Family and Childcare Trust

Creating a family friendly UK

Holiday Childcare Survey 2015

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Key findings and areas for action

Children usually greet the start of the school holidays with joy. But many parents experience a different range of emotions as they try to juggle work, school holidays and childcare. Most families set up an array of arrangements, such as 'shift-parenting' where mothers and fathers split their leave between them. They also turn to informal care from relatives and friends and some families use childminders, who may have spare capacity over the holiday period. Sports and arts activities also function as de facto childcare for children of secondary school age. About one in five of all families with children under 14 use childcare provided by holiday clubs, with 81 per cent of this provision now run by private and not-for-profit organisations. This group-based childcare provides children with a day of structured activities and outings. Typically, a family uses holiday childcare schemes for two or three weeks of the year.

Every year the Family and Childcare Trust conducts a survey to gather information about the price of holiday clubs and their availability across Britain. The data – collected from local authorities – makes it possible to monitor changes in the price and availability of childcare during school holiday periods and identifies differences in provision across the regions and nations of Britain.

This years' Holiday Childcare Survey, the 14th in the series, is released at a time of real action to help parents with the cost of childcare. In 2016, the new Tax Free Childcare Scheme will be rolled out and support under Universal Credit will be increased. This is welcome, but our survey shows many parents will still face a lottery of high prices and gaps in provision.

Key findings

Childcare prices

- In Britain the average price of one week's full-time (50 hours) of holiday childcare is now £123.49, compared with £114.51 in 2014. This represents a 7.8 per cent increase in price over the last 12 months.
- Holiday clubs provided by the public sector cost an average of £109.51 per week, compared with £124.85 per week in the private and not-for-profit sectors. These price differences are a result of subsidies and because holiday childcare provided by local authorities and schools often have access to free premises and equipment.
- Over the last Parliament (2010-2015) prices of public sector childcare increased by 32.9 per cent and private and not-for-profit provision by 20.6 per cent. When ownership patterns are taken into account, the prices of holiday clubs have increased by 24.9 per cent over the last five years.
- The region with the most expensive holiday childcare is the South East where prices are 11.7 per cent above the average price for Britain.

The availability of holiday childcare

- Under the Childcare Act 2006 all local authorities in England and Wales have a legal obligation to make sure there is sufficient childcare for working parents and those undertaking training. Despite this duty, 87 per cent of English local authorities and 95 per cent of those in Wales lacked sufficient holiday childcare for working parents.
- In Scotland, where the legislative framework is different, just three local authorities had enough holiday childcare for working parents, and 12 had no data to see if their supply met parental demand.
- Parents of children aged 12 or over, families who live in rural areas and those with disabled children face the biggest gaps in provision. Some 88 per cent of local authorities in England and all local authorities in Wales lacked sufficient holiday childcare for disabled children.
- Gaps in holiday childcare provision are increasing rather than decreasing, with 73 per cent of English local authorities lacking sufficient childcare for working parents in 2014, compared with 87 per cent this year.
- There are now 28 local authorities in England, 13 in Wales and 4 in Scotland where there are shortages of childcare in most or all of the local authority. An estimated 1,466,000 children aged between 4 and 15 years live in these areas where holiday childcare is in particularly short supply.
- In situations where many parents face gaps in provision, their search for holiday childcare is not being helped by a lack of accurate and timely consumer information. Under half (47 per cent) of local authorities have online information about holiday clubs and activities on their websites.

Key findings and areas for action

Table One: The weekly price of holiday childcare, 2015

Region/nation	Public sector (school, local authority) holiday clubs	Private and not-for-profit holiday club	Average weighted price
East of England	£114.60	£136.89	£136.65
East Midlands	£92.68	£116.82	£113.71
Greater London	£97.95	£142.18	£137.39
North East	£112.46	£133.80	£131.29
North West	£103.41	£107.32	£107.08
South East	£125.87	£136.20	£137.94
South West	£110.18	£129.62	£128.03
West Midlands	£115.77	£115.94	£116.74
Yorkshire and Humberside	£103.42	£115.97	£114.00
England (Regional Average)	£108.48	£126.08	£124.76
Scotland	£119.91	£121.48	£120.61
Wales	£108.31	£117.13	£114.91
Britain average	£109.51	£124.85	£123.49

Source: Family and Childcare Trust Holiday Childcare Survey, 2015

Areas for action

Holiday childcare is an essential service for many families, enabling them to juggle their caring obligations and work during the school holidays. It also has a wider economic impact as it enables employers to have a dependable labour force who can be relied on to turn up for their jobs. Despite the importance of holiday childcare, too many families struggle to find local provision that they can afford. This situation is not improving; instead gaps are worsening, although there is a legal duty on local authorities to make sure there is sufficient childcare. This means children are missing out on enrichment activities and parents struggle to combine work and care.

While childcare has risen up the political agenda, the focus has mainly been on the under-fives. The results of this years' survey have led us to conclude that the childcare needs of families with school-age children must be given higher priority.

The Family and Childcare Trust wants to see:

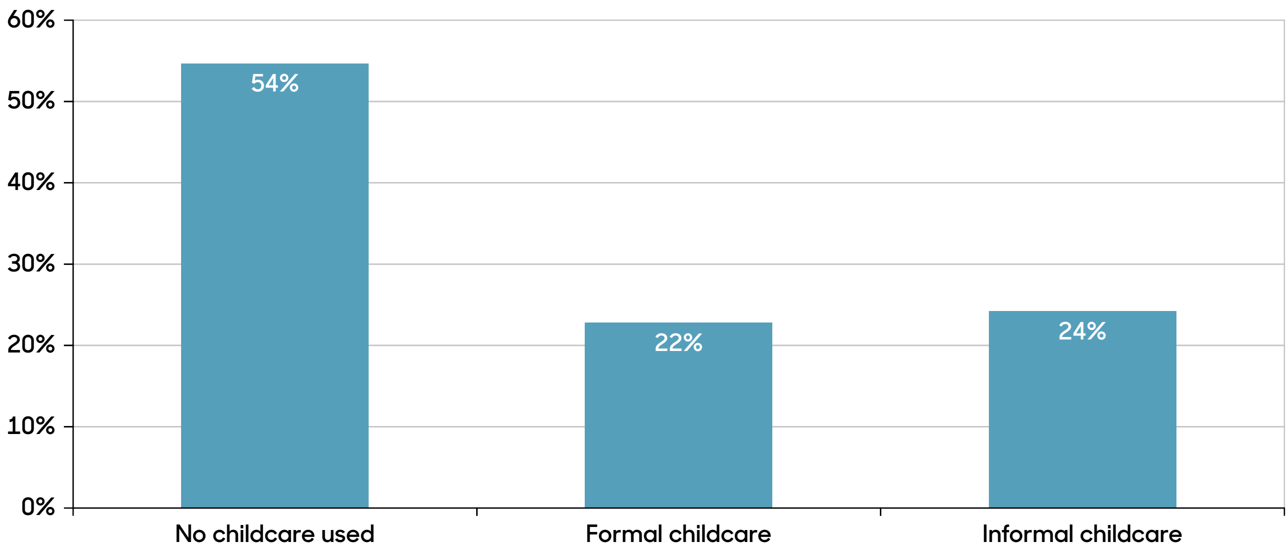
- The Government take action to make sure there are no further delays in Universal Credit and the roll out of Tax Free Childcare, so that this vital support is available to parents as soon as possible.
- The Government, and devolved administrations, publish detailed statutory guidance on auditing childcare supply and demand and childcare market management in all parts of the UK, which should include a clear definition of childcare sufficiency.
- Support for local authorities to help them fill gaps in provision, including ring-fenced funding to help providers with start-up costs and business sustainability.
- Strengthened statutory guidance for local authorities to produce accurate and timely online information on holiday clubs and activities for parents and providers, including information about rights to flexible working and unpaid parental leave.
- Local authorities bringing together police commissioners, schools, leisure, arts and sports organisations to develop local strategies to ensure that there are enough holiday activities for children of secondary school age.

Introduction

School holidays, particularly the long summer holidays, present challenges to working parents. Schools and school-based nurseries are closed and parents resort to many different strategies to find childcare in the 14 weeks of the school holidays. A lucky few have employers who support flexible working, for example, offering parents term-time only contracts. Many parents also resort to 'shift parenting' where they split their own annual leave and take it in turns to look after their children. Informal childcare from relatives and friends is also important, with the most recent Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents showing that 41 per cent of working families with children under 15 used informal childcare over the school holidays, most usually provided by grandparents (Department for Education, 2014a).

But not all families can rely on shift parenting or informal childcare provided by relatives and friends. About a quarter of parents also use formal childcare during the holiday period, most frequently childminders or holiday clubs – sometimes called play schemes – that provide activities for nine or ten hours every day. Across Britain, about one in five families uses group-based holiday childcare. For older children, open access adventure playgrounds, sports camps and holiday activities run by museums, orchestras, theatre projects and other cultural organisations often function as *de facto* childcare. Figure Two draws on the *Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents* and shows holiday childcare use in England in 2013.

Figure Two: Holiday childcare use among parents of children aged 5-14, 2013



Source: Childcare and Early Years' Survey of Parents, 2013

Policy context

This report looks at the prices and availability of group-based holiday childcare, variously termed holiday clubs, play schemes, clubs or holiday projects. Most of them book in children on a daily or weekly basis, but a few are 'open access' which is drop in provision where children can turn up and undertake supervised play for as many hours as they wish. It is a diverse sector, in terms of ownership and the activities that it offers. It is also a new addition to the array of children's services. Until 20 years ago, there was little out-of-school childcare available in the UK, with just 350 clubs and 5,000 places in England and Wales in 1990 (New Opportunities Fund, 2003).

Female employment increased steadily throughout the 1980s and this social change led the Government to commit to expanding out-of-school childcare. In 1997 the Government set up the Out-of-School Childcare Initiative (OSCI) which ran until 1999 and created 40,000 childcare places, mostly for children aged 5-11. The 1998 green paper: Meeting the Childcare Challenge announced further support for out-of-school childcare, through funding from the Lottery's New Opportunities Fund (Department for Education and Employment, 1998). This grant stream ran until 2004; by then there were an estimated 555,340 places in after-school and holiday clubs in the UK.

Introduction

A further ten-year childcare strategy was published in 2004 which committed the Government to creating an out-of-school childcare place for all children aged 3-14 (HM Treasury, 2004). In England this was now to be achieved through the Extended Schools Programme where schools would deliver a range of services that would include out-of-school childcare.. Between 2004 and 2011 about £300 million funding was made available annually through ring-fenced funding to deliver the Extended Schools Programme.

Ring-fenced funding for extended schools ceased in 2011, with the money merged into school budgets. By then there were an estimated 339,300 places in holiday clubs in England (Department for Education, 2014b). Some £356 million was allocated to extended schools funding in the financial year 2011-2012, although the removal of the ring-fence meant that local authorities did not have to spend this money on childcare . At a time when there was pressure on budgets, it is likely that money that is theoretically ear-marked for developing out-of-school childcare has been diverted for other purposes.

Childcare affordability

Alongside moves to increase the availability of out-of-school childcare, a number of initiatives have also helped make childcare more affordable, summarised in Table Three. The current infrastructure of support includes the subsidy of parents' childcare costs through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. At present working parents on low incomes can receive up to 70 per cent of their childcare costs through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, up to a maximum cost of £175 per week for one child in childcare and £300 per week for two or more children. But it is only the most deprived working families that receive this type of help and there are many families on modest incomes - £25,000 - £35,000 gross household income per year - who are getting little or no help with their childcare costs through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.

Tax credits are now being merged into the single Universal Credit. Within Universal Credit the overall maximum support levels for childcare costs of £175 or £300 per week will remain, although these will now be calculated monthly. However, in April 2016 all families receiving Universal Credit will get up to 85 per cent of their childcare costs paid, up from 70 per cent today. Universal Credit will also eventually be administered online and these two changes will enable greater flexibility for parents whose childcare costs fluctuate from week-to-week, for example, due to paying for holiday childcare. However, Universal Credit is unlikely to be rolled out to all families in the medium term. In the short term the Government should look to raise support in Tax Credits to 85 per cent to bring it into line with Universal Credit.

At present parents not in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credits are entitled to help with their childcare costs through employer-supported vouchers. About 9 per cent of UK families get help with their childcare costs this way (House of Commons Library, 2014). An advantage of childcare vouchers is that they can be 'banked' and used at a time when childcare costs may be particularly high, for example, during the school holidays. The disadvantages of childcare vouchers are that only five per cent of employers offer them and many childcare providers do not accept them. The involvement of childminders, after-school and holiday clubs in the voucher scheme is particularly low in many areas.

In 2013 the Government announced that it intends to phase out the present employer-supported childcare voucher scheme and replace it with the Tax Free Childcare Scheme (HM Treasury, 2013). This will be an online system where parents bank their payments. For each £8 a parent pays in, the Government will add an additional £2 up to a maximum of £2,000 per year per child. The scheme will be rolled out during 2017, with parents of the under-fives being the first group to receive help. The support will eventually be available to all families with children up to the age of 12, or 17 if they are disabled.

The extra help with childcare costs is welcome. But there are concerns that channeling help to parents may cause above inflation price rises as hard-pressed providers see extra money in parents' pockets as a chance to increase costs (Ben-Galim, 2014). There is still a need for greater action to make sure all parents can find holiday childcare.

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Table Three: Summary of sources of help with childcare costs in England

	Level of support	Recipient group	Date available
Childcare element of Working Tax Credit	70% of childcare costs up to a maximum of £175 per week or 1 child or £300 per week for 2 or more children, meaning families get £122.50/£210	About 400,000 low income working families	Presently available
Universal Credit	85% of childcare costs, with same maximum levels as Working Tax credit	Low income working parents	From April 2016
Childcare vouchers	Worth up to £55 per week for basic rate tax-payers Can be claimed when only one parent is working	Working parents, but not self-employed and usually excludes those receiving tax credits	Presently available, but will not accept new applicants after 2016
Tax Free Childcare	20% of childcare costs up to a maximum of £2,000 per year Parents of disabled children receive help with up to 40% of their childcare costs to a maximum of £4,000 per year.	About 1.8 million working parents who are not in receipt of tax credits/Universal credit whose gross household income is less than £300,000 per year (or £150,00 for lone parents	From early 2016
Care to Learn	£175 in London and £160 per week outside	Parents under 20 at school or in further education	Presently available
Further education Discretionary Learner Fund	Discretionary	Parents over 20 in further education	Presently available
Higher Education Childcare Grant	£150.23 a week for 1 child, and up to £257.55 a week for 2 or more children	Parents in full-time higher education who are eligible for student finance	Presently available
Free early education	570 hours per year, usually 15 hours per week in term time	All 3 and 4 year olds and the 40% most income deprived 2 year olds	Presently available
Free early education extension	1,140 hours per year = 30 hours per week during term-time	3 and 4 year old children of working parents living in England	After September 2017

Methodology

The Family and Childcare Trust has carried out an annual survey of holiday childcare since 2002. The research, which examines childcare prices and supply, is based on a survey to local authority Family Information Services (sometimes called Children's Information Services in Scotland). A survey was sent out in May 2015 to all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, with the exception of the Scilly Isles, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland, all of which have no holiday childcare schemes. The survey asked the daily and weekly price of holiday childcare projects – sometimes called holiday play schemes – in their area.

A distinction was made between public sector holiday childcare (run by local authorities, school and other public sector bodies) and childcare run by private and not-for-profit sector providers. It is important to emphasise that this survey asks local authorities to report the price that parents pay for holiday childcare in their area. This survey does not ask providers to estimate how much it costs to deliver holiday childcare – this may well be a different amount, as some holiday childcare providers receive grants or in-kind subsidies such as the free use of premises.

We used our survey data to calculate average regional weekly prices for public sector and private/not-for-profit provision in England and average national prices for Scotland and Wales. We also calculated overall regional and national prices by weighting our figures for public sector and the private and not-for-profit sector to reflect ownership patterns. Throughout the UK, most holiday childcare schemes are run by the private and not-for-profit sectors, although the proportions vary between local authorities Our weighting formula takes into account the greater prominence of the private and not-for-profit sectors in delivering holiday childcare and enables us to come up with a more precise calculation of average holiday childcare prices.

As previously noted, the Childcare Act 2006 obliges local authorities in England and Wales to ensure that there is sufficient childcare for working parents and those studying with the intention of returning to work. Local authorities are also obliged to have regard to the childcare needs of disabled children. There is no equivalent legislation in Scotland, although the 2008 Early Years' Framework requires that local authorities have '*a strategic view of childcare accessibility*' and has a longer-term objective that families have '*access to integrated pre-school and childcare services in every community matched to an assessment of local demand*' (Scottish Government, 2008). In order to monitor whether local authorities are fulfilling the obligation to ensure sufficient childcare, the survey asked whether there was enough holiday childcare for different groups of children: 4-7 year olds, 8-11 year olds, children aged 12 and over, disabled children, those living in rural areas and the children of parents working full-time.

This year we asked an additional question that looked at consumer information on holiday childcare. This is a topical issue as the Childcare Bill 2015 contains a clause that aims to harmonise and standardise the information about childcare that local authorities are obliged to hold and make available to parents. The Government now recognises the importance of information about childcare provision: it helps parents find the services they need and the sources of financial help with childcare costs. Consumer information – in the form of contact details of childcare providers – helps providers to fill vacant places and childcare markets to function efficiently. We asked if local authority websites included information about sports, arts and leisure activities that function as de facto childcare for 11-14 year olds. We supplemented the survey with an analysis of the information available on local authority websites, both about holiday childcare schemes for 4-11 year olds and on activities for older children.

In order to ensure an adequate response rate, Freedom of Information Act requests were used to collect the information where the survey methodology had failed. Responses were eventually received from 187 of 202 local authorities we surveyed, representing a 93 per cent response rate overall and a minimum 80 per cent response rate in each region or nation of Britain.

Holiday clubs – a diverse sector

The holiday childcare sector is diverse, in relation to its ownership, and in the type of activities offered. This year's survey indicates that 17 per cent of holiday clubs were run by local authorities and schools, less than in 2014 when they provided 22 per cent of holiday childcare. Much local authority provision is aimed at 4-7 year olds and is often located in children's centres. Cuts to the number of centres and the budgets of existing provision accounts for much of the reduction of local authority provision.

The largest providers of holiday childcare are the private and not-for-profit organisations, which between them provide 81 per cent of holiday childcare, up from 78 per cent last year. This is a varied group of providers that include commercial holiday clubs run by national chains, small, single site businesses, as well as holiday clubs run by charities. There are also a growing number of multi-service childcare providers who may provide holiday care alongside other childcare services such as daycare and out-of-hours provision.

There are differences between local authorities in patterns of ownership, for example, in some areas, schools are heavily involved in providing holiday childcare, but in other local authorities their involvement is small. Both our survey and recent research from the Department for Education (2014d) indicated that there is less school-based provision per head of population in deprived areas, compared with the least deprived, with the latter showing 15 per cent of schools offered holiday childcare in the most deprived areas, compared with 20 per cent elsewhere.

Some holiday clubs are subsidised, most often those offered by local authorities or schools. This accounts for the difference in price between public sector and private and not-for-profit sector provision shown in Table One. These subsidies can take the form of a direct grant from the local authority, school or another public body, an indirect subsidy through free use of school premises and equipment, or funding to offer free places to vulnerable children who may be at risk of neglect when not at school.

Parents have to book some holiday clubs weeks or months in advance. But in some areas there are also 'open access' clubs where children may turn up on the day. Open access clubs – sometimes called play schemes – are usually run by local authorities and are often subsidised. Most open access holiday clubs are located in deprived areas and serve a dual purpose of providing childcare for working parents and structured activities for disadvantaged children.

Generally, holiday clubs open at 8am and close at 6pm, offering 10 hours of care per day. However, some holiday clubs, particularly open access clubs and much public sector provision, offer care for a shorter period of the day and may not meet the needs of parents who work full-time.

Most clubs can accommodate between 30 to 50 children. Staff come from a range of backgrounds including youth work, teaching and sports coaching. There is a growing segmentation in the holiday childcare market, with a small number of clubs set up to cater for more prosperous families. This segmentation is reflected in the activities that they offer – horse riding and paint-balling – and in the prices they charge. But the majority of holiday clubs are used by families with more modest incomes. Generally when children arrive in the morning they have a choice of different activities, which include arts, crafts, baking, drama, IT and sports, as well as time to relax with friends. There are also trips out to local sites and wider, to museums and theme parks.

> *"I like the club because there are good trips and I get to spend time with friends from school. I think I like spending time with friends most of all."*
>
> **Archie, London**

The price of holiday childcare

In Britain, public sector holiday childcare now costs an average of £109.51 per week, compared with £124.85 per week in the private and not-for-profit sectors (Table One). These price differences are a result of subsidies and because holiday clubs provided by local authorities and schools often have access to free premises and equipment. Taking into account different patterns of ownership, the overall price of one week of full-time (50 hours) of holiday childcare is now £123.49. This is a weighted price which accounts for the greater proportion of holiday childcare provided by the private and not-for-profit sectors.

The South East of England and London are the regions with the most expensive holiday childcare, where prices are more than 11 per cent above the average price for Britain. The most expensive holiday club cost £583 per week and was located in London. Figure Four gives the most expensive holiday childcare clubs in each region and nation of Britain.

Figure Four: Most expensive holiday childcare for full-time place per week, by region, 2014

Source: Family and Childcare Trust Holiday Childcare Survey, 2015

Overall, holiday childcare is 7.8 per cent more expensive than it was last year – again this is a weighted figure that takes into account ownership patterns. Prices have risen more (14.0 per cent) in the public sector than in the private and not-for-profit sectors (5.2 per cent) (Table Five). A likely explanation for this trend is that pressures on local authority budgets have led to cuts to in their direct subsidies. Nevertheless, in most areas, public sector provision is still cheaper than that offered by private and not-for-profit organisations, although there is much less of it and it does not always cover the full working day.

Table Five shows that prices have not increased evenly across Britain. Prices have fallen in the East Midlands and the South East. We think that a likely explanation for this is an increase in the numbers of providers and places in both regions. This highlights the importance of making sure that there is enough childcare provision, as shortages can drive up prices.

The price of holiday childcare

Table Five: Increase in holiday childcare prices over a 12 month period 2014-2015, by region and nation

Region/nation	Increase in price in public (school, local authority) sector holiday clubs	Increase in prices in private and not-for-profit sector holiday clubs	Increase in weighted prices
East of England	23.5%	18.4%	23.0%
East Midlands	-8.2%	-13.5%	-11.5%
Greater London	13.6%	14.4%	22.9%
North East	15.8%	14.3%	14.5%
North West	1.9%	1.7%	3.6%
South East	11.3%	-8.1%	-2.1%
South West	13.0%	11.5%	14.1%
West Midlands	9.7%	6.7%	8.1%
Yorkshire and Humberside	8.9%	-0.4%	-1.0%
England (Regional Average)	9.8%	4.4%	7.4%
Scotland	15.8%	19.3%	15.7%
Wales	69.9%	-0.7%	4.8%
Britain average of regionals and nations	14.0%	5.2%	7.8%

Source: Family and Childcare Trust Holiday Childcare Survey, 2014

Looking back over the last Parliament (2010-2015) prices of public sector childcare have increased by 32.9 per cent and private and not-for-profit provision by 20.6 per cent (Table Six). When ownership patterns are taken into account, the prices of holiday clubs have increased by 24.3 per cent over the last five years.

The price of holiday childcare

Table Six: Price increases in holiday childcare 2010-2015

	Average price of holiday childcare in the public sector 2010	Average price of holiday childcare in the public sector 2015	Percentage increase in price of holiday childcare in the public sector 2010-2015	Average price of holiday childcare in private and not-for-profit provision 2010	Average price of holiday childcare in private and not-for-profit provision, 2015	Percentage increase in price of holiday childcare in private and not-for-profit provision 2010-2015	Average weighted price, 2010	Average weighted price, 2015	Percentage increase in price of holiday childcare 2010-2015
England	£82.60	£108.48	31.3%	£104.55	£126.08	20.6%	£100.16	£124.76	24.6%
Scotland	£104.28	£119.91	15%	£96.47	£121.48	25.9%	£98.03	£120.61	23.0%
Wales	£58.89	£108.31	83.9%	£101.60	£117.13	15.3%	£93.06	£114.91	23.5%
Britain average of regions and nations	£82.40	£109.51	32.9%	£103.55	£124.85	20.6%	£99.32	£123.49	24.3%

The price of holiday childcare

Can holiday childcare be offered more cheaply?

While holiday clubs are expensive, their prices are still cheaper than those charged by childminders. The Family and Childcare Trust's Annual Costs Survey indicates that a parent might expect to pay £206 per week for full-time holiday care from a childminder (Family and Childcare Trust, 2015). But it is worth looking at whether holiday clubs could be cheaper – for example by using parent volunteers or school premises. There may be some small savings that can be made by using parent volunteers alongside paid staff, and advantages when parents might have particular skills. There are certainly merits in using school premises to deliver holiday childcare, as clubs will have access to school facilities.

Many people might also argue for more holiday childcare provision in the public sector, given the difference in price outlined in Table One. However, increasing the amount of subsidised school-based holiday childcare risks undercutting neighbouring private and not-for profit provision and worsening existing shortages. The record of the public sector in responding to the childcare needs of working parents is not as good as the private and not-for-profit sectors, as illustrated by more limited opening times in the public sector. If school-based holiday childcare is to be expanded, it must not be at the expense of childcare flexibility and its availability to working parents.

> *"We split our leave and use my great auntie, but in the summer we've always had to use a club. It's expensive and you're talking about £300, £400 for just a week. We muddle through somehow, but last summer we went into debt"*
>
> **Debbie, mother of one**

Gaps in holiday childcare supply

The Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities in England and Wales to make sure there is enough childcare as far as is 'reasonably practical' for working parents and those undertaking work-related training. In England regulations also specify that local authorities have regard for the childcare needs of parents receiving working tax credits and those who have disabled children.

In order to ensure sufficient childcare, local authorities need to know about any gaps they might have. In England, regulations require that local authorities audit their supply of childcare to see if it satisfies parental demand. These audits have to be carried out annually and should include an action plan to show how gaps will be filled (Department for Education, 2014c).

While the Childcare Act 2006 also covers Wales, different sections of this legislation apply and regulations differ. There is no equivalent legislation to the Childcare Act 2006 in Scotland, although the 2008 Early Years' Framework requires that local authorities have "*a strategic view of childcare accessibility*" (Scottish Government, 2008). While more local authorities in Scotland are now looking at whether there is enough childcare, we were concerned that 12 of them still had no data to show if their supply met parental demand.

There are particular challenges for local authorities in assessing if there is enough holiday childcare. There is no agreed definition of *sufficiency* in law or statutory guidance, so local authorities have no consistent reference against which to judge if they have enough (Office for Public Management, 2008). There is also no administrative data on the numbers of places in holiday clubs in England. This is because provision for children over eight and that run by school governing bodies does not have to be registered by Ofsted.

Trends in places

The Childcare and Early Years' Providers Survey suggested that in England there were an estimated 7,200 holiday clubs offering 341,400 places in 2013 (Department for Education, 2014b). Although changes to the sampling method of this survey make year-on-year comparisons difficult, place numbers have remained constant in the last five years, after an earlier large expansion in the first years of the century.

Despite the growth of places since 2000, many local authorities are reporting shortages of holiday childcare. Using childcare sufficiency assessments published in 2014, Rutter and Butler (2015) suggest that 28 local authorities in England and 11 in Wales reported particularly acute shortages of holiday childcare. These were not gaps in a small number of local authority wards, rather they were severe shortages in most or all of the local authority for all groups of children.

Our survey updates the analysis in Butler and Rutter (2015), drawing on more recent childcare sufficiency assessments from 2015. There are now 28 local authorities in England, 13 in Wales and 4 in Scotland where there are shortages of childcare in most or all of the local authority. An estimated 1,466,000 children aged between 4 and 15 years live in areas where holiday childcare is in particularly short supply.

Even in areas where there are more places very few local authorities have sufficient holiday childcare to meet the needs of working parents. This year's survey showed that 87 per cent of English local authorities and 95 per cent of those in Wales lacked sufficient holiday childcare for working parents, a worse position than last year (Table Seven). In Scotland, where the legislative framework is different, just 3 local authorities had enough holiday childcare for working parents, and 12 had no data to see if their supply met parental demand.

> *"Childcare is scarce where I live and if I didn't book early I would be stuck."*
>
> **Nina, Manchester**

Gaps in holiday childcare supply

Table Seven: Percentage of local authorities without sufficient childcare across the whole local authority for specific groups of children, 2015, with 2014 figures in brackets

Region/nation	Percentage of local authorities lacking sufficient holiday childcare for 4-7 year olds	Percentage of local authorities lacking sufficient holiday childcare for 8-11 year olds	Percentage of local authorities lacking sufficient holiday childcare for children aged 12 and above	Percentage of local authorities lacking sufficient holiday childcare for disabled children	Percentage of local authorities lacking sufficient holiday childcare for working parents
East of England	91% (67%)	100% (78%)	100% (100%)	100% (100%)	100% (78%)
East Midlands	100% (78%)	100% (89%)	100% (89%)	100% (100%)	100% (78%)
Greater London	88% (67%)	88% (67%)	96% (91%)	(82%)	(77%)
North East	50% (55%)	50% (64%)	83% (82%)	67% (73%)	55% (55%)
North West	53% (42%)	53% (47%)	74% (68%)	84% (68%)	53% (42%)
South East	72% (76%)	72% (76%)	100% (94%)	89% (94%)	89% (82%)
South West	62% (62%)	69% (77%)	100% (100%)	92% (92%)	85% (85%)
West Midlands	75% (55%)	83% (82%)	100% (100%)	92% (82%)	92% (91%)
Yorkshire and Humberside	50% (77%)	57% (85%)	100% (92%)	79% (85%)	72% (85%)
England (average for all local authorities)	72% (63%)	75% (72%)	94% (89%)	88% (85%)	87% (73%)
Wales	95% (94%)	100% (94%)	100% (100%)	100% (94%)	95% (94%)

Source: Family and Childcare Trust Holiday Childcare Surveys, 2014 and 2015

Only four local authorities in England, two in Scotland and none in Wales had enough childcare for children who live in rural areas, a fall from last year when ten local authorities (seven in England, three in Scotland) had enough childcare for rural families.

Table Six shows that gaps in holiday childcare provision are increasing rather than decreasing. This trend is not a one-off anomaly. Looking back further to 2009 and the implementation of the Childcare Act 2006 sufficiency duty, it can be seen that gaps in provision are getting bigger (Table Eight).

Table Eight: Local authorities lacking sufficient childcare for particular social groups in 2009 and 2015

	England 2009	England 2015	Wales 2009	Wales 2015
For disabled children	80%	88%	81%	100%
For parents who work full-time	51%	87%	81%	95%

There are two reasons for these growing gaps. First, as the economy has grown, the numbers and proportion of women in work has increased. In the period January –March some 68.6 per cent of the female working age population was employed in the UK, compared with the 67.6 per cent in the same period in 2014[1], amounting to an extra 272,000 women in the UK labour market. This has undoubtedly created extra demand for childcare, to which the market has not yet responded. At the same time, clubs are closing, in the public sector through funding cuts and in the private and not-for-profit sector because providers cannot break even. This year's survey showed that 44 local authorities in England and 5 in Wales reported that the overall number of places in holiday clubs had fallen since 2014.

1 Labour Force Survey data made available on nomisweb.co.uk.

Gaps in holiday childcare supply

Activities for older children

The Family and Childcare Trust is particularly concerned that such little progress has been made to meet the holiday childcare needs of older children, a group who are frequently forgotten in debates about 'childcare'. Activities for them are sometimes not viewed as 'childcare' and are not considered in childcare sufficiency reports. It is significant to note that 25 local authorities in England did not know if they had enough childcare for this group, as their sufficiency analysis did not include children over the age of 11.

Holiday activities provide supervision and entertainment for children who have some independence but are too young to be left alone for long periods. Children of secondary school age may attend sports or cultural activities in the school holidays, or activities organised by local authority youth services that function as de facto childcare. Much of this type of provision has seen extensive funding cuts since 2010. Although the Welsh Government has published a play strategy, in England there is little strategic thinking on holiday activities for children of secondary school age. In both central and local government, there is no over-arching champion to take forward this area of work. The Family and Childcare Trust is calling on the Department for Education to work with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Home Office to ensure that there is enough de facto childcare for older children. At a local level we would also like local authority leisure and children's services departments to work with police commissioners, schools, leisure, arts and sports organisations and other relevant bodies to develop local strategies to ensure that there are enough varied summer holiday activities for children of secondary school age.

Disabled children

Tables Seven and Eight show that families with disabled children are another group who find it difficult to find childcare. In 2014, the Family and Childcare Trust supported a Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children. There was consensus among Inquiry respondents that disabled children and young people are worse served by existing provision (Contact a Family, 2014). As non-disabled children access childcare provision less once they are in secondary school, compared to their non-disabled peers, the mainstream childcare market is relatively limited and fewer options exist for disabled young people.

Respondents also identified out-of-school childcare as a particular problem for families with disabled children. Some providers charge higher prices for this group. Mainstream schools are increasingly open for extended school days to provide breakfast clubs and after school care but these settings are often not inclusive, even to pupils attending the school during the day. One-to-one care and other school based support is also typically not extended beyond school hours. The physical size of older children can increase requirements for manual handling training and can make some providers reluctant to take on children with challenging behaviour or developmental impairments. It is also a greater challenge to provide quality childcare that offers opportunities for disabled children to do similar activities to their peers, so parents are sometimes reluctant to use provision that does not help their children thrive.

Far fewer special schools offer out-of-school childcare, often because the numbers of families accessing the support would be low and it is harder to find additional staff to cover extended hours. This means children who attend these schools must travel to another childcare setting or be cared for by a childminder.

Parents told the Inquiry that holiday clubs run by special schools often did not cover parents' work schedules. Some disabled older children were expected to attend the same provision as much younger children and take part in the same activities which were not age appropriate. Disabled young people want the opportunity to do the same activities as other teenagers. They want to enjoy spending time with their friends, learning new skills, having fun and being independent. These aspirations are presently not being met.

The Government recognises that there are shortages of appropriate childcare for disabled children and we welcome the recent (2015) announcement that the Government will increase the amount of help in the new Tax Free Childcare scheme to cover 40 per cent of the childcare costs of disabled children (Table Three). Through market mechanisms this extra support may encourage childcare providers to develop additional places. But there is still a need to monitor development and hold local authorities to account for failing to increase the amount of childcare that is suitable for disabled children.

Gaps in holiday childcare supply

Filling the gaps

One of the reasons that so few local authorities have enough holiday childcare for all working parents is that there are almost always fewer places in deprived areas. For example, there are 39 holiday clubs in Bristol, but almost all of them are located in the more prosperous parts of the city. For all types of childcare there is a tendency for there to be more provision in prosperous areas where high proportions of parents are working and can pay for childcare. In deprived areas, there is usually is less demand for childcare. Existing providers, in turn, may find it harder to break even or expand provision and new providers may be deterred from entering the market. Holiday childcare providers face particular challenges to business sustainability in that most parents only book one or two weeks care every year, often at short notice. Holiday providers may not easily be able to predict if they can fill their places and this, too, may deter expansion.

A further reason that holiday childcare gaps persist is that providers may lack information about potential local markets for this services. If local authority childcare sufficiency reports are not undertaken, then potential providers will not know about gaps in the market. The Family and Childcare Trust is disappointed that 36 English local authorities have not undertaken childcare sufficiency assessments since 2012 (Butler and Rutter, 2015). In Scotland where there is no duty to assess the sufficiency of childcare, 12 local authorities had no data to see if their supply meets local demand.

In England and Wales many childcare sufficiency reports also lack detailed action plans that identify how gaps in provision might be filled, and this is a further reason that gaps in provision remain. But the process of intervention in the holiday childcare market can be fraught with difficulties. The Childcare Act 2006 allows local authorities to be the 'provider of last resort' when market mechanisms fail to fill gaps in supply. In the past, some local authorities responded to gaps in provision by setting up their own holiday childcare schemes. Such provision is often provided at a lower price than private and not-for-profit provision, as running costs may be subsidised or the holiday project may use free premises. In some cases subsidised public sector holiday risks undercutting private and not-for-profit provision. Where local authorities and schools do deliver they need to ensure that they do not price other providers out of the market.

There are a number of ways that holiday childcare providers could be helped to expand provision, in deprived areas and elsewhere. We would like central government (including the devolved administrations) to publish detailed statutory guidance on auditing childcare supply and demand and childcare market management in all parts of the UK.

At present, local authorities are not being given the means to fill gaps in provision, not held to account when they fail to do this. Local authorities need grant-funding to help providers with start-up costs and to give business sustainability help.

Holiday childcare and the need for information

If parents and children are to benefit from the range of services available locally, they need to know what is on offer. Consumer information - in the form of contact details of childcare providers - helps parents find childcare and providers to fill vacant places and break even. This information thus enables childcare markets to function efficiently.

This need for information has been recognised by the Government and today most local authorities in England and Wales have a Family Information Service whose role is set out in the Childcare Act 2006 and in statutory guidance. There are similar services in Scotland, where they are often called Children's Information Services. Usually they are a small team of staff based in children's services directorates. While some of their work role involves the production of online information, or providing face-to-face advice for families, a survey undertaken in 2013 indicated that Family Information Services in England and Wales dealt with 430,000 telephone or email enquiries (Rutter and Stocker, 2014). Family Information Services give out a wide range of advice, but about 35 per cent of their enquiries concern childcare (ibid).

Family Information Services have been subject to the cuts experienced by most other local government services. Some have restructured and many are now using the internet and social media more imaginatively. But we have concerns about the reduction of this service and a lack of consumer information about a range of issues related to childcare, including available provision, sources of help with costs and rights to flexible work and unpaid leave. Accurate and timely consumer information is essential given the changes to childcare support and leave entitlements. Following new rules introduced in April 2015, parents with at least one year's service with their current employer qualify for 18 weeks' unpaid parental leave per child, which can be taken any time up until the child's 18th birthday.

The Childcare Bill 2015 contains a clause that aims to harmonise and standardise the information about childcare that local authorities are obliged to hold and make available to parents. Prompted by this, we analysed the information available on local authority websites, both about holiday childcare schemes for 4-11 year olds and on activities for older children. We looked at whether there were lists of holiday clubs and

Holiday childcare and the need for information

a range of activities. We also examined how easy it was to find this information using search engines.

There were many excellent local authority websites where this information was easy to find. Barking and Dagenham, Blackpool, Cornwall, Luton, Middlesbrough, Oxfordshire, Peterborough and York had particularly good information that was easy to find. But on other website there were broken links, non-functioning search engines, out-of-date information and websites that were difficult to navigate and used inaccessible jargon. In some cases, 'childcare' was not listed in the A to Z directory of council services.

Many local authorities also did not list holiday clubs or activities. Our analysis showed that under half (47 per cent) of local authorities had online information about holiday clubs and activities on their websites. This information was least complete in London and Scotland.

Family Information Services already have lists of childcare providers, although in some cases their links with leisure, sports and arts organisations needs to be improved. Producing and up-dating online information does not cost a large amount of money and it helps both parents and providers. For this reason we recommend that the Government, including devolved administrations, take action to ensure that all local authorities produce accurate online information listing holiday clubs and activities.

Fixing holiday childcare

This year's survey again shows the high prices of holiday childcare and gaps in provision in many parts of Britain. While some parents find affordable care in a location that is convenient for them, others face high prices and acute shortages of childcare. Holiday childcare prices have risen by 7.8 per cent over the last year, well above the rate of inflation. And shortages of provision have worsened rather than improved, with 1,466,000 children living in local authorities with the most severe gaps.

Some families manage to negotiate this lottery of high prices and severe shortages. They may have informal childcare support networks or the transport needed to travel to more distant provision. Parents might also have an accommodating employer and opportunities to work flexibly.

However, not all parents have the benefits of informal care, a car or flexible work. While workers now have the right to request flexible work, for many of them this offer is in name only. Data from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Survey showed that only a third (34 per cent) of workplaces allowed flexi-time working and 16 per cent allowed term-time only contracts. There are also some groups of workers who have less access to flexible work practices, including the least well-qualified, those who work in male-dominated workplaces, and those in manufacturing industry.

Our 2014 Holiday Childcare Survey also reported that 22 per cent of parents reported that their employer was unsympathetic or very unsympathetic to requests to change working hours over school holidays. The survey also highlighted the strategies that parents used to make sure they could care for their children in the absence of holiday childcare. Some 31 per cent of parents took unpaid leave and 17 per cent had taken days off sick because they could not find childcare. An additional 12 per cent of parents had given up a job because they could not find holiday care (Family and Childcare Trust, 2014). Such courses of action affect family incomes and parents' careers. They also have a wider impact on workplaces and the economy. If the pattern of sick leave identified in the survey applied to all UK parents, one day missed to cover childcare every year represents nearly 900,000 days of avoidable absence every year and costs the UK economy nearly £100 million every year[2].

This is a strong argument for giving greater attention to out-of-school childcare. This has received far less policy attention than under-fives provision, both at a central government and at local level.

In the UK we rely on a regulated mixed market to provide sufficient childcare. But to date market mechanisms have not been effective in filling gaps. Moreover, the sufficiency duties enshrined in the Childcare Act 2006 are not working. Local authorities not being given the means to fill gaps in provision and they are not held to account for this failure.

Yet there are a number of ways that holiday childcare providers could be helped to expand provision, in deprived areas and elsewhere. We would like central government (including the devolved administrations) to establish a clear definition of childcare sufficiency, including specific measurable indicators. We also believe that there is a need for updating statutory guidance for local authorities on assessing childcare sufficiency and on effective childcare market management. This guidance needs to be accompanied by identified grant-funding that helps local authorities and providers to provide more childcare places. This funding needs to cover business advice, start-up costs and help new providers in their first months of operation.

Improving consumer information would better match parents needing childcare with vacant places. There also needs to be a strategy to increase the range and number of holiday activities for older children for whom clubs and play schemes are not appropriate.

All of the main political parties now recognise the importance of high quality and affordable childcare for families. The extra help with childcare costs through Tax Free Childcare, Universal Credit and the extension of free early education have been welcomed by families. For too long, the childcare of school-age children has felt like a forgotten issue. A new government has the opportunity to change this. The Family and Childcare Trust wants to see:

- The Government take action to make sure there are no further delays in Universal Credit and the roll out of Tax Free Childcare, so that this vital support is available to parents as soon as possible.
- The Government, and devolved administrations, publish detailed statutory guidance on auditing childcare supply and demand and childcare market management in all parts of the UK, which should include a clear definition of childcare sufficiency.
- Support for local authorities to help them fill gaps in provision, including ring-fenced funding to help providers with start-up costs and business sustainability.

2 Based on average gross weekly earnings for 2013 of £517 per week.

Fixing holiday childcare

- Strengthened statutory guidance for local authorities to produce accurate and timely online information on holiday clubs and activities for parents and providers, including information about rights to flexible working and unpaid parental leave.
- Local authorities bringing together police commissioners, schools, leisure, arts and sports organisations to develop local strategies to ensure that there are enough holiday activities for children of secondary school age.

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The Family and Childcare Trust works to make the UK a better place for families. Our vision is of a society where government, business and communities do all they can to support every family to thrive. Through our research, campaigning and practical support we are creating a more family friendly UK.

The Family and Childcare Trust's annual childcare costs survey is the definitive report on childcare costs and sufficiency in the UK and its data is used by the Department for Education and OECD.

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