



National Day Nurseries Association

EDUCATION
POLICY
INSTITUTE

The Covid-19 pandemic and the early years workforce

November 2020 - February 2021
Staffing decisions in an uncertain environment





National Day Nurseries Association



Method

This report describes the results of the third quarterly survey of early education and childcare providers in Great Britain. The survey was conducted with early years settings across England, Scotland and Wales between 4th - 18th February and was open to all private, voluntary and independently run providers. The survey asked providers about the period covering the past three months since our last survey was conducted in November.

Questions were asked that were relevant and specific to the context of each country. In presenting the results the England and Wales qualification levels have been used. Respondents in Scotland answered equivalent qualification levels: Level 2 or SVQ2/NC; Level 3 or SVQ3/HNC; Level 4/5 or SVQ4/PDA8; Level 6 or PDA9/graduate. When discussing children with additional needs in Scotland, respondents answered about Additional Support Needs and Additional Learning Needs in Wales.

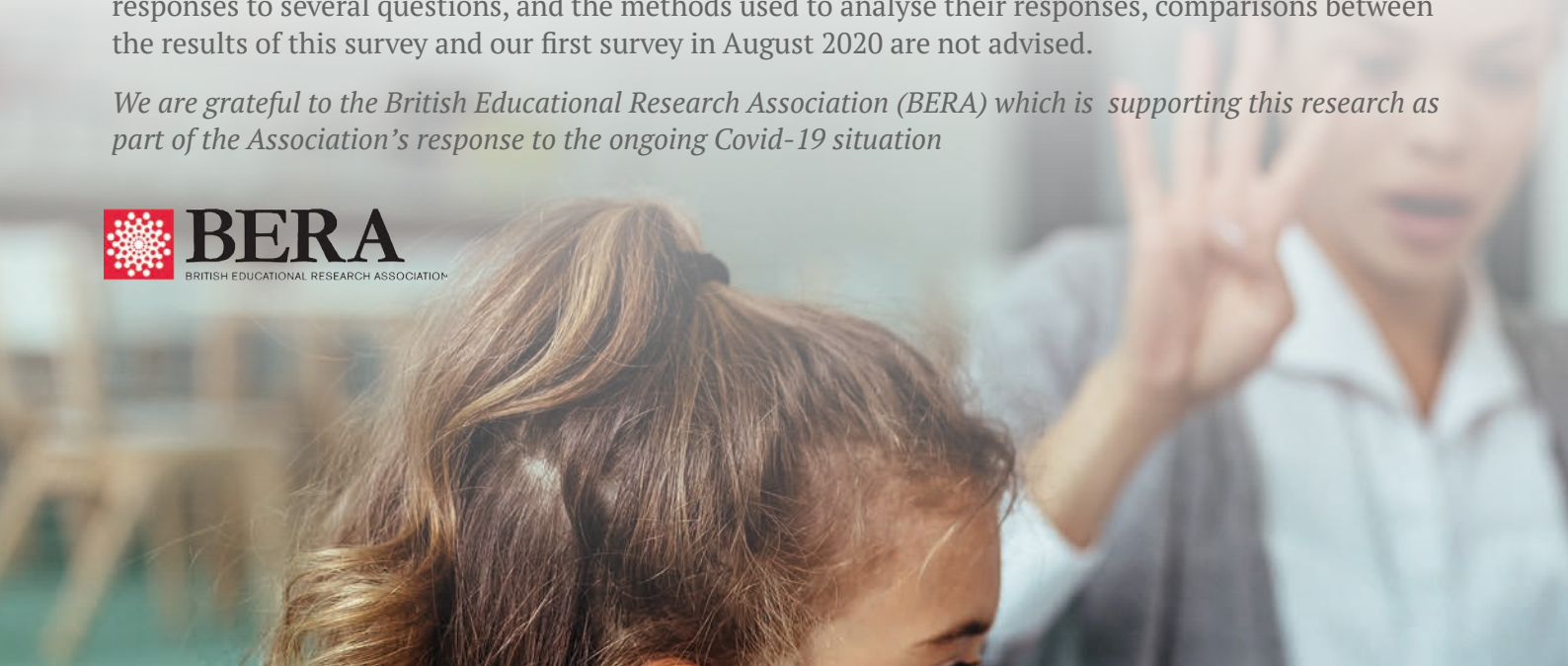
Where one response represented more than one setting (e.g. where we received a response on behalf of a chain of settings) we weighted their response accordingly. This ensures that each setting within a chain counts for the same as any other setting. It also means that some responses on behalf of relatively large chains of settings have a significant impact on the results of our analysis. We have only included the responses of chains to questions that we can reasonably expect all such chains to be able to accurately answer on behalf of all settings in their chain. Details of which respondents are included are given at the beginning of each section.

To calculate the proportion of staff who had been furloughed, made redundant etc., we divided the number of staff to whom the relevant action (e.g. being furloughed) applied by the total number of staff employed in November.

Where settings reported that the number of staff that they had furloughed or made redundant since November was more than 120% of the number of staff they had employed in November, we did not include their responses in averages, on the assumption that this response was a typo or misunderstanding of the question. This applied to fewer than 1% of responses.

Due to differences in which settings responded to our earlier survey, the time periods covered by responses to several questions, and the methods used to analyse their responses, comparisons between the results of this survey and our first survey in August 2020 are not advised.

We are grateful to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) which is supporting this research as part of the Association's response to the ongoing Covid-19 situation



Characteristics of settings

We received 737 responses, of which 312 included responses to most or all questions. Because some responses were on behalf of chains of settings, together the 312 full responses represent 781 early years settings.



94% of settings are based in England, with 4% based in Scotland and 2% based in Wales.

Most responses (71%) were from single sites, with 29% from settings which were part of chains. A subset of those responses from settings which were part of chains were made on behalf of all the settings in a chain (16% of all responses). Because some of these chains were quite large, the majority (67%) of all *settings* represented by responses to the survey were part of a chain.

In total the survey represents the responses of early years providers representing more than 15,000 staff. On average, settings employed around 20 staff, though some were much larger and others much smaller, with the biggest setting employing over 50 staff and some employing just one member of staff. Of all staff represented by respondents, 10% had no qualifications, 7% were apprentices, 27% held a Level 2 qualification (or Scottish equivalent), 46% a Level 3 qualification, 5% a Level 4 or 5 qualification, and 5% a Level 6 qualification.

Introduction

This is the third in a series of short reports summarising the findings of four quarterly surveys of early education and childcare providers in Great Britain. We are seeking to understand the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic is having on the staffing decisions of early years providers in the private, voluntary and independent sector.

Since our last report in December, rates of infection of Covid-19 have seen a spike and in response national lockdowns have come into place across the country, reducing demand for early education and childcare places. Some key forms of financial support for early years providers, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, have remained in place. Meanwhile, others have changed. In England, funding for government-funded places has become less generous than it was in the autumn term, being based from January 2021 on the number of registered places providers had in late January, when a national lockdown was in place. In Scotland, beginning in January 2021, settings were only allowed to provide care to vulnerable children and the children of key workers, with those who remained open receiving grants in recognition of their extra costs and lower revenue during this period.

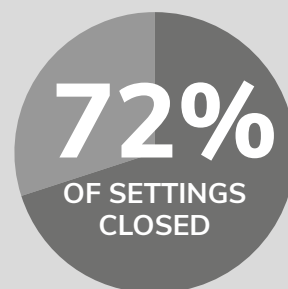
While the long-term effects of these developments remain to be seen, this survey of nurseries in England, Scotland and Wales aims to give an indication of the short-term effects they are having on the staff employed in the sector.

Setting closures

The spread of Covid-19 and the efforts to control its spread have impacted the operation of many nurseries in a variety of ways. We asked nurseries in England and Wales whether they have, in response, had to close their setting fully or partially, which includes when one or more rooms at their setting had to be closed temporarily while others continued to operate.

We found that 72% of settings in England and Wales had to close fully or partially between November and February, with 31% of settings closing once in this period, 18% closing between two and four times, and 23% closing five or more times.

Of those settings that have had to close, the most common reason for doing so was insufficient demand for places (44%), followed by staff members or children self-isolating (22%).



In Scotland, where settings were asked to remain open only for vulnerable children and children of key workers during the national lockdown in early 2021, 84% of settings were open and 16% told us that they were closed while the current measures remained in place.

Staff

Looking at the size of the workforce, we asked settings a range of questions about how the composition of staff they employed had changed between November 2020, when we ran our previous survey, and February 2021, when they completed this one. Responses from all settings, including all chains, are included here for a minimum of 742 settings represented by responses to these questions.

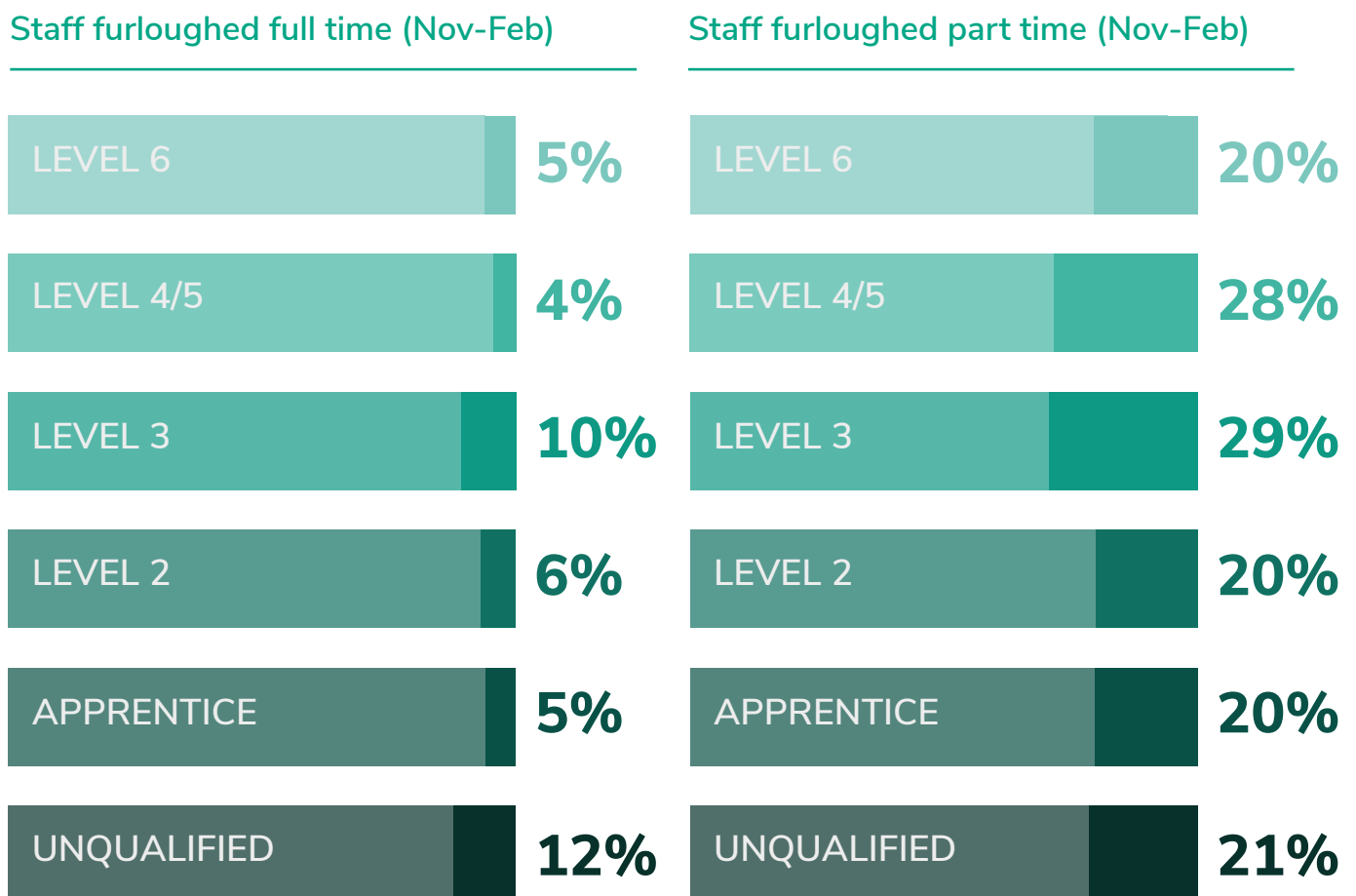
Settings reported employing about the same number of staff in February as in November – on average, they employed 1% more.¹ However, this overall figure obscures some notable variation between those settings that have seen the number of staff they employ between November and February rise and those who have seen it fall. While 31% of settings had seen no change in the total number of staff they employed between November and February, 54% had seen a rise and 15% had seen a fall. Of those that told us they employed more staff in February than November, settings reported employing an average of 18% more staff in the later period. Of those that told us they employed fewer staff in February than November, settings reported employing 19% fewer staff in the later period.

On average, employers had placed 11% of their staff on full-time furlough between November and February. This equates to 1,239 staff who have been placed on full-time furlough among the settings who responded to our survey. Staff with no qualifications were the group most likely to be placed on full-time furlough. Settings reported placing nearly twice as many of their staff on full-time

¹ We have excluded for all calculations in this section those settings which reported employing in February more than twice as many staff as they had employed in November. This applied to 12 settings.

furlough in the period from November to February than did respondents to our previous survey which covered the period from August to November 2020.

On average, employers had placed 27% of their staff on part-time furlough between November and February. This equates to 1,740 staff who have been placed on part-time furlough among the settings who responded to our survey. Staff with qualifications at levels 3, 4 and 5 were the group most likely to be placed on part-time furlough. A considerably higher proportion of staff had been part-time furloughed among respondents to this survey than among settings who responded to our survey three months earlier (5%).



When we asked settings in our previous survey in November how many staff they expected to place on furlough over this period, they had expected on average to place 3% of staff on full-time furlough and 7% of staff on part-time furlough. As described above, settings responding to this survey in February have placed 11% of staff on full-time furlough and 27% on part-time furlough, suggesting that more staff have been furloughed than was expected over this period.

On average, employers had made none of their staff redundant in the period between November and February. This is slightly below the 1% of staff that settings who responded to our earlier survey in November said they expected to make redundant over this period.

NO

STAFF MADE
REDUNDANT FROM
NOVEMBER TO
FEBRUARY



Among those settings where staff had voluntarily terminated their contract, the most common reasons that respondents say were given by staff for terminating their contract were unknown (18% of settings reported this), personal reasons unrelated to Covid-19 (17%) and personal or family health concerns related to Covid-19 (16%).

Employers had reduced the contracted hours of, on average, 5% of staff. Among the settings who responded, this equates to 456 staff who have had their contracted hours reduced in this period.

456

STAFF HAD
CONTRACTED HOURS
REDUCED



Expectations about the future

We asked settings how many staff they expected to place on furlough, to reduce their contracted hours, or to make redundant over the coming three months between February and the end of April 2021. Responses from all settings, including larger chains, are included here, for a minimum of 771 settings represented by responses.

On average, settings expected to place 6% of their staff on full-time furlough in the three months between February and the end of April. They expected to place 11% of staff on part-time furlough, and to reduce the hours of 4% of their staff. Further, they expected to make 1% of their staff redundant in the coming three months.

What informs settings' decisions about staffing

We asked settings whether they took the qualifications or experience of their staff into account when making staff redundant or reducing their contracted hours. Responses from single site settings and chains of up to 10 settings are included here, for a minimum of 201 settings represented by responses to these questions.

When asked about making staff redundant or reducing their contracted hours, settings overwhelmingly told us that they were more likely to do so to staff with lower qualifications and less experience. These findings are in line with the findings of our previous survey.

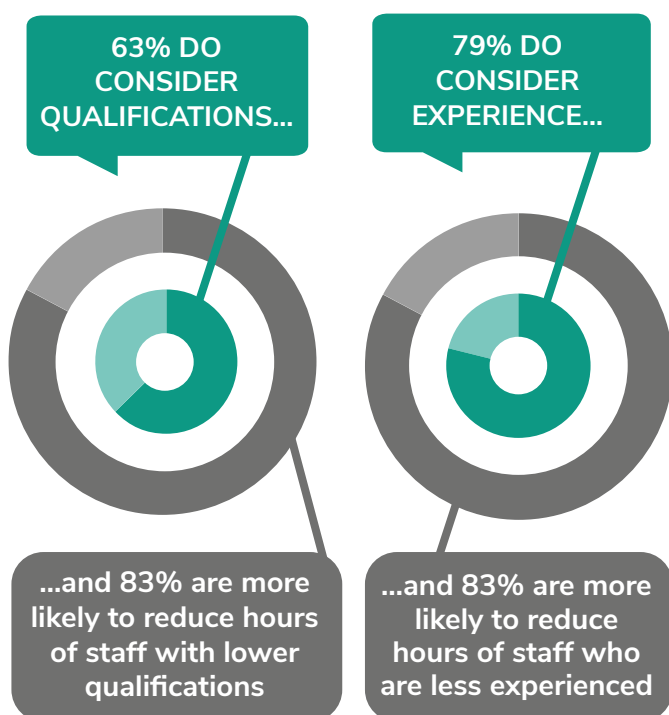
When considering making staff redundant, 78% of respondents take the experience of staff into account while 62% take their level of qualifications into account. A considerably greater proportion of settings said that they are more likely to make staff with less experience redundant (88%) than those with more experience (12%).

Similarly, settings tended to say they would choose staff with lower or no qualifications to make redundant rather than those with more. 50% of settings said they were most likely to choose staff with no qualifications to make redundant, followed by those with low qualification levels (29%), those with higher qualification levels (11%), and apprentices (9%).

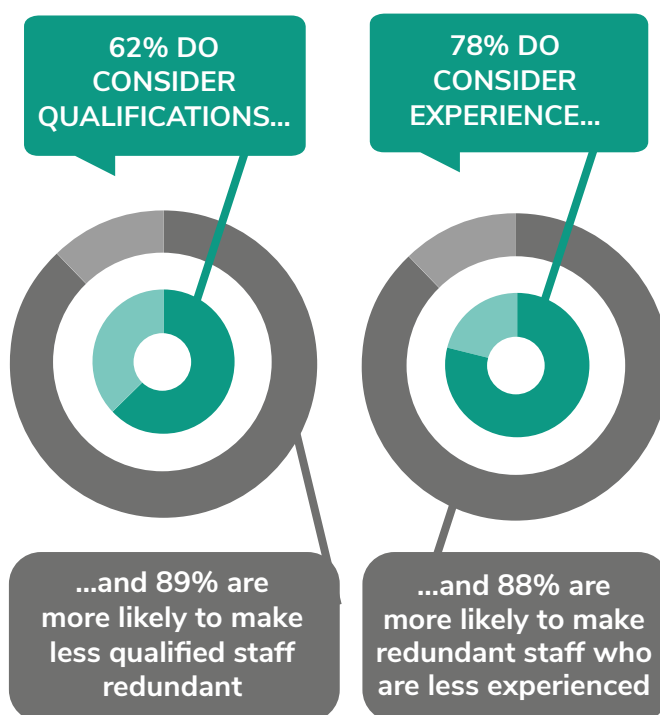
When considering reducing the contracted hours of staff, 79% of respondents said they take the experiences of staff into account while 63% take their level of qualifications into account. A considerably greater proportion of settings said that they are more likely to reduce the contracted hours of staff with less experience (83%) than those with more (17%).

Similarly, settings tended to say they would choose to reduce the contracted hours of staff with lower or no qualifications rather than those with more. Some 44% of settings say they were most likely to reduce the contracted hours of staff who had no qualifications, followed by those with low qualification levels (34%), those with high qualification levels (17%) and apprentices (6%).

Staff hours considerations for employers



Redundancy considerations for employers



CPD opportunities

We asked settings about the training that they offer to their staff and about the CPD opportunities that are available. Here we have divided respondents into two groups. The first group includes single site settings and small chains including chains of up to 10 settings. This group is made up of 304 responses on behalf of 365 settings. The second group represents chains of more than 10 settings. This group is made up of six responses on behalf of 414 settings. The findings in this section for single site settings and small chains are broadly in line with the findings from our survey in November.

Single site settings and small chains

Most settings (96%) report that they are continuing to offer CPD to their staff. Of these, 19% report offering mandatory training only, with the remaining 81% saying they are offering training over and above what is required.

When asked whether there were enough training opportunities available, 92% of settings said there were enough opportunities for food hygiene training, 88% said there were enough for safeguarding and child protection, and 85% said there were enough opportunities for infection prevention and control.

Meanwhile, fewer than half (46%) of respondents said that there were enough opportunities for training on trauma and bereavement, 55% said there were enough opportunities for training on taking a whole-setting approach to supporting children with special educational needs and 59% said there were enough for training on supporting children with autism.

Finally, 76% of settings said that there were enough opportunities for training on paediatric first aid, leaving 24% of respondents reporting that they were without access to training which is mandatory. At least one member of staff who is present on the premises at each setting is required to have a current

PFA certificate, and all newly qualified entrants to the workforce who have completed a Level 2 and/or Level 3 qualification on or after 30 June 2016 are required to hold one within three months of starting work to count in staff to child ratios. This gap in available training could therefore pose a barrier to settings, especially those seeking to recruit to replace those staff they have lost over this period if demand for childcare recovers following the pandemic.

Chains of more than 10 settings

All chains of more than 10 settings report that they are continuing to offer CPD to their staff. Of these, just 6% report offering mandatory training only, with the remaining 94% saying they are offering training over and above what is required.

When asked whether there were enough training opportunities available, respondents representing chains of more than 10 settings were more likely than those responding on behalf of single sites and smaller chains to say that there were enough opportunities for all types of training available. All large chains said that there were enough opportunities available for paediatric first aid, safeguarding and child protection and food hygiene.

The biggest gaps in training opportunities available to large chains include the following areas, with 75% of settings reporting enough training opportunities for each: supporting children with SEND, speech and language, trauma and bereavement training and supporting children's behaviour management.

The findings in this section suggest that the approach to training and CPD differs between single sites and smaller chains on the one hand and larger chains of settings on the other, with larger chains appearing more likely to offer CPD over and above what is required and to experience fewer issues in securing training opportunities. One reason why larger chains appear to experience fewer issues securing training opportunities might be that some are able to provide training in-house. However, any comparisons should be made with caution since among larger chains there is likely to be a limit to how accurately one response on behalf of a large number of settings can represent the experiences of each setting.

Single site settings and small chains

Enough trauma & bereavement training?

54% no

A whole setting approach to SEND/ASN/ALN training?

45% no

Enough autism training?

41% no

Enough paediatric first aid training?

24% no

Larger chains

Enough trauma & bereavement training?

25% no

A whole setting approach to SEND/ASN/ALN training?

19% no

Enough autism training?

25% no

Enough paediatric first aid training?

0% no

Children in attendance

We asked settings how many children attended last week and how many had attended in a typical week the same time last year, as well as how many children were taking up government-funded places compared to last year. Responses from all settings, including larger chains, are included in calculations of average numbers of children attending, for a minimum of 670 settings represented by responses in England and Wales and 41 settings in Scotland.

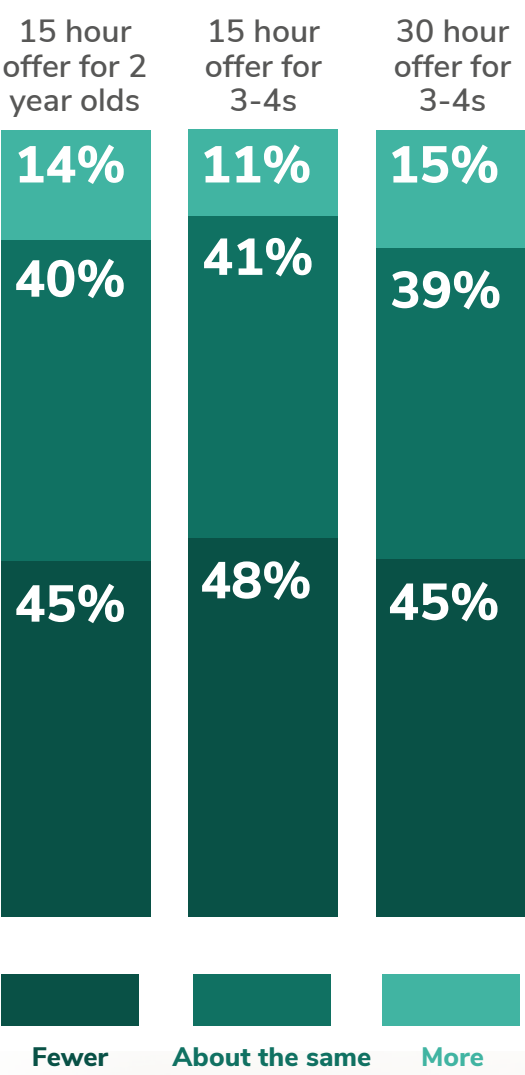
In England and Wales, the average number of children attending settings in February was 28% lower than the number attending in a typical week a year earlier. In Scotland, where early years settings were only allowed to open for vulnerable children and the children of key workers, the number of children attending was 63% lower than a typical week a year earlier.

We asked settings in England whether the number of children taking up government-funded places at their setting was fewer, about the same as, or more than last year. Responses from single site settings and chains of up to 10 settings only are included in calculations of take-up of government-funded places, for a minimum of 252 responses.

For all government-funded childcare entitlements, just under half of providers said that fewer children were attending this year compared to last year. Around 40% said that about the same number of children were attending government-funded places this year as last year, with just 10%-15% reporting that more children were taking up such places compared to last year.

We also asked settings in Wales and Scotland about whether the number of children taking up government-funded places at their setting was fewer, about the same as, or more than last year. Very few settings (around 40 in Scotland and 25 in Wales) responded to these questions, so the findings should be treated with caution. With this in mind, settings in Wales reported that, compared with this time last year, fewer children are taking up the Childcare Offer. In Scotland, settings were more evenly split, with about the same number saying more children were taking up government-funded entitlements as those that said fewer were.

Proportion of settings reporting changes to the number of children taking up government-funded childcare entitlements at their setting



Conclusion

This survey of nurseries in England, Scotland and Wales gives an indication of the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the early years workforce. In England and Wales, where settings were allowed to remain open for business during the national lockdown, 72% of settings have had to close fully or partially between November and February, with 23% reducing their operations five or more times. In Scotland, where settings were asked to remain open only for vulnerable children and children of key workers during the national lockdown in early 2021, 84% of settings were open and 16% told us that they were closed while the current measures remained in place.

The settings that responded to this survey told us that a substantial proportion of their staff have been furloughed in the past three months, with an average of 11% of staff placed on full-time furlough and 27% on part-time furlough – considerably more than respondents to our survey three months ago expected. This might reflect the lower demand that settings have faced, with 44% of settings in England and Wales citing lower demand for places as the reason they had had to reduce their operations in this period. Settings told us that they expected to rely less on the furlough schemes in the three months to the end of April, expecting to place 6% of staff on full-time furlough and 11% on part-time furlough.

In line with the findings from our previous two surveys, in August 2020 and November 2020 respectively, settings reported that they are considerably more likely to reduce the contracted hours or make redundant staff members with fewer qualifications and less experience, if presented with the choice. Staff with lower qualifications were more likely than other staff to have been placed on full-time furlough. This suggests that such staff are continuing to experience some of the most negative effects of the pandemic, such as reduced job security and income.

The vast majority of settings report continuing to offer CPD to their staff, and four in five say they are offering more than just mandatory training. However, gaps in the training opportunities that settings are able to secure persist in the same areas as we have seen in our previous surveys: training on trauma and bereavement, on taking a whole-setting approach to supporting children with special educational needs and on supporting children with autism. Training needs to be available to settings if they are to offer it to staff, improving their training offer for employees and improving the quality of care at their setting.

Finally, attendance at early education and care settings continues to be below where it was a year ago, with settings in England and Wales reporting 28% fewer children attending compared to a year before. This will impact on children who have missed out on time in early education settings as well as placing increased pressure on early education and care providers' business models and sustainability.

Over the coming months, as measures to control the spread of Covid-19 are gradually lifted and vaccines are rolled out to the population, we may see a rise in demand for early education and care. This, along with the relaxing of restrictions on how settings can operate and a reduction in the frequency with which they have to partially close their setting, is likely to improve the outlook for the early years sector and its workforce. To date, this research has shown how the rise and fall in cases throughout the pandemic has impacted on the early years workforce. With demand for places significantly lower compared with this time last year, the sector is likely to need government support to react to potential increases in attendance. In the meantime, it is clear that the furlough scheme continues to be of great importance to the sector, while there are clear opportunities to improve access to training for settings.




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