

Children's Services Omnibus: Wave 4 research report ^[1]

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from the fourth wave of the DfE Children's Services Omnibus Survey. The survey explored senior local authority (LA) and Children's Services Trust leaders' perceptions on, and activities relating to, a range of policy areas. These included children's social care; early years and childcare provision in authorities; and services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The questionnaire comprised a mix of open response questions and fixed category response questions.

The online survey was sent to all 152 upper tier LAs in England. In total, 56 LAs took part, representing an overall survey response rate of 37%. This compares to an overall response rate of 66% at Wave 1, 50% at Wave 2 and 51% at Wave 3.

However, as indicated throughout the report, not all 56 LAs answered all of the survey questions. A total of 49 LAs answered questions on Children's Social Care (32% response rate, compared to 60% in Wave 1, 45% in Wave 2 and 47% in Wave 3); 50 LAs answered questions on Early Years and Childcare (33% response rate, compared to 56% in Wave 1, 38% in Wave 2 and 39% in Wave 3); and 48 answered questions on Special Educational Needs and Disability (32% response rate, compared to 54% in Wave 1, 34% in Wave 2 and 36% in Wave 3).

The profile of LAs which completed the survey is largely in-line with the overall profile, based on the type of authority, region, proportion of pupils eligible for and receiving free school meals, and rates of children in need.

The research was carried out between 26 June and 15 August 2018. The key findings are outlined below. Throughout this report, figures are based on all LAs responding to each question. Please note that the base sizes for some questions are relatively low and therefore the findings should be treated with some caution.

[EXCERPTS]

Early years and childcare

A total of 50 LAs answered questions on early years and childcare.

Early education entitlements

Local Authorities were asked about actions they had taken to promote funded early education entitlements for disadvantaged 2 year-olds during the last year. All of the responding LAs had supported the communication and provision of information to parents, either directly or in partnership with other local professionals. The vast majority (96%) ensured sufficiency and quality of existing provision and almost two thirds (64%) said they had developed new provision or new places. 82% had streamlined administrative processes and 78% had carried out workforce development and training.

More than two in five responding LAs (44%) said that they had experienced difficulties over the last year in implementing funded early education entitlements for disadvantaged two year-olds.

The most commonly reported difficulty local authorities faced was eligible parents not wanting or needing child care for their 2 year-old, with 34% of responding authorities saying that they had experienced this. Twenty per cent of responding authorities reported a lack of funding for publicity, outreach or infrastructure development, and 16% of responding LAs reported that they had experienced providers not wanting to offer funded places to eligible 2 year olds.

Local authorities were also asked about what they had done to promote the universal funded early education entitlements of 15 hours for 3 and 4 year olds.

Nine in ten (90%) had supported providers or children's centres to communicate with parents and carers and ensured the sufficiency and quality of existing provision.

One in five (20%) responding authorities reported difficulties in implementing the universal funded early education entitlements of 15 hours for all 3 and 4 year olds.

Thirty eight per cent of responding authorities said that the introduction of the 30 hours funded early education entitlements for 3 and 4 year olds of working parents had caused difficulties for the implementation of the disadvantaged 2 year old offer. Key difficulties mentioned were the capacity of early education providers to offer places for 2 year-olds, and financial sustainability.

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