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Early years places and workforce need

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Applies to England

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In the Spring Budget of 2023, the Chancellor announced that funded childcare hours would be extended to children of eligible working parents in England from 9 months old to support increased parental engagement in the labour market.

The measures announced will expand the existing system by offering up to 30 funded hours of childcare per week over 38 weeks of the year to children aged 9 months and over whose parents meet the same income eligibility criteria as applied to the existing 30 hours entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds.

The policy is being delivered through a phased rollout, with 15 hours per week for 38 weeks a year offered to eligible 2-year-olds from April 2024 and to eligible children under 2 from September 2024. The new entitlement will be offered in full from September 2025.

The Department for Education (DfE) has previously published its initial costing of this policy and an assessment of the place and workforce requirements during delivery of the entitlements alongside [early education entitlements and funding](#) information.

The analysis provides indicative numbers of places and workers that the sector needs to meet demand due to the entitlement expansion. This analysis does not replace or supersede the assessments of sufficiency carried out by local authorities.

This note contains the numbers of places and workers that the sector needed to create for April 2024 and September 2024. It also shows the number it will need to create for September 2025, in line with the phasing of the rollout. The analysis is based on assumptions around typical parent and provider behaviour and therefore contains considerable uncertainty.

Key findings

To meet the additional demand placed on the childcare sector by expanding government funded entitlements to childcare, DfE estimates that, for the number of places needed:

- demand in the summer 2024 term could be met within existing capacity
- around 10,000 new places are needed above the 31 December 2023 baseline for autumn 2024
- around 70,000 new places are needed above the 31 December 2023 baseline for autumn 2025

DfE estimates that, for the levels of workforce recruitment needed:

- the summer 2024 term could be met by the existing workforce
- around 6,000 additional staff (headcount) are needed above the 31 December 2023 baseline for autumn 2024
- around 35,000 additional staff (headcount) are needed above the 31 December 2023 baseline for autumn 2025

Methods

Children

As published in the [expansion to early childcare entitlements](#) data, around 219,000 children have taken advantage of the expanded entitlement funding in the summer 2024 term (starting April 2024). The start of the autumn 2024 term has also seen hundreds of thousands of children aged from 9 months old gain access to entitlement funded childcare.

Following the methods described in the [early education entitlements and funding policy costing information note](#), with updates including accounting for the actual numbers of parents seeking entitlement funded places, we can make informed assumptions around the number of children that may seek an entitlement funded

childcare place from September 2025.

Places

Converting assumptions of the number of children taking entitlement funded places to the number of places that need to be added to the sector relies on assumptions about the number of hours existing childcare can support and the distribution of new demand across the country.

Given the uncertainty in estimating the number of hours demanded of the sector, and inherent uncertainty in modelling based on assumed values, the numbers presented here can give only an indicative assessment of the need to create childcare places across the county.

Existing supply of childcare places

Information from providers registered on the Ofsted early years and childcare registers, as at 31 December 2023, is used to identify locations of providers and the number of places they offer. These places are converted to a number of hours that can be supported in a typical term time week and distributed between the age groups they support.

Existing use of childcare

Existing use of childcare is estimated by applying national average childcare usage data from DfE's [childcare and early years survey of parents](#) to local populations.

Distribution of new demand

The additional demand that the sector needs to support is distributed across the country, in line with where parents have been issued with eligibility codes that allow them to access the new offer.

Demand is then redistributed according to the travel patterns that can be seen in the [education provision report for children under 5 years of age](#). For the 3- to 4-year-olds entitlements, we can compare the wards in which children live to the locations where those children attend a childcare setting. This allows us to move demand to the locations that typically offer childcare.

New places needed

By adding new demand to the existing use of childcare, and comparing it to the supply of childcare hours, we can make an assessment of the levels of shortfall and surplus childcare across the country.

This leads to the indicative estimates given in the key finding section.

You can see the breakdown of [early years places needed](#) by local authority.

Workforce

Alongside the need to create childcare places, the increase in demand due to the new entitlement will mean more workers are needed. How many workers are needed to look after a given number of children depends on the child's age group and the requirements of the [early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#).

In practice, settings operate within these ratios and not at them, as shown in the [childcare and early years provider survey](#). To estimate the increase in the workforce needed to meet the new demand, we account for operating ratios. We also account for non-contact activities that would be required to deliver the additional hours demanded, such as liaising with parents and local authorities.

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