



Supporting take-up of the early education entitlements: local authorities' views and experiences

A substantial minority of children do not benefit from the 15 hours of funded early education that all 3-4-year-olds and disadvantaged 2-year-olds are entitled to in order to support their early learning and development. While in some cases this may be due to parental preference, barriers to take-up of the early education entitlements also play a part. With funding from the Nuffield Foundation, we are conducting the most comprehensive study to date to understand how to support take-up of the 15 hours early education entitlements in England.¹

As part of the study, in summer 2023, we conducted a survey of local authorities (LAs) to explore views on barriers to take-up in their childcare market, how they support engagement in early education and incentivize childcare providers to deliver funded hours. This briefing summarises some of the key survey results.

Barriers to taking up the early education entitlements

- Many LAs reported service-level barriers to take-up of the 15 funded hours in their childcare market (Table 1), particularly for 2-year-old funded places.
- Service-level barriers reported by LAs included: settings limiting the number funded places for 2-year-olds with SEND (65%) and 2-year-olds funded places more generally (57%); charges associated with the 3-4-year-olds entitlement (54%); and, inflexibility in how 2-year-olds funded hours are offered to families (51%).

How local authorities support take-up of the early education entitlements

- LA activities to support take-up of funded hours were focused on 2-year-olds. This could be because, unlike the universal entitlement, the 2-year-olds offer is not yet seen as the 'norm', with a quarter of eligible children not accessing funded hours in 2022-23.² It could also be due to higher barriers to take-up for 2-year-olds (as outlined in Table 1), and because LAs have more information about eligible 2-year-olds, thus making it easier to reach out to them directly.
- Less resource intensive methods for promoting the 15 funded hours (e.g. writing to and emailing eligible families, each mentioned by around four fifths of LAs for 2-year-olds) were more commonly reported than more resource intensive methods (Figure 1).
- Less intensive methods may be seen as effective at promoting funded hours (see Table 2), but it may also be easier for LAs to reach more families using these methods, which may not be more effective for a given family than more intensive approaches.
- Door-knocking (i.e. home visits) has become uncommon (less than a sixth of LAs did this, even for 2-year-olds), but other intervention involving personal contact, such as help to broker a funded place and support with the application for the 2-year-olds offer, were widely used (by 76% and 88% respectively).

¹ The '[Understanding the take-up of early education entitlements](#)' project is funded by the Nuffield Foundation and is being undertaken by a team of researchers from the Centre for Evidence and Implementation, the UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, Coram Family and Childcare with Ivana La Valle. While the project has been funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation.

² Department for Education (2023) '[Education provision: children under 5 years of age](#)'

- The most common incentives LAs offered settings to deliver funded hours were free or discounted SEND support and free or discounted training/consultancy, each reported by just under half of LAs.

Table 1 – Local authorities who agreed or strongly agreed that the statements listed in the table were barriers to take-up of the entitlements in their area in the 2022-23 academic year

	2-year-olds entitlement	3-4-year-olds entitlement
Local providers	%	%
Do not offer/limit 15 hours funded places for SEND children	65	50
Do not offer/limit 15 hours funded places	57	30
Offer 15 funded hours in a way that doesn't work for families e.g. limit on the days/hours when hours can be taken	51	34
Expect families to pay for additional hours or top ups when taking 15 funded hours	40	54
Offer 15 funded hours only if cannot fill spaces with fee-paying families/those entitled to 30 hours	21	20
Local families		
Can't find a setting near home to take the 15 funded hours	32	27
Think local settings would not adequately support their child's learning and development or are not good options for their child	16	16

Figure 1 – How LAs promoted the entitlements to most/all eligible 2-year-olds and to 3-4-year olds in the 2022-23 academic year

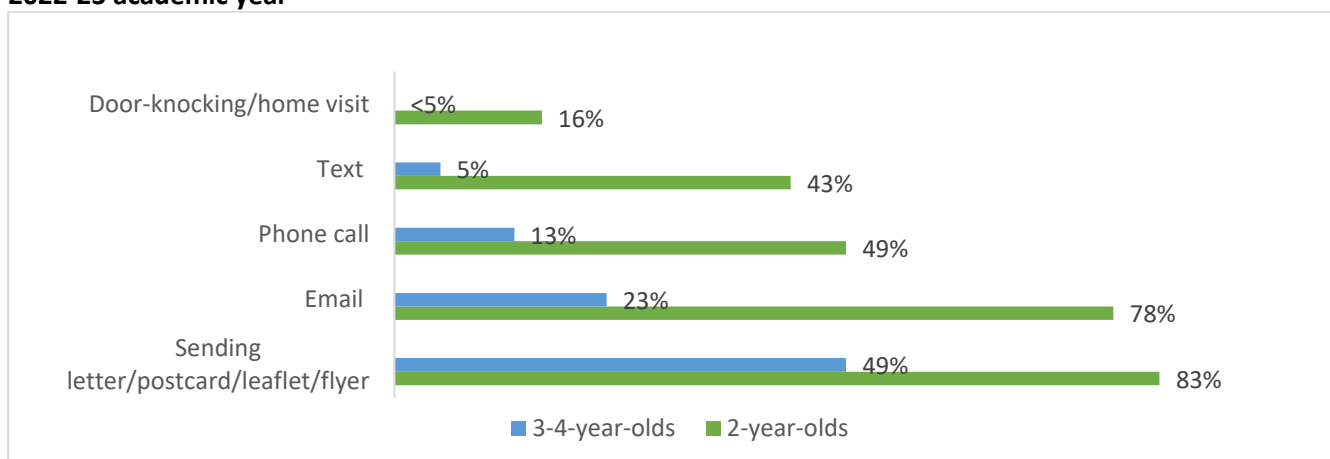


Table 2 – Local authorities' views on the most effective way to promote the entitlements

	2-year-olds entitlement	3-4-year-olds entitlement
	%	%
Send letter, postcard, leaflet, flyer	59	53
Email	47	20
Outreach	28	57
Text	26	6
Phone call	16	6
Door-knocking/family visit	10	2
Online parent sessions	<5	<5

Next steps

In the next stage of the research, we will explore the association between LA actions and experiences and the take-up of early education across LAs, with a view to identifying potentially promising practice to support take-up.