couples (where both were working) paid for additional hours, as well as 35% of households where one parent was working or a lone parent was working. This was compared to just 12% where neither parent or a lone parent was working. Those earning more were also more likely to pay for additional hours. 67% of households earning £41,600 or more paid for additional hours, compared to half (51%) of households earning between £20,800 and £41,599 and just 29% of households earning up to £20,799.

**Figure 1: Number of additional hours paid for above 15 hour entitlement**



Base: All respondents with a child aged 3 or 4 who use the free hours and pay for additional hours (219) (HWT)

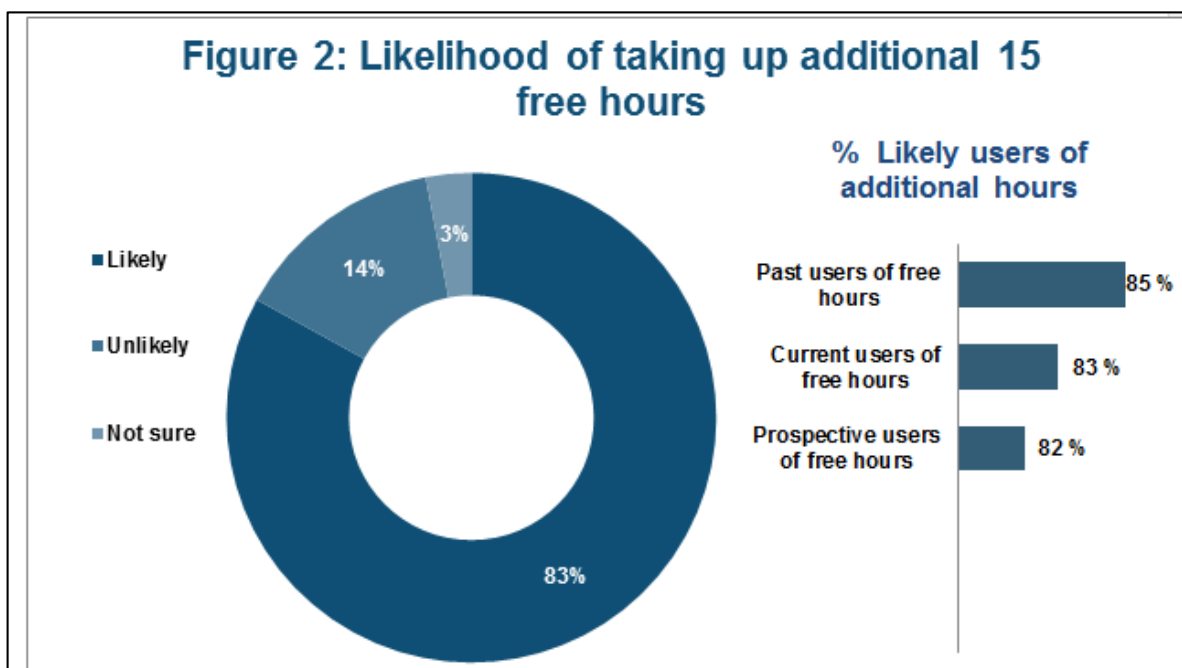
## Intentions to use the additional 15 hour entitlement

**Four out of five users of childcare say they are likely to use the additional hours. Reported likelihood was similarly high among current, past and future users of the free entitlement.**

### Likelihood of taking up additional hours

Of those currently using the 15 free hour entitlement, four out of five (83%) said they would likely or would definitely take up the additional 15 free hours (59% definitely would; 16% very likely; 8% fairly likely) if they were available to them now. Responses were similarly high for those that had been eligible in the past<sup>10</sup> (85% say they would have likely taken up these additional 15 hours). Of those who intend to use the existing free hours in the future when their child becomes eligible, 82% said they would likely or would definitely take up the additional hours (46% definitely would; 23% very likely, 13% fairly likely). As shown in Figure 2.

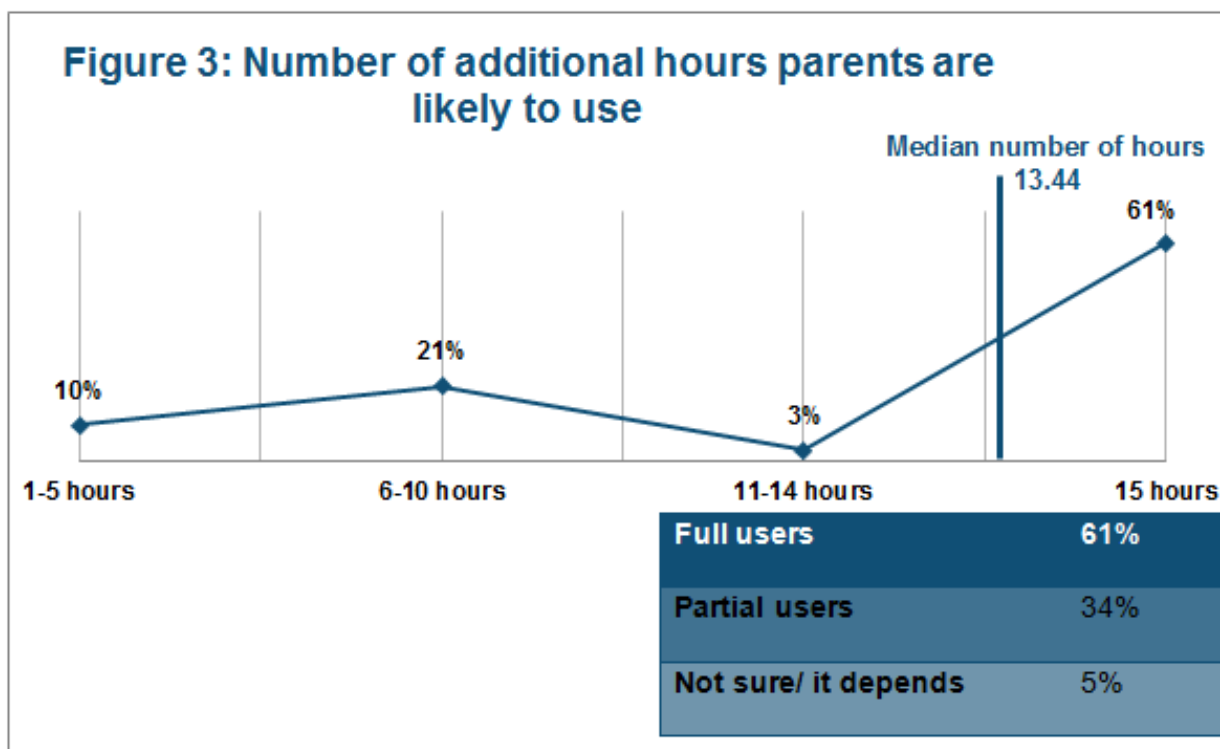
Figure 2: Likelihood of taking up additional 15 free hours



Base (Donut Chart): All respondents who currently use the free entitlement for their child (434, HWT);  
Base (Graph): All respondents who currently use the free entitlement for their child (434), used it in the past (125) and intend to use it in the future (262) (HWT).

<sup>10</sup> These respondents were parents of children aged 4 who are slightly older and would have previously been potentially eligible but are now in school / reception / full-time education.

Figure 3: Number of additional hours parents are likely to use



Base: All respondents who said they would use the additional hours if these were available to them (632, HWT).

Of all those who would use the additional free hours if these were available to them, 61% would use the full 15 hours per week, 3% 11-14 hours, 21% 6-10 hours and 10% 1-5 hours per week. This shows a general picture of 61% of parents who would be 'full users', 34% of 'partial users' (i.e. between 1-14 hours) and 5% who reported that they were not sure/ it depends – as shown in Figure 3. Parents who said they would use the additional 15 free hours if these were available to them were asked why. The top reasons for using the additional hours included:

- 'The extra hours will cover the cost for the childcare I already pay for/ will reduce my childcare costs' (29%)
- 'I can go back to work' (26%)
- 'I can increase my working hours/ days' (17%)
- 'My child having more time to socialise with other children at their childcare provider' (13%)
- 'My child having more time to prepare for school at their childcare provider' (12%).

Parents who said they would not use the additional free hours<sup>11</sup> were also asked why. The reasons for this were mainly parent related. The top reasons for not using the additional hours included 'I want to spend time with my child' (18%), 'I am not in work/ not eligible' (18%) and 'I prefer to look after my child myself' (14%).

## Potential impact of use on current childcare and working arrangements

**Reducing the cost of childcare and allowing parents to return to work emerged as the two most influential factors in decisions to use the additional hours.**

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<sup>11</sup> Base: All respondents who said they would not use the additional hours if these were available to them (143, HWT).

## **Expected benefits from using the additional hours**

Parents who said they would use the additional hours if these were available to them were asked to reflect on the expected benefits of using them. The top benefits identified were mainly related to economic reasons and included:

- 'The extra hours will cover the cost for the childcare I already pay for / will reduce my childcare costs' (36%)
- 'I can increase my working hours/ days' (32%)
- 'My child having more time to socialise with other children at their childcare provider' (16%)
- 'My child having more time to prepare for school at the childcare provider' (12%).

## **Expected impact of additional 15 hours on working**

Forty-seven per cent of respondents in work (65% of those interviewed) would change the number of hours they work in the week if they could use the additional 15 free hours. Of this group, 54% would increase the number of hours they worked in a week and 26% would work longer hours over fewer days. Of those not in work (35% of those interviewed), 60% would likely or would definitely look for work to become eligible for an additional 15 hours of childcare (21% definitely would, 27% very likely, 12% fairly likely).

## **Expected impact of additional 15 hours on the cost of childcare**

Out of all the 46% of parents who currently pay for childcare over the current free 15 hour entitlement for their three or four year old, 81% agreed (67% strongly agreed, 14% tend to agree) that the additional 15 free hours of childcare would significantly reduce the cost of childcare for their household. The majority of respondents who pay for childcare agreed (87%, with 71% strongly and 16% tend to agree) that they would use the additional 15 free hours towards the childcare that they currently pay for.

## **Expected impact of additional 15 hours on childcare for the whole household**

Of parents with two or more children aged 0-4, 55% agreed (39% strongly agreed, 16% tend to agree) they would only use the additional 15 hours if they could use the same childcare provider for all their children, with 31% disagreeing (22% tend to disagree, 9% strongly disagree). Forty-five per cent of these parents agreed (24% strongly agreed, 21% tend to agree) that they would use all or some of the additional 15 hours even if it meant their children had to go to different childcare providers, with 38% disagreeing with this statement (12% tend to disagree, 26% strongly disagree).



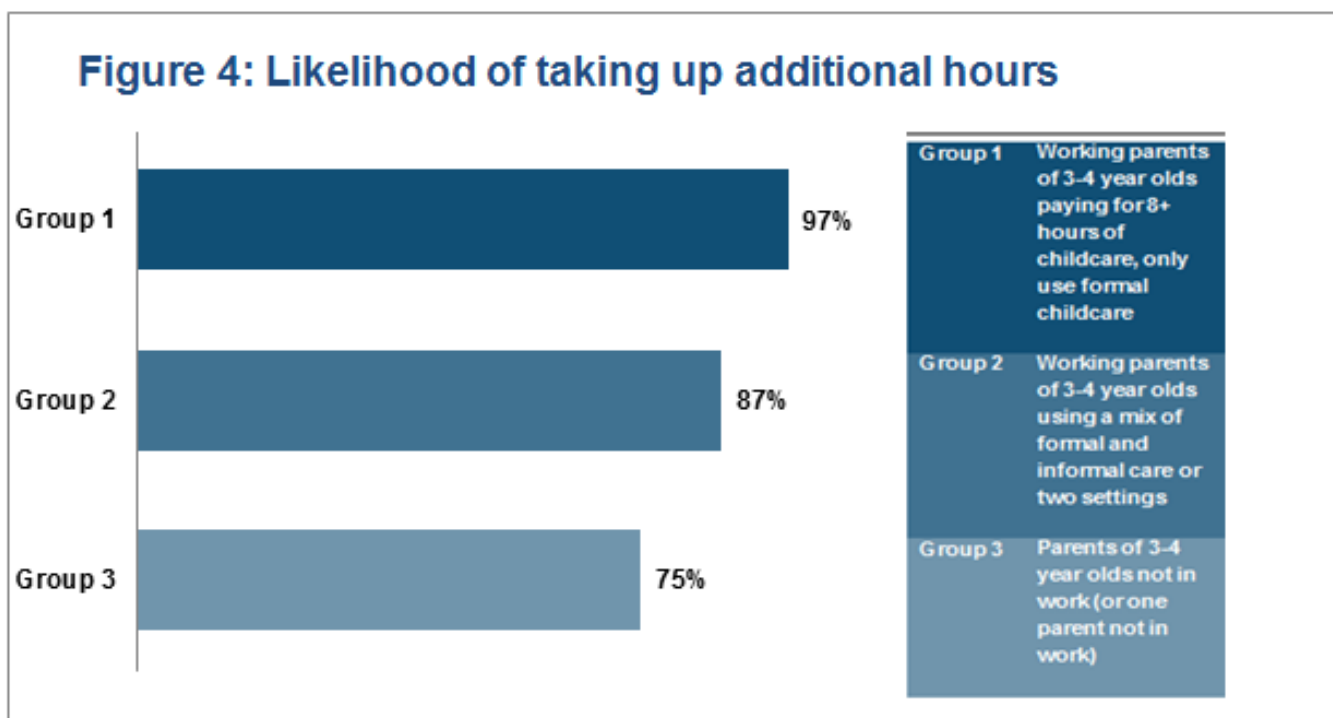
## Annex 1: Parental Intentions: Additional sub-group analysis

Additional analysis was carried out on the sample of parents from the survey which identified three distinct groups: those working parents of three and four year olds who were paying for 8 or more additional hours of childcare and only using formal childcare; working parents of three and four year olds using a mix of formal and informal care in two settings; and parents of three and four year olds not in work (or, one parent not in work). The following charts compare how these groups differed in response on their reported likelihood of:

- Taking up additional free hours
- Using more than one provider in order to receive the additional free hours
- Switching provider in order to receive the additional free hours
- Looking for a more suitable job if the additional free hours were available

**The majority (97%) of parents paying for 8 or more hours of formal childcare would take up the additional 15 free hours. For parents using a mix of formal and informal childcare in two settings this was 87% and for parents of three and four year olds not in work this was 75%.**

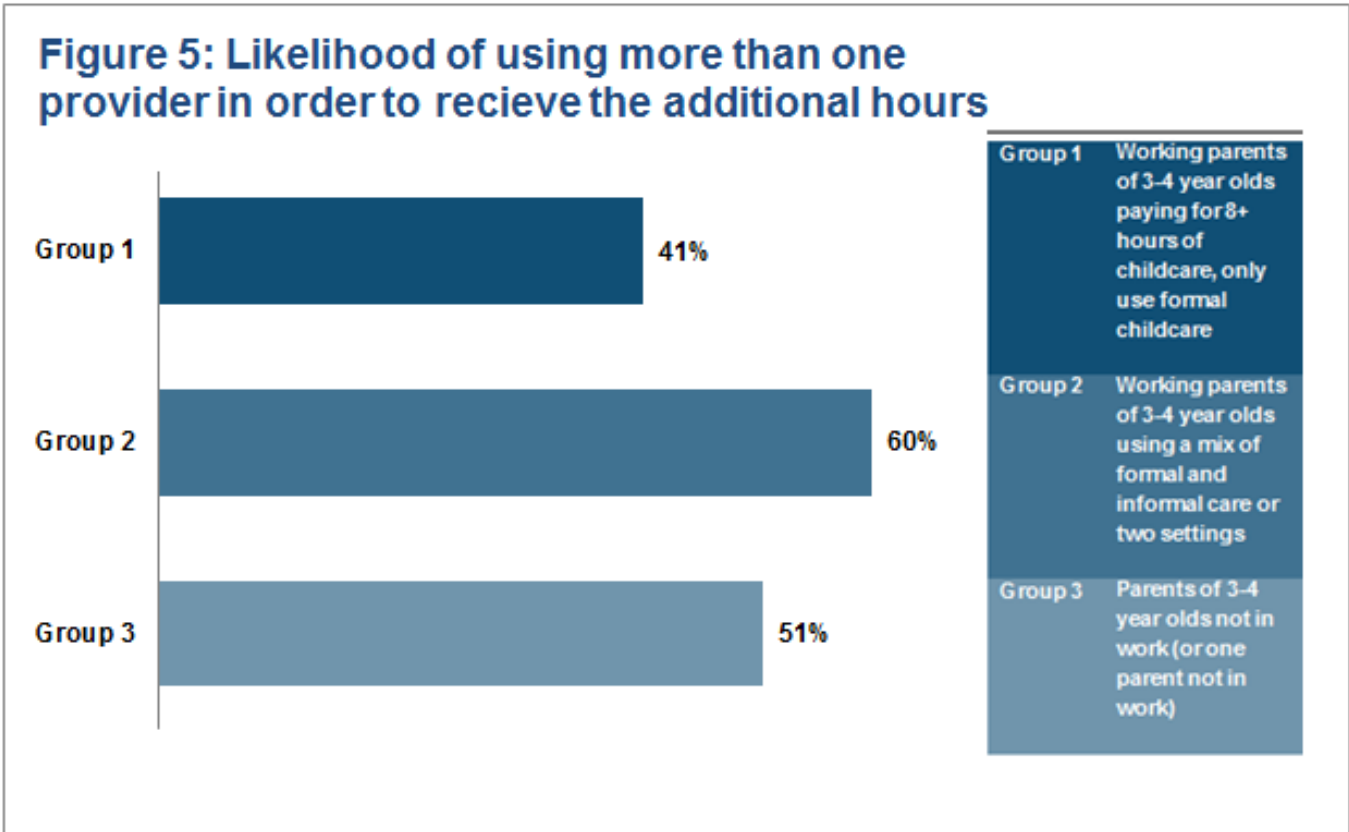
Figure 4: Parental subgroups: likelihood of taking up additional 15 free hours



Base sizes: Group 1: Working parents of 3-4 year olds paying for 8+ hours of childcare (only using formal) (65); Group 2: Working parents of 3-4 year olds using a mix of formal and informal care or two settings (228); Group 3: Parents of 3-4 year olds not in work (or one parent not in work) (273)

**When asked the likelihood of using more than one provider in order to receive the additional 15 free hours, those using a mix of providers were most receptive to using more than one (60%).**

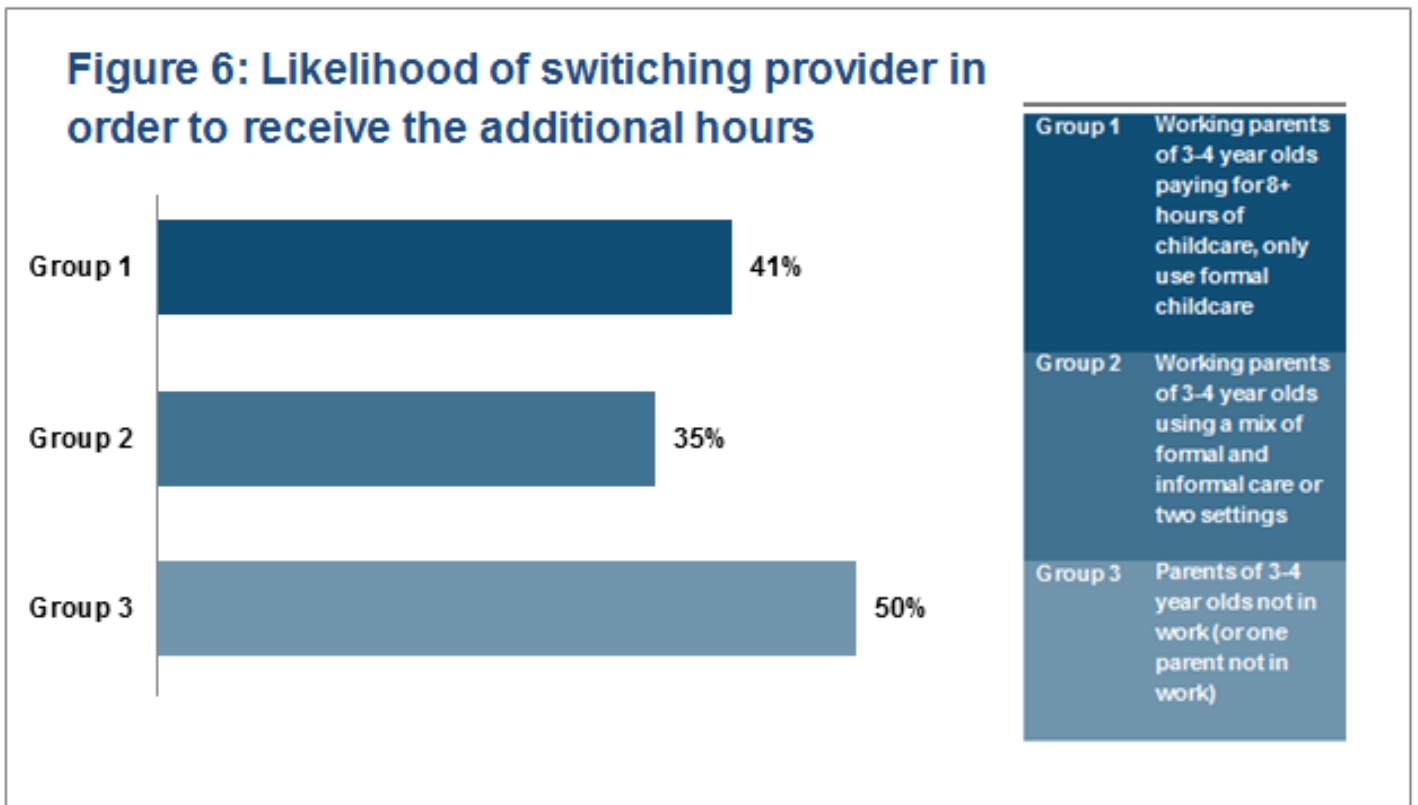
Figure 5: Likelihood of using more than one provider in order to receive the additional 15 free hours





**Non-working households were most willing to switch providers in order to receive the additional 15 free hours (50%).**

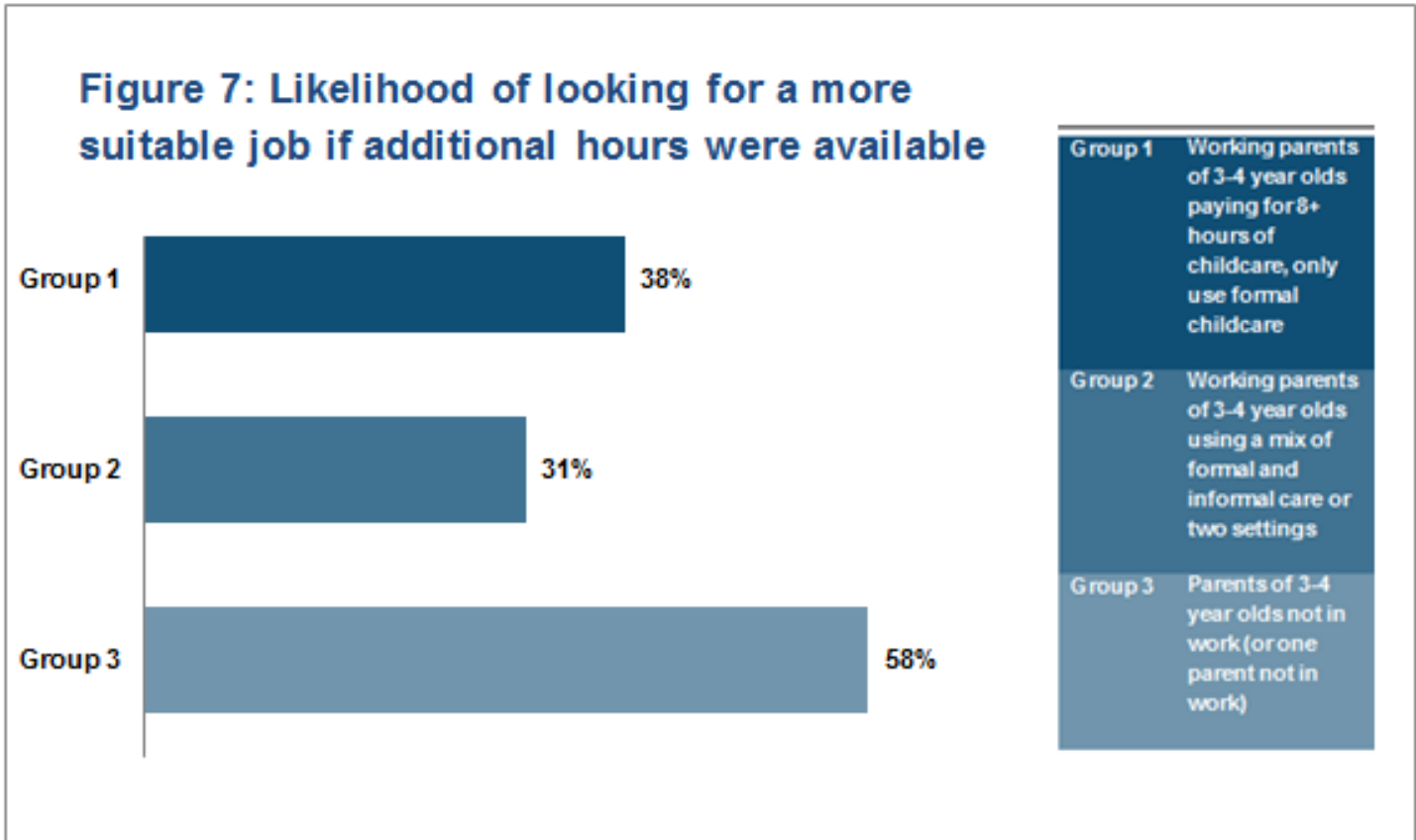
**Figure 6: Likelihood of switching provider in order to receive the additional 15 free hours**



Base: Group 1: Working parents of 3-4 year olds paying for 8+ hours of childcare (only using formal) (65);  
Group 2: Working parents of 3-4 year olds using a mix of formal and informal care or two settings (228);  
Group 3: Parents of 3-4 year olds not in work (or one parent not in work) (273)

**Non-working households were also more likely to say they would look for a more suitable job if the additional 15 free hours were available (58%).**

Figure 7: Likelihood of looking for a more suitable job if the additional 15 free hours were available



Base: Group 1: Working parents of 3-4 year olds paying for 8+ hours of childcare (only using formal) (65);  
Group 2: Working parents of 3-4 year olds using a mix of formal and informal care or two settings (228);  
Group 3: Parents of 3-4 year olds not in work (or one parent not in work) (273).

## Annex 2: Childcare Definitions

Table 1: Childcare Definitions

Formal providers	Informal providers
Nursery school	My ex-husband/ wife/partner/the child's other parent who does not live in this household
Nursery class attached to a primary or infants' school	The child's grandparent(s)
Reception class at a primary or infants' school	The child's older brother/sister
Special day school or nursery unit for children with special educational needs	Another relative
Day nursery	A friend or neighbour
Playgroup or pre- school	
Childminder	
Nanny or au pair	
Baby – sitter who came to home	
Breakfast club	
After- school clubs and activities	
Holiday club/scheme	



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