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# Main findings: fostering in England 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

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## Applies to England

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The [Fostering in England 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025](#) release also includes:

- data tables
- methodology
- pre-release access list

## Summary

This release covers:

- the numbers of foster carers and foster places and placements, in both local authority and independent fostering agencies (IFAs)
- data relating to types of foster care, registrations, deregistrations and a range of

other subjects

- the period between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

## Main findings

During the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:

- the number of mainstream fostering households has continued to decline over the past 4 years, but at a slower rate compared to last year
- there has been an increase in the number of newly approved mainstream households entering the sector this year, following a longer-term downward trend which plateaued between 2023 and 2024
- the proportion of formal kinship care arrangement (family and friends) households has remained consistent with last year. However, there has been a slight decline in the proportion of newly approved formal kinship care arrangement households still active at 31 March
- there continues to be an increase in the proportion of IFA mainstream households with the number of IFA households and places seeing a slight increase from the previous year
- the number of short break places has increased by 41% since 2021

## Introduction

This statistical release covers local authority fostering agencies and IFAs in England in the year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. It includes data about fostering households, foster carers, retention, recruitment and capacity of providers.

This year, [Ofsted's annual fostering data collection](#) received responses from 465 fostering agencies (147 local authorities and 318 IFAs). All percentages within this report are calculated based on the data submitted.

Among the agencies that submitted data were several organisations that run children's services, including fostering, for particular local authorities independently of the council. There were also several joint returns, such as Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster, which submit a combined dataset as 'London Tri-borough'. For more details, please see the [accompanying dataset](#).

We divide fostering households into 2 main groups for this analysis. The main part of this report covers 'mainstream fostering', which refers to all foster homes (including permanent, non-permanent and fostering to adopt arrangements) except those with a primary placement offer of formal kinship care arrangements (also known as family and friends foster care). 'Formal kinship care arrangements' or 'family and friends fostering', which is covered in the last section, refers to arrangements organised through a local authority to allow children to be cared for by someone they already know.

[The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#), currently progressing through Parliament, promotes kinship care primarily through proposed amendments to the Children Act 1989. These include a new duty for local authorities to consider family group decision-making. However, at present, we do not collect data on all types of kinship care as part of the data collection; therefore, kinship carers fostering a child under arrangements other than formal kinship care arrangements are not reflected in this publication.

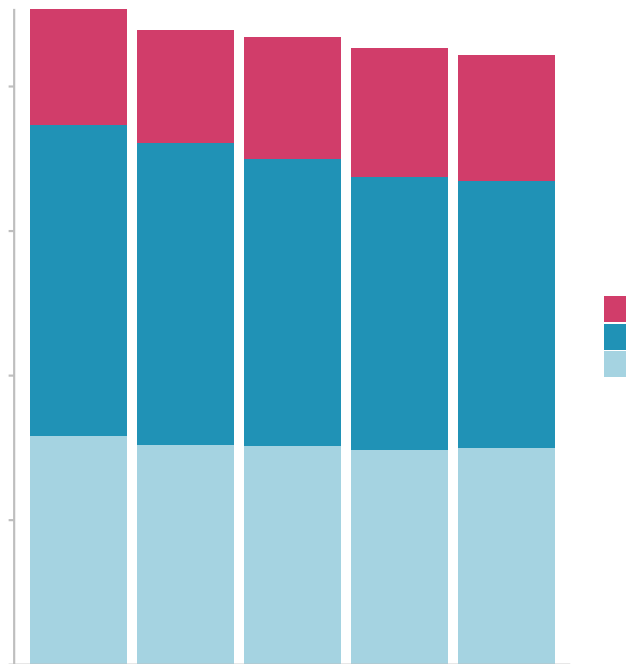
## Fostering sector overview

As at 31 March, the total number of fostering households has continued to decrease. There has been a 7% decrease since 2021 and a 1% decrease compared to last year. Local authority mainstream households have seen a decrease of 2% from the previous year that has been offset slightly by a small increase in IFA households.

Out of [just over 12 million children and young people under the age of 18 living in England, just under 400,000 \(3%\) are in the social care system](#) at any one time. At the start of this reporting period, about 83,600 of these children were looked after, of whom around 56,400 were in foster care. The number of those children in foster care has remained consistent since 2020 but the number in children's homes has increased.<sup>[\[footnote 1\]](#)</sup>

At the end of March 2025, there were 42,190 fostering households in England. The number of households has decreased steadily since 2021, and the make-up has changed. Formal kinship care fostering is the preferred route in many cases, and it is increasingly common for this type of foster care to be used to meet the needs of individual children. The largest subset of fostering households is mainstream local authority households (18,415). These currently account for 44% of total fostering households (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Number of fostering households by type and sector as at 31 March, over the last 5 years**



View the [data for Figure 1 in an accessible table format](#).

## Mainstream fostering

### Sector stability

For the first time since 2021 there has been a net increase in the number of IFA households. Although the number of local authority mainstream households is still decreasing, the rate of decline is slower than in the previous 3 years.

The IFA sector accounts for 45% of mainstream households, and since 2021 the proportion of IFA mainstream households has steadily increased. For the first time since 2021, there has been a slight increase in the number of IFA households (figure 2); however, it has not been enough to offset the decline in local authority households. Between 2021 and 2025, the number of approved or newly approved mainstream local authority households has fallen by 14%.

**Figure 2: Year-on-year net change in mainstream fostering households by sector over the last 5 years**

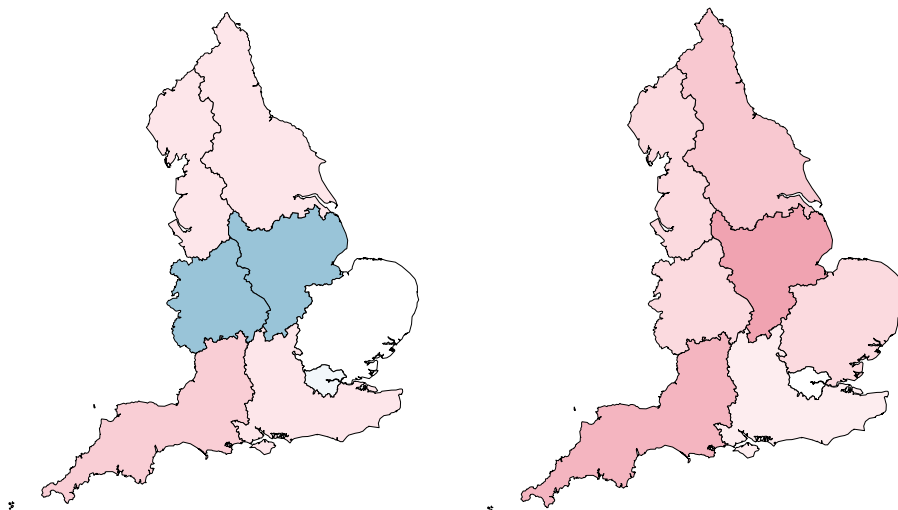


1. This chart is calculated by comparing datasets from separate instances of the annual fostering data collection, while the joiners and leavers section below is based on data from just this year's fostering data collection.

View the [data for Figure 2 in an accessible table format](#).

Most regions saw slight decreases in the number of mainstream fostering households across both local authority and IFA sectors this year. East Midlands (8%), West Midlands (8%) and London (1%) saw small increases in the number of IFA households, while all regions except London (no percentage change) saw a decrease in local authority households.

**Figure 3: Percentage change in number of approved mainstream fostering households by region between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025**



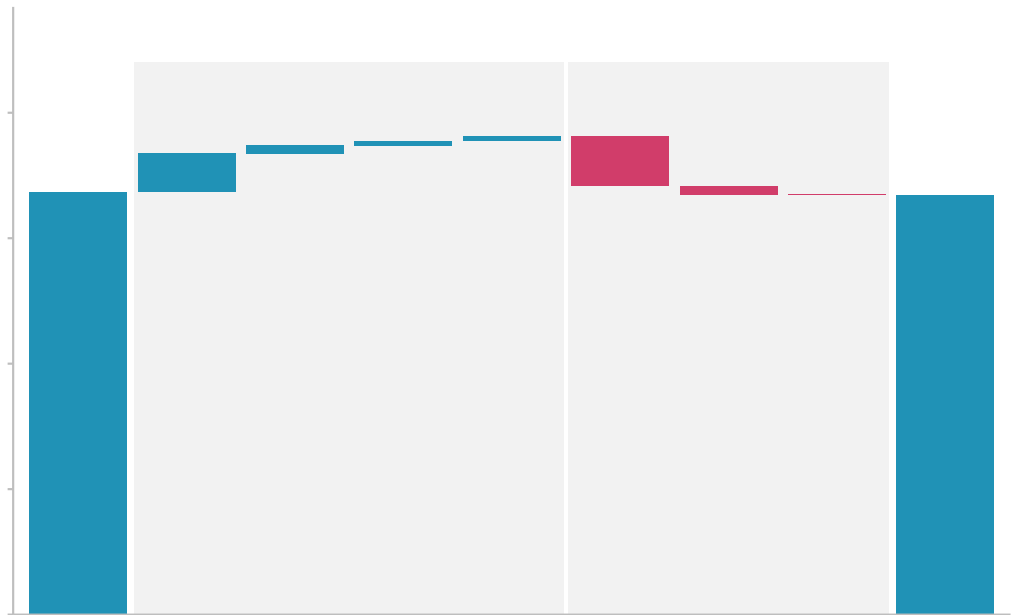
View the [data for Figure 3 in an accessible table format](#).

## Joiners and leavers

Although the number of mainstream households leaving continues to exceed those joining, the net change is smaller than in the previous year.

The number of applications received during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 was 8,290. During this period, 4,430 mainstream households joined the sector, of which 3,050 were new to fostering. The number of deregistrations over the same period was 4,690. Some of these may have deregistered and re-registered, changing agency or sector. The overall change in the number of households (joiners minus leavers) recorded in this year's collection (-255) is smaller than that recorded in last year's collection (-765).

**Figure 4: Total approved mainstream households at the start and end of the collection period with in-year joiners and leavers**

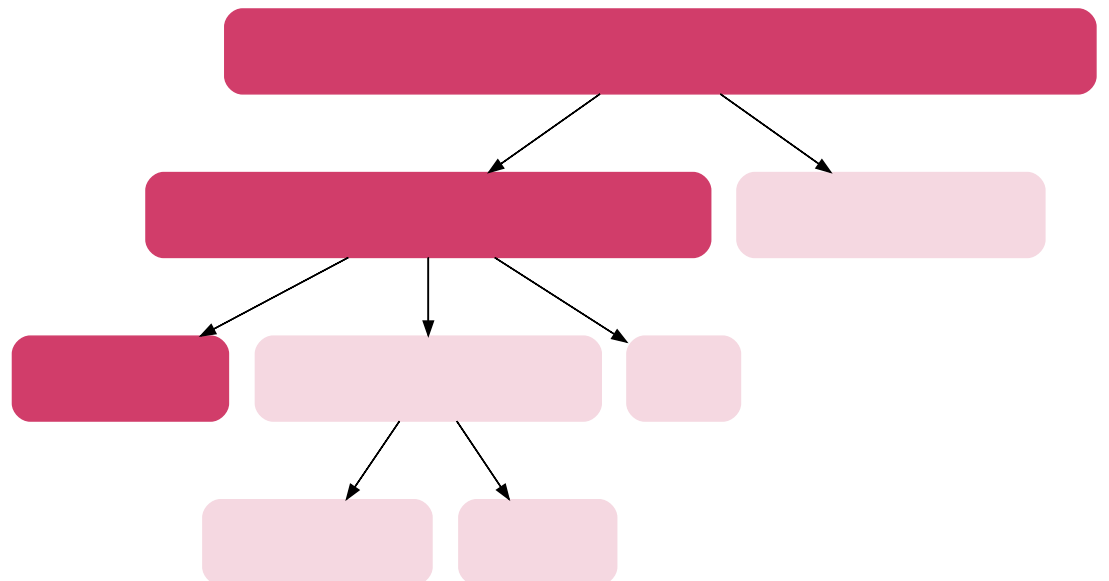


1. Figures are rounded, so subtotals for different types of joiner and leaver in the chart may not sum to totals.

View the [data for Figure 4 in an accessible table format](#).

At the end of March 2025, there were 4,115 newly approved households, some of which will have started the application process before the beginning of the year. The total number of applications this year was slightly lower than last year (8,290, down from 8,485). The proportion of applications completed has remained the same over the past 3 years.

**Figure 5: Applications received in 2024 to 2025, by status on 31 March 2025**



1. This flowchart shows that, of the 8,290 applications received in 2024 to 2025, 5,370 were completed

and 2,925 were still in progress as at 31 March 2025. Of the applications completed in-year, 2,050 were approved, with 3,290 withdrawn and 30 rejected. Of the withdrawn applications, 2,175 were withdrawn by the applicant and 1,115 by the service.

2. This chart is not to scale.

3. Figures are rounded, so subtotals may not sum to totals in adjacent rows.

View the [data for Figure 5 in an accessible table format](#).

Of the fostering households that held approved status at some point during 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 12% had deregistered by the end of the year (4,690 of 38,125). On average, local authority households that deregistered this year had been registered for just over 7.5 years, while IFA households that deregistered this year had been registered for just over 5.5 years. These averages have remained consistent in recent years.

For applications started in-year that were withdrawn by the applicant by the end of the year, the most commonly cited reasons for withdrawal were: a change in household circumstances (not financial) (36%), other or unknown reason (35%), and the fostering process not being as the applicant expected (20%).

## Foster carers

This year, the number of mainstream foster carers has decreased by 1% from the previous year, with the proportion of new approvals in the local authority and IFA sectors the same as last year.

As at March 2025, there were 56,345 approved mainstream foster carers. This is a slight decrease of 1% from last year (57,065) and a decrease of 12% from 2021 (63,890).

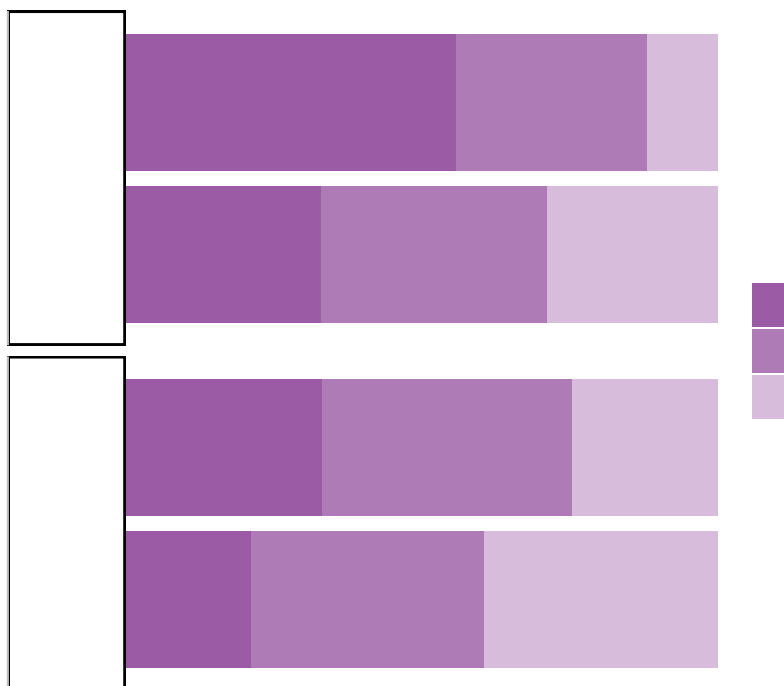
This year, the largest proportion of all approved foster carers were aged in their 50s (37%). Among foster carers newly approved during the year, the highest proportion were in their 40s (31%). Around one third of approved mainstream carers are aged 60 or over. This is consistent with last year but higher than 5 years ago, when only around a quarter of carers were in this age group.

## Fostering households

As at 31 March, 39% of IFA households were approved for 3 or more children compared to 29% of local authority households.

As at March 2025, it was most common for mainstream households to be approved to provide non-permanent foster care (49%) or permanent foster care (39%) as their primary care type. In line with previous years, many households (64%) offered multiple types of foster care. This was higher in the IFA sector (86%) than the local authority sector (47%).

**Figure 6: Household size for all approved and newly approved mainstream fostering households as at 31 March 2025**



1. Totals include households approved for zero children.
  2. All figures are rounded so subtotals may not sum to totals in brackets.
- View the [data for Figure 6 in an accessible table format](#).

## Fostering places

As at 31 March, the number of mainstream fostering places had decreased slightly since last year, with around 3 in every 5 available places filled in both local authority and IFA sectors.

As at March 2025, there were 69,825 approved mainstream fostering places, a slight decrease from 70,465 the previous year. Across local authority and IFA households, around 60% of places were filled, 17% were vacant and about 1 in 5 places were unavailable.

This year, 1,765 household places were used exclusively for short breaks, which

is equivalent to 3% of all approved mainstream places. There has been a net increase of 41% in short-break places since 2021.

**Figure 7: Number of filled, vacant and not available mainstream fostering placements as at 31 March each year, over the last 5 years**



View the [data for Figure 7 in an accessible table format](#).

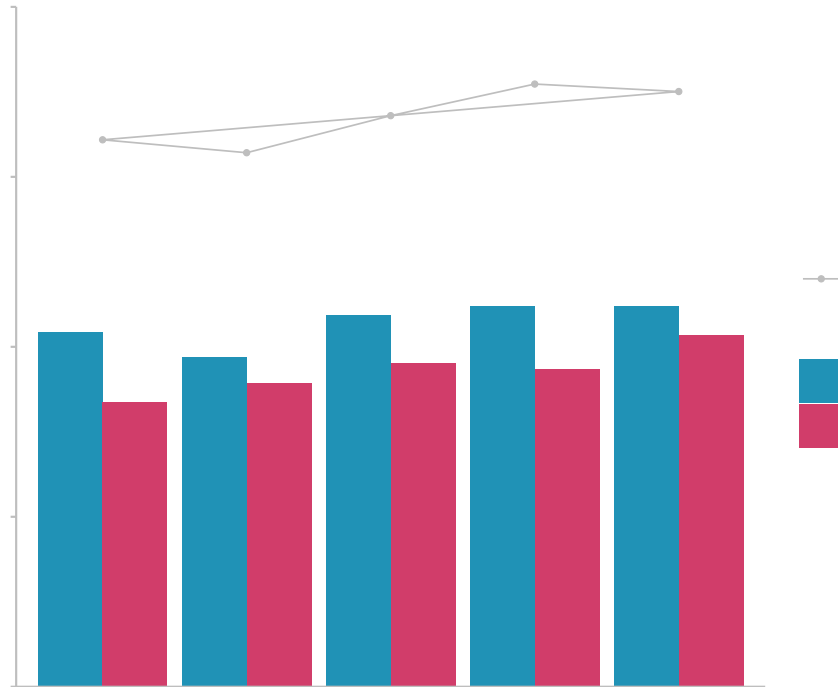
There are several reasons why a fostering place may be recorded as 'not available'. You can read more about this in the [statistical glossary](#).

## Formal kinship care (family and friends fostering)

This year, formal kinship care arrangements households accounted for 21% of all active fostering households. While these arrangements have experienced growth in previous years, the number of formal kinship care households saw a slight decline this year compared to 2024.

As at the end of March 2025, formal kinship care continued to account for a fifth of all fostering provision. There has been growth in the sector in recent years, with a net increase of 9% in households since 2021. There is also a high level of turnover in the formal kinship care sector (Figure 8), because specific households are approved and deregistered based on need and the plan for the child.

**Figure 8: Total approved formal kinship care households as at 31 March, with in-year joiners and leavers, over the last 5 years**



1. Slight discrepancies between in-year deregistrations and new approvals and subsequent totals are because the data for each year is based on separate annual data collections.

View the [data for Figure 8 in an accessible table format](#).

## Revisions to previous release

This is the first release of this data for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The [Fostering in England 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025](#) release also includes:

- data tables
- methodology
- pre-release access list

## Notes

Percentages and other derived statistics in this publication are calculated using

unrounded figures. However, the underlying data in the published dataset are rounded to the nearest 5. As a result, figures derived from the published dataset may differ slightly from those presented in the report.

## Contacts

If you are a member of the public and have any comments or feedback on this publication, please contact Rebecca Vincent at [socialcaredata@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:socialcaredata@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to the following for their contribution to this statistical release: Jonny Shine and Kathryn Leech.

## Glossary

Definitions of terms are in the [statistical glossary](#).

## Annex: data tables for figures

This section contains the underlying data in an accessible table format for all figures.

### Data for Figure 1: Number of fostering households by type and sector as at 31 March, over the last 5 years

Sector	2021 (45,370)	2022 (43,905)	2023 (43,405)	2024 (42,615)	2025 (42,190)
Formal kinship care (local authority)	8,045	7,855	8,400	8,865	8,755
Mainstream (local authority)	21,495	20,845	19,835	18,860	18,415
Mainstream (IFA)	15,830	15,205	15,170	14,890	15,020

See [Figure 1](#).

**Data for Figure 2: Year-on-year net change in mainstream fostering households by sector over the last 5 years**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
IFA	485	-625	-35	-280	130
Local authority	-390	-650	-1,010	-975	-445

See [Figure 2](#).

**Data for Figure 3: Percentage change in number of approved mainstream fostering households by region between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025**

<b>Region</b>	<b>IFA</b>	<b>Local authority</b>
East Midlands	8%	-5%
East of England	0%	-2%
London	1%	0%
North East, Yorkshire and Humber	-2%	-3%
North West	-2%	-2%
South East	-2%	-1%
South West	-4%	-4%
West Midlands	8%	-2%

See [Figure 3](#).

**Data for Figure 4: Total approved mainstream households at the start and end of the collection period with in-year joiners and leavers**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>Number</b>
Approved households as at 1 April 2023	Total	33,690
In-year joiners	New	3,050
In-year joiners	Transfer	680
In-year joiners	Return	335
In-year joiners	Other	370

In-year leavers	Leaver	-3,985
In-year leavers	Transfer	-645
In-year leavers	Other	-65
Approved households as at 31 March 2024	Total	33,430

See [Figure 4](#).

### Data for Figure 5: Applications received in 2024 to 2025, by status on 31 March 2025

Group	Number	Percentage
Applications received in 2024 to 2025	8,290	
Applications completed	5,370	65%
Applications still in progress	2,925	35%
Applications completed in approval	2,050	38%
Applications completed in withdrawal	3,290	61%
Applications completed in rejection	30	1%
Withdrawn applications by applicant	2,175	66%
Withdrawn applications by service	1,115	34%

See [Figure 5](#).

### Data for Figure 6: Household size for all approved and newly approved mainstream fostering households as at 31 March 2025

Sector	Group	1 child	2 children	3 or more children
Local authority	Newly approved (1,850)	1,030	595	220
Local authority	All approved (18,415)	6,080	7,035	5,290
IFA	Newly approved (2,265)	750	955	555
IFA	All approved (15,020)	3,190	5,910	5,920

See [Figure 6](#).

**Data for Figure 7: Number of filled, vacant and not available mainstream fostering placements as at 31 March each year, over the last 5 years**

Status of fostering place	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Not available	17,365	15,940	14,960	14,755	14,335
Vacant	14,005	13,170	12,100	11,520	12,080
Filled	44,750	44,550	44,580	42,870	42,015

See [Figure 7](#).

**Data for Figure 8: Total approved formal kinship care households as at 31 March, with in-year joiners and leavers, over the last 5 years**

Group	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
New approvals (in-year)	5,215	4,850	5,465	5,600	5,595
Deregistrations (in-year)	4,180	4,470	4,755	4,665	5,170
Total approved households (at 31 March)	8,045	7,855	8,400	8,865	8,755

See [Figure 8](#).

1. [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), Department for Education, November 2024. ↩

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