

# Nurseries in England say new rules have reduced care to 'crowd control'<sup>[1]</sup>

The first study into Tory shake-up of childcare shows staff are overwhelmed

**Author:** Fazackerley, Anna

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online<sup>[2]</sup>

## Excerpts

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Since September last year, nurseries in England have been allowed to increase child-to-staff ratios, so one adult now looks after five two-year-olds rather than four. The change was intended to help deliver the party's pledge of 15 hours' free childcare a week from this month for working parents of children aged from nine months to three years.

But according to the study, shared with the Observer, a third of staff (32%) at nurseries that followed the new guidelines feel that quality has been hit.

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Aaron Bradbury, lecturer in early childhood studies at Nottingham Trent University, who co-authored the research, said: "We found those who increased their ratios are often experiencing real problems, with children left to cry or hurting themselves because staff are overwhelmed."

He said that many providers had "stuck to their principles" and refused to increase the number of children per adult, but with the sector in deep crisis and many nurseries closing, others had had to take more children "just to keep the lights on".

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"Instead of educating, I'm simply crowd control."

She added that older pre-schoolers were often left to their own devices.

Another said: "We often find it difficult to give children the attention they need."

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Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Early Years Alliance, which represents 14,000 providers of care and education to under-fives in England, said: "The sector is on its knees, and we have a recruitment and retention crisis worse than ever before, so ministers were out of their minds to increase ratios."

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A Department for Education spokesperson said: "We hear the concerns from the sector about the balance between managing finances, staffing and offering the places parents need."

The spokesperson added that the staff-to-child ratios "are a minimum requirement – there is no obligation to adopt them".

## Related link:

Balancing numbers or addressing needs? Child to adult ratios, practitioner well-being, and quality of provision in early years s<sup>[3]</sup>

The expansion of free childcare has been a Tory-fied mess of a bright Labour idea<sup>[4]</sup>

**Region:** Europe<sup>[5]</sup>

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regulations<sup>[7]</sup>

staff:child ratios<sup>[8]</sup>

wellbeing<sup>[9]</sup>

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#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/24/09/nurseries-england-say-new-rules-have-reduced-care-%E2%80%98crowd-control%E2%80%99> [2] <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/sep/14/nurseries-in-england-say-new-rules-have-reduced-care-to-crowd-control> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/24/09/balancing-numbers-or-addressing-needs-child-adult-ratios> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/24/04/expansion-free-childcare-has-been-tory-fied-mess-bright-labour-idea> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/public-policy> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/regulations> [8] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9196> [9] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9119>