



Centre for  
Evidence and  
Implementation



Centre for  
Education Policy  
& Equalising  
Opportunities



# **Early education for disadvantaged children: How local action can support take-up of the 15 hours entitlement**

**Report launch**

**18 October 2024**

# Early education entitlements in England

Support early development and learning

**15 hours** a week for 38 weeks a year:

- All 3-4-year-olds since 2010 (with fewer hours and childcare vouchers available before 2010)
- 2-year-olds from low-income families, children with SEND, in care and adopted, since 2014 (with a smaller % of 2-year-olds eligible from 2013)

Reduce childcare costs to support parental employment

**30 hours** a week for 38 weeks a year:

- 3-4-year-olds in working families since 2017
- Children aged 9 months plus in working families entitled from September 2025 (15 hours from 2024)

# The most comprehensive study to date on take-up of the 15 hours early education entitlements in England

- Why do some children, particularly disadvantaged children, not take up their 15 hours entitlements?

- What explains the geographical variation in take-up of the 15 hours entitlement?

- Can local authority actions support take-up of the 15 hours entitlement?

- What can be done nationally and locally to increase take-up and reduce inequalities in participation in early education?

# The research programme

**Scoping**  
Mar-April 23

15 expert interviews and scoping review to refine the research design

**Local authority (LA) survey**  
July-Aug 2023

60% of LAs (N 91) provided data on their approaches to supporting take-up of the 15 hours entitlements

**Secondary analysis of national data** July 23-May 24  
To get rich understanding of take-up, identify LAs with higher-than expected take-up and assess approaches to support take-up

**Qualitative research**  
Oct 23-May 24  
Explored with parents (N 62), providers (N 17) and LAs (N 18) barriers to and facilitators of take-up

**Stakeholder workshops**  
June 2024

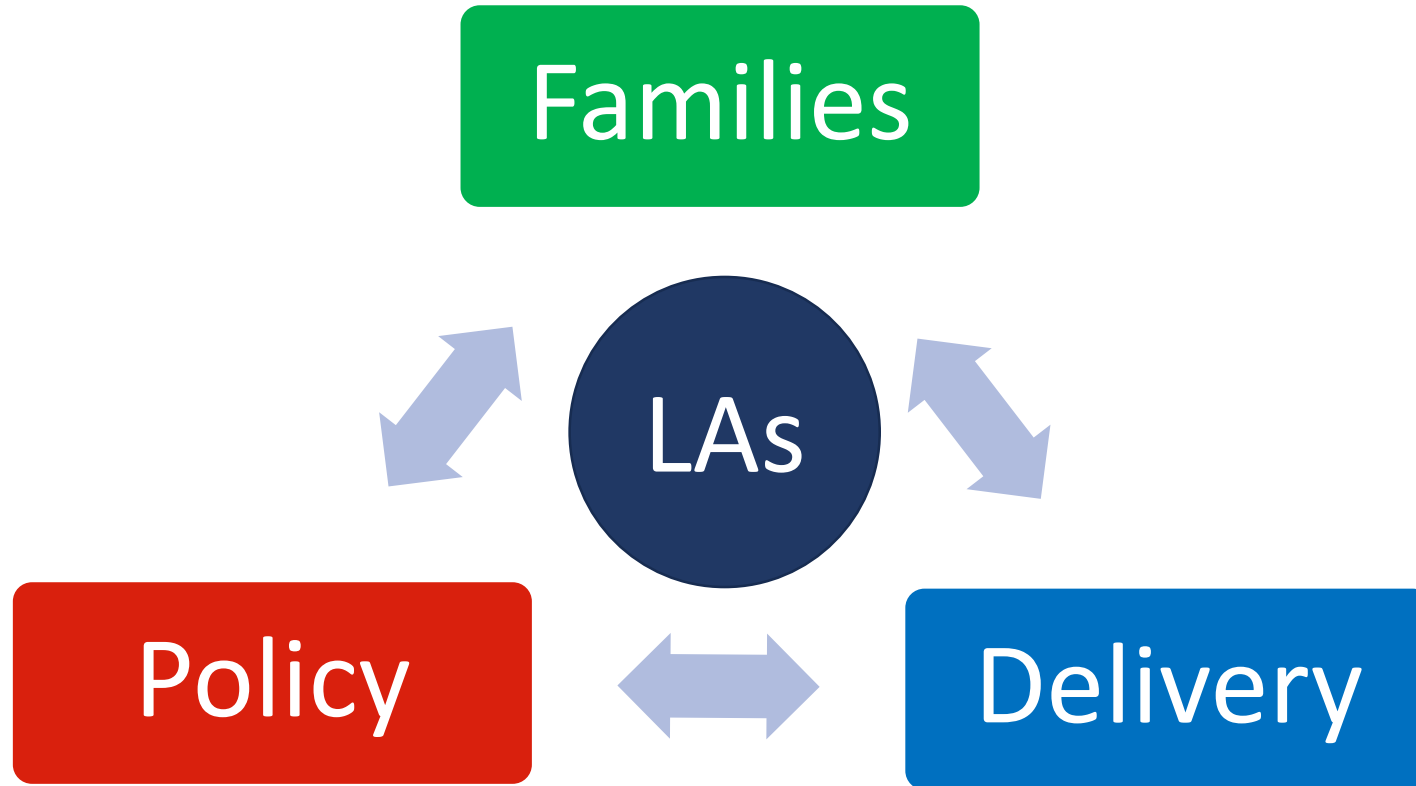
Discussion of findings and implications for policy and practice with 67 stakeholders and experts

**Why do some children, particularly disadvantaged children, not take up their 15 hours entitlements?**

Findings from qualitative research with parents, providers and local authorities

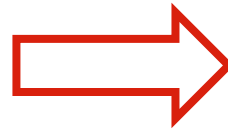
# What are the reasons for non-take-up?

## A systems approach to understanding influences



# Policy-level influences

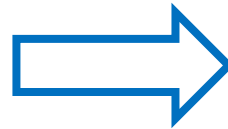
- Multiple entitlements
- Tension between labour market and child development drivers
- Prevalent language of 'childcare'
- Insufficient funding



- Patchy awareness
- Confusion
- Difficult to access and navigate
- Administrative burden
- Pressures on providers

# Delivery-level influences

- Profit model / financial pressures
- Staff recruitment and retention challenges
- Pressure on support for children with additional needs
- Unclear guidance
- Limited LA powers

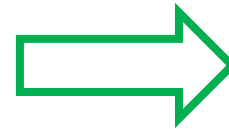


- Restrictions on number of places
- Constraints on structure of places
- Additional charges
- Stigmatising and unequal treatment



# Family- and community-level influences

- Experiences of looking for early education places
- Views about benefits of family care and early education
- Views about when children are ready for early education
- Own childhood, cultural norms, family and work situation
- Practical challenges



- Decisions about whether to use early education
- Success in accessing a place

**What explains  
the geographical  
variation in take-  
up of the 15  
hours  
entitlement?**

Findings from the  
secondary analysis

# LA variation in take-up of the 15 hours

- In 2023, average take-up was 95% for 3-4-year-olds and 75% for disadvantaged 2-year-olds, but varied from < 50% to > 90% across LAs
- The socio-demographic area profile and features of the local labour market and early education services explain:
  - 66% of variation across LAs for 3-4-year-olds - % of places in maintained sector and outstanding settings positively associated with take-up
  - 37% of variation across LAs for disadvantaged 2-year-olds –take-up negatively associated with % of ethnic minority residents and positively associated with % working in professional occupations
- There is therefore room for other things that vary across areas – potentially including LA actions – to help explain why take-up rates are higher in some authorities, particularly for disadvantaged 2-year-olds

**Can local  
authority (LA)  
actions support  
take-up of the  
15 hours  
entitlement?**

Findings from  
qualitative research  
with local authorities

# What can we learn from LAs that 'out-perform' the characteristics of their local areas?

Sampled 18 from the top 20 LAs with take-up of one or both 15 hours entitlements above what would be expected given their local context

Mix of urban/rural areas, with different levels of disadvantage and proportions of the population from different ethnic communities

In-depth discussions with early education and childcare teams in Nov 23-May 24

# Features of LAs with higher-than-expected take-up of the 15 hours

- An early education team with sufficient capacity, expertise and connections with other services to effectively support take-up and delivery of the entitlements
- Effective use of local data and intelligence on families' needs and supply of early education services
- An in-house Family Information Service (FIS) with a telephone line and experience to provide tailored support to meet families' diverse needs
- Early education fully embedded in a robust local early years offer, with co-ordinated work across professional groups to identify and reach families who need support to take up their entitlement

# A relentless focus on disadvantaged 2-year-olds

- Regular data exercises using DWP and other data to get a comprehensive list of potentially eligible children and establish if already in contact with other family services
- Reminders to apply (texts seen as particularly effective), supported by early education entitlement 'conversations' with family-facing professionals and peer-to-peer promotion
- Families encouraged to contact FIS, early education settings, children's centres/family hubs to apply and discuss the 15 hours
- Visit or phone call to families who do not apply/take-up a place - analysis of a national data found a statically significant correlation between home visits and take-up of the entitlement
- Tailored support provided by FIS or other services working with the family
- LAs signpost families to local settings that offer genuinely free places and provide brokering particularly to secure places for SEND children
- LAs rely mostly on some settings to ensure enough places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds, many in maintained and voluntary sector, also in the for-profit sector but could be harder to negotiate

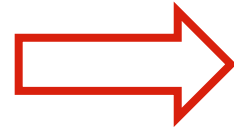
**What can be  
done nationally  
and locally to  
increase take-up  
and reduce  
inequalities in  
participation in  
early education?**

Recommendations  
from our research  
and consultation  
with stakeholders



# Recommendations for policy design

- Insufficient funding, esp. for disadvantaged children and those with SEND; no dedicated LA funding; constraints on number/structure of places; additional charges



- Funding rates that cover full cost of delivery (3-4-yr-olds)
- Dedicated LA funding
- Higher EYPP and SEND funding
- Tighter guidance to ensure places are free and inclusive

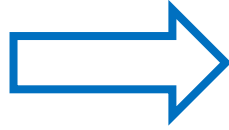
- Multiple entitlements → confusion and administrative burden



- Universal 2-yr-old entitlement
- Progressive subsidy system?

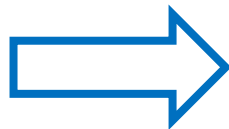
# Recommendations to support policy delivery

- Weak regulation; limited LA power to enforce rules



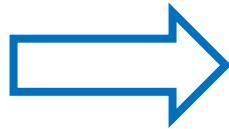
- Strengthen LA powers to enforce guidance and incentivise inclusive provision

- Early education system out of step with school system



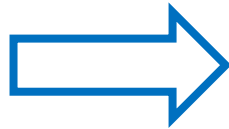
- Inclusive admissions; no charges; EYPP in line with primary PP

- Low awareness; confusion



- Co-design messaging with parents

- Staff recruitment/retention



- National workforce strategy

# Recommendations for local action

Innovative use of data combined with cross-profession working to support multiple informed conversations

Tailored one-to-one support for families who face multiple barriers, provided by in-house FIS

Dedicated funding to support LAs to incentivise and enforce free and inclusive provision, best practice shared

Robust multi-agency vision and strategy for early years

# Thank you

- Report can be found here:  
<https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/understanding-take-early-education-entitlements-landing-page>
- Please read and share!

