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# **Towards universal early years provision: analysis of take-up by disadvantaged families from recent annual childcare surveys**

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This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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## Executive summary

### Introduction

The entitlement to free early years provision was first introduced by the Labour Government in the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE 1998). The scope of the initiative gradually expanded over time, with particular emphasis on improving access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (HM Treasury 2004a, HM Government 2009). By January 2010 almost all eligible 4 year olds (98%) and the vast majority of eligible 3 year olds (92%) in England were benefiting from the entitlement to free early years provision (DfE 2010) and survey data illustrates that this early years provision is provided through a variety of settings (Smith *et al.* 2010).

There is a lot of research evidence showing that receiving good quality early years education is associated with improved outcomes for children's development, and is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Feinstein *et al.* 2008, Hansen and Hawkes 2009, Leseman 2009, Melhuish 2004, Smith *et al.* 2009b, Sylva *et al.* 2004). There is also evidence showing that children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. those from workless and low-income families) are less likely to attend early years education settings and thus to receive the benefits of it (Ghate and Hazell 2002, Speight *et al.* 2010).

This study aims to analyse how the take-up of early years provision varies by different dimensions of disadvantage and the main barriers experienced by disadvantaged families. The data used is from the 2008 and 2009 surveys in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents series, which were carried out by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf of the Department for Education.

As well as examining the role of different dimensions of disadvantage (such as worklessness, absence of qualifications, low income, area deprivation, disability etc.) we construct a separate measure of *multiple disadvantage* and use it to distinguish between families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage and those with lower levels or no disadvantage. This measure also allows us to focus on children from the most disadvantaged families and to see what distinguishes those of them who receive early years provision from those who do not.

### Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children from different backgrounds

Overall, 92% of eligible 3 and 4 year olds received early years provision in 2008-2009. Four year olds were more likely to receive early years provision than three year olds, which is largely explained by the prominent role played by reception classes in providing early years provision for 4 year olds.

Children were receiving early years provision at a range of maintained and private providers including nursery classes (28%), reception classes (27%), playgroups/pre-schools (19%), day nurseries (18%) and nursery schools (15%).

Receipt of early years provision was found to be associated with a number of socio-demographic characteristics. Children from lower-income and larger families (i.e. with three or more children), those whose mothers did not work and those whose mothers did not have any academic qualifications were less likely to receive early years provision. Children from lone-parent families were more likely to receive early years provision than those from two-parent families when the analysis took account of differences in work status, income and other socio-demographic characteristics between these two types of families. (There was no difference in the overall percentages of take-up of early years provision for children from lone- and two-parent families.) Children whose parents had

access to a car had higher rates of take-up of early years provision than those without such access. However, once we controlled for income (as car ownership is correlated with income levels), the effect of access to a car became insignificant.

The take-up of early years provision was similar for boys and girls, and it did not vary by whether the child had a long-standing illness or disability or by whether they had special educational needs.

Compared with children whose mothers were White, children of Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were substantially less likely to receive early years provision. However, once the analysis controlled for differences in socio-demographic profile between families from different ethnic backgrounds, the effect of ethnicity on uptake of early years provision was no longer significant.

The take-up of early years provision was the lowest in London compared with other regions of England. Children living in deprived areas were less likely to receive early years provision than those living in more affluent areas.

There was a strong association between the level of multiple disadvantage experienced by the family and their take-up of early years provision. In families experiencing no disadvantage only 3% of children were not attending any early years providers, whereas the proportion was higher for families experiencing some or a lot of disadvantage, with the highest figure (13%) found among the most disadvantaged families.

There were differences in the types of providers attended by children depending on the level of disadvantage experienced by their families. Children from the most disadvantaged families were more likely to receive early years provision at nursery classes and less likely to receive it at playgroups/pre-schools, day nurseries and childminders, whereas attendance at reception classes and nursery schools did not vary by level of multiple disadvantage.

### **Focus on families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage – what distinguishes those who take-up early years provision from those who do not?**

Among children from families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage (28% of children in the study), there were a number of socio-demographic differences between those who were receiving early years provision and those who were not.

There were large differences in the take-up of early years provision by child's age: among disadvantaged 4 year olds only 5% were not receiving any early years provision, whereas the figure was 24% for 3 year olds. This age difference is greater than that seen for all families and highlights the role that the entitlement to free early years provision for disadvantaged 2 year olds could have to play in targeting disadvantaged families early and improving take-up of early years provision at age 3.

Children of lone parents and those whose mothers were in paid employment were more likely to receive early years provision, whereas those from larger and lower-income families were less likely to receive it. There was no association between the take-up of early years provision and family's access to a car.

Mother's educational level was associated with the children's take-up of early years provision: among children of mothers who had no academic qualifications 17% were not receiving early years provision, whereas this was the case for only 5% of children whose mothers had qualifications at A level or higher.

Girls from disadvantaged families were more likely to receive early years provision than boys, although when the analysis controlled for other socio-demographic characteristics, this difference was no longer statistically significant. There were no differences in the take-up of early years provision between children with and without a long-standing illness or disability and between children with and without special educational needs.

Children living in London were less likely to receive early years provision than children living outside of London. The level of deprivation in the area did not appear to make a difference to the take-up of early years provision by children from the most disadvantaged families.

We analysed whether parents' negative perceptions of the availability of places at local providers of nursery education and childcare and of the quality of local provision were a barrier to their use of the entitlement to free early years provision. We found that this was not the case. Instead, it appears that lack of knowledge about local early years provision was a substantial barrier to taking it up.

### **Reasons for not using the entitlement to free early years provision**

As discussed above, 8% of children aged 3 and 4 and eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision were not attending any early years providers. We found that parents of 38% of these children were not aware that the government paid for some hours of nursery education per week for children of this age. Low awareness of the scheme was a particular barrier for the highly disadvantaged families, as parents of 50% of children in these families were not aware of their entitlement, compared with parents of 26% of children in less or non-disadvantaged families.

Those parents who were aware of the entitlement to free early years provision were asked why they were not using it. Parents of 47% of children mentioned personal preferences, parents of 33% of children reported various constraining factors such as lack of places at local providers, and parents of 20% of children mentioned one-off circumstances such as being on holiday in the week the survey asked about. Parents from the most disadvantaged families were much more likely to report constraining factors as their reasons for not using the provision than parents from less or non-disadvantaged families.

The surveys also showed that parents of 4% of 3 and 4 year old children reported that their children attended early years provision but were not receiving any free hours. This estimate appears to be somewhat inflated due to parents' confusion over how the scheme works. The main reasons why some children received early years provision but not any free hours appeared to be low awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision and use of providers such as childminders who did not provide the entitlement to free early years provision. The prevalence of these reasons varied by level of multiple disadvantage experienced by the family. Low awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision was a particular barrier to take-up for the highly disadvantaged families, while use of childminders was a factor most pertinent to families experiencing no or little disadvantage.

### **Hours of the entitlement to free early years provision used**

Those children who were receiving some free hours of early years provision (except those who received them through attending school) received an average (median) of 12.5 free hours per week (which corresponds with the level of provision in most areas in 2008-2009 when the surveys took place).

Thirty-four per cent of children received fewer free hours than their full entitlement (i.e. fewer than 12.5 hours). Three year olds were more likely to receive less than their full entitlement than four year olds.

Children from families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage were less likely to receive less than their full entitlement than children from less or non-disadvantaged families (25%, compared with 35-39% respectively).

Reasons why some children received their entitlement to free early years provision for less than 12.5 hours per week did not vary by level of disadvantage experienced by the family. Parents of just under a half of those children (49%) reported various constraining factors, such as that they would have had to pay for more hours or that the setting had no extra sessions available. Parents of 36% of children mentioned their personal preferences not to send their child to an early years provider for more hours, and for parents of 13% of children it was due to one-off circumstances that their child received fewer than 12.5 free hours in the week the survey asked about.

## **Conclusions**

Our analysis revealed large differences in the take-up of early years provision by children from different backgrounds, with those from disadvantaged families being much less likely to access early years provision than those from families in better circumstances. What were the main barriers to accessing early years provision experienced by disadvantaged families?

The findings of this study suggest that lack of awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision and a low level of information about local options for nursery education and childcare were important factors affecting take-up of early years provision by disadvantaged families. In addition, the way the entitlement to free early years provision is delivered through a range of providers appeared to have an impact on its uptake by the disadvantaged families. Parents from disadvantaged families were more likely to mention lack of availability of places at local providers and other constraining factors than those from families in better circumstances. There is some evidence to suggest that some types of providers (e.g. nursery classes attached to schools) might be more easily accessible by disadvantaged families than others (e.g. day nurseries), which means that there may be fewer options open to disadvantaged families with regard to where to take-up the entitlement to free early years provision than to families experiencing no or little disadvantage.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Aims of the study

There is a lot of research evidence showing that receiving good quality early years education is associated with improved outcomes for children's development, and is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Feinstein *et al.* 2008, Hansen and Hawkes 2009, Leseman 2009, Melhuish 2004, Smith *et al.* 2009b, Sylva *et al.* 2004). There is also evidence showing that children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. those from workless and low-income families) are less likely to attend early years education settings and thus to receive the benefits of it (Ghate and Hazell 2002, Smith *et al.* 2010, Speight *et al.* 2010). There have been a number of policy strategies and initiatives since the late 1990s aiming to change this situation and to enable more children, and disadvantaged children in particular, to participate in early years education (DfEE 1998, HM Treasury 2004a, HM Government 2009).

The present report reflects the Coalition Government's commitment to continue work on identifying barriers to the uptake of early years provision among the most disadvantaged 3 and 4 year olds as an important means of reducing educational and socio-economic inequality (Gove 2010). The study uses data from the 2008 and 2009 surveys in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents series and aims to provide analysis relating to the following questions:

- How does take-up of early years provision by 3 and 4 year olds who are eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision vary by different dimensions of disadvantage?
- What are the main barriers to taking up early years provision experienced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- What is the level of awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision among those not taking it up? Is lack of awareness a particular barrier for disadvantaged families?
- Do families who take-up the entitlement to free early years provision use all of the hours available (i.e. 12.5 hours per school term week in most areas when the surveys were carried out)? Does the number of hours used – and the ability to use the whole entitlement – vary by level of disadvantage experienced by the family?

## 1.2 Background

### *The policy background*

Despite its early beginnings with the 1816 founding by Robert Owen of a nursery school in Scotland, early education remained a low policy priority for central and local government until the late nineties of the twentieth century when the Labour Government introduced the entitlement to free early years provision for 3 and 4 year old children. Up to then, access to early education was unevenly distributed across the country, available primarily in disadvantaged areas (Penn 2009). Early education was delivered by qualified teachers in free standing state funded nursery schools or nursery classes attached to state primary schools and in a small number of private nursery schools and classes.

The beginning of the term after children reach their fifth birthday has been the compulsory school starting age since the 1870 Education Act, yet for many years over half of 4 year olds have been admitted to reception classes of primary schools (Daniel and Ivatts 2008). This situation, too, was radically altered by the introduction of the entitlement to free early years provision in the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE 1998). Until that time, most 3 year olds and those 4 year olds not already in school merely had access to part-time playgroup provision, staffed by leaders without teaching qualifications and by volunteers (Statham *et al.* 1990).

The implementation of the entitlement to free early years provision for 3 and 4 year olds was completed by 2004 (NAO 2004) and is now being rolled out as originally planned to more than 20,000 targeted 2 year old children after a pilot period (Smith *et al.* 2009b). The Ten Year Strategy for Childcare (HM Treasury 2004a) reviewed the achievements of the National Childcare Strategy and outlined the way forward for early years provision from age two, underpinned by research findings on its long-term educational and social benefits for children. The Strategy also alluded to evidence, presented as part of the Child Poverty Review (HM Treasury 2004b) of the potential of good quality early years provision to counter the impact of poverty on young children's development. These messages were reinforced in the next childcare strategy review (HM Government 2009).

Initially, 3 and 4 year old children whose parents wanted a place for them, had been entitled to 12.5 hours of free early years provision for 33 weeks of the year, but in 2006 this entitlement was extended to cover 38 weeks of the year. A further increase to 15 hours per week delivered flexibly, was piloted by 34 pathfinder authorities between 2007 and 2009 (Clarke *et al.* 2009). The Coalition Government has confirmed that this entitlement will be rolled out nationally from September 2010 as originally planned (Gove 2010).

The entitlement to free early years provision is funded by the Nursery Education Grant and can be provided not only in state nursery schools and classes, but also in private-for-profit and not-for-profit childcare businesses and indeed by childminders forming part of a childminding network associated with a Children's Centre. The National Childcare Strategy proposed this integration of early education within childcare provision, since no sensible distinction could be made between early education and childcare (NAO 2004). Subsequently the legal distinction between childcare and nursery education for young children aged 0-5 was removed altogether in the Childcare Act 2006. The term 'early years provision' has come to describe the provision of integrated early learning, development and care for young children as set out in Section 18 of the Act.

Since 2001 all providers must meet Ofsted registration requirements, which include the delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage, a curricular and regulatory framework governing provision for children aged 0 to 6 years of age. Introduced in the 2006 Childcare Act, this was implemented nationally from September 2008. The Early Years Foundation Stage extends to the end of the school year in which children reach their fifth birthday and is followed by Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum. This programme replaced the *Foundation Stage Curriculum* for children aged 3 to the end of reception year of primary school, the *Birth to Three Matters* framework, and the *National Standards for Under 8s Daycare and Childminding* which applied previously (DCSF 2008).

In England 92% of all 3 year olds and 98% of all 4 year olds now benefit from the entitlement to free early years provision (DfE 2010). The two most recent surveys in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents series (Kazimirski *et al.* 2008, Speight *et al.* 2009), whose data have been analysed for the present study, highlight the extent to which early learning and childcare provision in England is being taken up by children from families experiencing disadvantage. Like their predecessors in this time series commissioned by the Government, they identified a steady increase in the use of formal childcare since the introduction of the National Childcare Strategy. However, a continuing concern articulated in the 2007 survey is:

*...the concentration of 'non-users' of childcare in the lowest income groups, given that a key focus of the Ten Year Childcare Strategy is increasing the use of formal care amongst disadvantaged families, with the ultimate aim of facilitating parents' move into work and hence alleviating poverty.*

(Kazimirski *et al.* 2008: 16)

Throughout the last decade, early years policy has emphasized the importance of reaching disadvantaged children with the entitlement to free early years provision (HM Government 2009), since its impact on their development is likely to be profound and long-lasting (Melhuish 2004; Leseman 2009).

The importance of early education as part of early years provision was reinforced in the Government's Every Child Matters programme which aims to provide all children with the support they need to meet the five key objectives of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being. Research confirms a negative association between disadvantage and a range of Every Child Matters outcomes for children and the cumulative effect of multiple disadvantage (Cabinet Office 2007; Oroyemi *et al.* 2009).

The present report reflects the Coalition Government's commitment to identifying the continuing barriers to the uptake of early years provision among the most disadvantaged 3 and 4 year olds as an important means towards eliminating educational and socio-economic inequality.

### ***The research background: overview***

The research evidence for the positive outcomes of good quality early education and childcare provision for children's educational development and future economic and social wellbeing is compelling. It is usefully summarised in the latest review of the National Childcare Strategy (HM Government 2009). Among influential British research informing the early years policy emphasis on disadvantaged children are studies by Leon Feinstein and colleagues from the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at London University's Institute of Education. An analysis of cognitive development among British children in the 1970 Birth Cohort Survey revealed that if at the age of 22 months children from disadvantaged backgrounds were already showing a cognitive deficit this would still be apparent at age 26. Even more striking was the finding that:

*The children of educated or wealthy parents who scored poorly in the early tests had a tendency to catch up, whereas children of worse-off parents who scored poorly were extremely unlikely to catch up and are shown to be an at-risk group. There is no evidence that entry into schooling reverses this pattern.*

(Feinstein 2003: 73)

While Feinstein did not draw any conclusions in this paper about the potential impact of early education, he did note strong evidence suggesting that programmes targeting resources directly at children were more successful than so-called two-generation programmes targeting children and their parents. Other studies by Feinstein and others focusing more explicitly on the role of early education in lessening the risk of lasting educational disadvantage also informed early years policy (Feinstein *et al.* 2008).

Interestingly, the most recent data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) complement Feinstein's basic finding: 3 year old MCS children from disadvantaged backgrounds who performed well intellectually at that point, are lagging behind by the time they reach age 5, as do children from average socio-economic backgrounds. In contrast, peers from higher socio-economic backgrounds who were not performing well intellectually at age 3 are not only catching up by this age, but even outperforming the other two groups (Blenden and Machin 2010: 163). Since other MCS findings confirm that disadvantaged children tended to receive better quality early education in group care settings (Robert *et al.* 2010) these findings point towards the crucial role of a comprehensive package of measures to address early inequality and disadvantage alongside high quality early education.

Using high quality early education and childcare as a means to narrowing the gap in developmental outcomes for disadvantaged children has become a local authority duty

under the Childcare Act 2006. This duty links to others forming part of the Every Child Matters agenda codified in the Children Act 2004. In recent years the body of pertinent, well-designed and large-scale UK studies informing the Coalition Government's early years policy has grown considerably. These studies now occupy the place once taken by studies of early childhood interventions from the USA, which have become less pertinent over time (Penn *et al.* 2006).

### **Outcome studies**

In a review for the National Audit Office of international childcare research, Melhuish (2004) found consistent evidence that the more disadvantaged children aged 3 to 5 stood most to gain socially and educationally from good quality early years education. However, low income families, particularly Black and minority ethnic (BME) families, were more likely to access segregated and lower quality provision. Though findings were mostly from USA studies, only those from cost-benefit analyses of interventions with disadvantaged families could not be generalised to the UK. Socially mixed early years groups had a greater developmental effect than those targeted primarily at disadvantaged children. Leseman (2009) recently conducted a literature review of this area for the European Commission. He listed the numerous quality factors determining whether lasting positive effects would occur.

While most international studies of early childhood provision explored different types, sometimes integrated, of childcare, early education and family support provision for children from 0 to 6 years of age, some studies do allow the identification of the effects of early education for English 3 to 5 year olds *per se*.

Among British outcome studies, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) longitudinal study proved a major source of evidence that the positive impact of 3 to 7 year old children's early educational experience has been making itself felt in their educational performance at entry to school and at the end of Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum (Sylva *et al.* 2004). This five year study was commissioned in 1997 to provide an 'evidence base' for early years policy decisions, but data collection for this study preceded many of the interventions and policies introduced since 1998.

Some 3000 children in 141 different early years settings in regions covering 36 local authorities took part in the study which not only explored their social and intellectual development, but also the impact of their home background and earlier childcare experience before age 3. Among the sample of regions included in the study, were socially disadvantaged and ethnically diverse ones. The effectiveness of different early years settings was compared, as well as the key aspects differentiating between them. A comparison group was included of 'home' children who had never attended a pre-school setting before school entry.

Though all EPPE findings are relevant to the present analysis, it is impossible to do justice to them all in this section; therefore only a few are summarised here. Apart from demonstrating the impact of quality early years experience on educational performance at Key Stage 1, the age of starting and the type of setting also mattered. Starting after age 2 and before age 3 had a beneficial effect on children's intellectual development. The most effective settings in promoting children's intellectual and social development were maintained nursery schools, nursery classes and – mostly publicly funded – centres integrating early education and childcare, whereas local authority day nurseries were the least effective. The effect of high quality early education and childcare persisted into the early primary years. Gender was a significant factor in intellectual attainment, with girls doing better than boys, while the effect of ethnicity was primarily mediated by language.

Children's early behavioural or other problems may compromise their ability to benefit from early years education. Therefore the Early Years Transition and Special Educational

Needs (EYTSSEN) project, a sub study within the EPPE project, aimed to identify children 'at risk' of developing Special Educational Needs when at primary school. At the time the research took place, children with disabilities and serious medical conditions were more likely to be found in segregated provision, so they were not included in this sample. The EYTSSEN study explored the relationship between this risk, other background factors and the nature of the early years setting attended. According to the researchers:

*As SEN is such a contentious issue the research chose to adopt a means of identification highlighting those children 'at risk' of developing SEN given their characteristics during pre-school. This 'at risk' status is more appropriate for very young children than diagnosed SEN, which rarely occurs for children during pre-school.*

(Sylva *et al.* 2004: 46)

Important findings included that children from the 'home' group were more likely to be identified with SEN at school than children who had received early years education and that nursery schools and integrated centres were most likely to help children overcome their 'risk' status on a range of measures, especially cognitive ones. Research on the impact of early years education on children with disabilities or special needs has since lagged behind (Newman *et al.* 2009, Springate *et al.* 2008). However, several evaluations have been published of initiatives such as *Aiming High for Disabled Children* (HM Treasury and DfES 2007) addressing the wider needs of these young children and their families in the early years (University of Manchester 2006, Jessiman *et al.* 2010). Uptake figures for this group remain unreliable, as at local authority level it is hard to establish percentages (Mooney *et al.* 2008). At national level the General Household Surveys estimate the incidence of children with a disability to be around 7% (Oppenheim 2007).

Recently, the EPPE findings on the superior impact of state funded provision on all children's cognitive development have been reinforced by those of the Millennium Cohort Study. The state funded early years settings attended by this cohort's children displayed the highest quality across the board, particularly where learning outcomes were concerned (Mathers *et al.* 2007).

### ***Uptake studies***

Certain studies have focused more on the extent of uptake of early years provision in relation to parental education, socio-economic status and other background variables, as well as parental attitudes to such provision. For instance, Speight *et al.* (2010) found that children from families experiencing multiple disadvantage were much less likely to receive early years provision than those from families in better circumstances. In another UK study, although the poorest parents appeared keen on childcare for their children for social and educational, rather than primarily economic reasons, they often failed to access it (Ghate and Hazell 2002). Fortunately, the time series of surveys funded by the Department for Education and conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) confirm that the entitlement to free early years provision for this age group has proved increasingly popular with parents since its universal introduction and its uptake has increased in parallel (Butt *et al.* 2007).

Where barriers to the uptake of early year provision remained, these have been explored in a variety of qualitative studies, which will be referred to where relevant throughout this report. Roberts (2008) explicitly addressed the increase in take-up of the entitlement to free early years provision for 3 and 4 year old children as part of a small scale qualitative study that explored parents' attitudes towards childcare, and the optimal language to use to talk about childcare. This study focused specifically on parents earning less than £20,000 annually, particularly among Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents.

Four main reasons were given by parents for why they welcomed the entitlement to free early years provision for 3 and 4 year old children, some of which relate to the age of the child and some of which relate to the availability of the entitlement to free early years provision through the maintained sector:

1. By the age of 3 children were perceived as able to express their feelings, wishes and experiences to parents and staff alike;
2. State nursery schools and classes were perceived as more trustworthy than private sector provision delivering both childcare and early education;
3. Cost was not an issue;
4. Children of this age were perceived as ready to enjoy play and social contact with peers (Roberts 2008).

In contrast, another DCSF commissioned project investigating how to promote the uptake of formal childcare among low income families did not distinguish between the take-up of the entitlement to free early years provision and other formal childcare (Andrew Irving Associates 2008). Hence its findings are less useful for the present report.

The issues surrounding the uptake of early education and childcare among BME families, who are overrepresented among disadvantaged families, has been more widely researched. Even though they identified increasing use of early education and childcare among BME communities, two reports using data from the Childcare series carried out by NatCen (Bell *et al.* 2005, Kazimirski *et al.* 2006) concluded that early years policies needed to focus more on their specific needs and circumstances. An overview report of effective engagement with ethnic minority communities in wider children's and parenting services not only came to a similar conclusion, but also reiterated the point that these needs differ substantially between communities (Page *et al.* 2007).

Finally, social class, too, has been proposed as an important factor influencing preferences and attitudes relating to early education and childcare (Vincent *et al.* 2008). Vincent's studies of working and middle class use of childcare in two London boroughs demonstrated heavy social segregation in provision and uptake, reflecting divergent parental attitudes within 'local childcare cultures.' The findings on the complex interplay between factors affecting parental childcare choices in these small-scale qualitative studies appeared to correspond to those in an analysis of the Family and Children Study data (D'Souza *et al.* 2008).

### 1.3 About the data

#### ***The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents series***

The study uses data from the 2008 and 2009 surveys in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents series. This series originated in two separate surveys (Stratford *et al.* 1997, La Valle *et al.* 2000), and has been carried out periodically by the National Centre for Social Research since 2004. The sample for the surveys is randomly selected from Child Benefit records, which, given its almost universal take-up, provide a comprehensive sampling frame for families with dependent children.

Just under 7,100 parents in England with children under 15 were interviewed for the survey in 2008 and just over 6,700 in 2009.<sup>1</sup> Each parent was asked basic information about all children they had living with them (e.g. type of childcare they received), and then more detailed information about one randomly selected child (if there were two or more children in the household).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about these surveys, see Speight *et al.* (2009) and Smith *et al.* (2010).

For the present study, we use data only on children aged 3 and 4 who were eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision.<sup>2</sup> This decreased the size of the sample available for the analysis. However, for most of the analysis, we were able to use information about *all* children in the families surveyed (and not just the ‘selected child’). In total, we were able to analyse data on just under 4,400 children. For the parts of the report that focus on highly disadvantaged families, we used a sub-set of this sample (28%), which was just over 1,300 children.

While the overall response to the surveys was relatively high (Speight *et al.* 2009, Smith *et al.* 2010), it is possible that families experiencing the highest levels of poverty and social exclusion were slightly underrepresented among those who completed the survey, as they are often missed in social surveys. These might be found among some ethnic minority groups (especially where parents did not speak English and there was no one available to translate for them), homeless families, mobile populations such as Travellers, and those on very low incomes (Levitas *et al.* 2007). Apart from the issue of non-response, it is also possible that some of these families were not receiving Child Benefit and therefore were not part of the sampling frame from which the survey samples were drawn.

### ***Defining early years provision***

The surveys in the series ask parents about their use of childcare and early years education over the last year and during a reference term-time week (usually the last week before the interview). For this study, we use information about the reference term-time week only.

Parents are asked whether their children attended any of the providers of childcare and early years education listed on a show card. The early years providers listed included:

- Nursery school
- Nursery class attached to a primary or infants’ school
- Day nursery
- Reception class
- Special day nursery or school or unit for children with special educational needs
- Playgroup / pre-school
- Childminder
- Other nursery education provider.

Where the child attended any of the types of providers listed above, they were considered to be in receipt of early years provision.

It is worth noting that the surveys classify providers according to the service for which they were being used, e.g. daycare or early years education. Thus, we use – and classify according to – terminology such as ‘nursery schools’ and ‘day nurseries’, rather than include forms of integrated provision such as Children’s Centres. (For more information on these types of settings, see Appendix B.) Checks on respondents’ classifications of the childcare providers they used – via a telephone interview with the providers themselves – were an integral part of the survey process and improved the accuracy of the classifications.

## **1.4 Measuring disadvantage**

Experience of disadvantage can cover a broad range of concepts, which have been explored in a large body of research (Oroyemi *et al.* 2009, Cabinet Office 2007, Barnes *et*

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<sup>2</sup> Children are eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision from 1 April, 1 September or 1 January following their 3rd birthday, and are entitled to up to six terms of provision before reaching statutory school age, which is the first term following their 5th birthday.

*al.* 2008, Brooks-Gunn *et al.* 1997). Furthermore, Government initiatives that tackle disadvantage often leave the precise nature of the target groups up to individual Local Authorities. For instance, the autonomy provided to Local Authorities in the Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children meant that eligibility for the pilot was determined by many different geographic and economic indicators of disadvantage (Smith *et al.* 2009b).

For this study, we constructed an index of multiple disadvantage in the same way as in Speight *et al.* (2010). It incorporates the following risk factors:

1. Lone parent families
2. Non-working families (no parents in paid employment)
3. Families with an annual household income of under £20,000 (or, for families where income is unknown, being in receipt of Job Seeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit)
4. Families including three or more children aged 0-14<sup>3</sup>
5. Families living in one of the 20% most disadvantaged areas of the country (as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation)
6. Families where all parents have no or low qualifications (no GCSE/ O Levels at grade A-C)
7. Families where at least one parent has a long-standing illness or disability
8. Families living in rented accommodation (as a proxy for social housing)
9. Families where at least one child in the household has a special educational need or long-standing illness or disability.

While it is clear that in many cases the factors above do not necessarily indicate that a family is disadvantaged, it is likely that an *accumulation* of such factors would indicate disadvantage. As such, the analysis in this report uses a sum of these factors as an indicator of families' level of disadvantage. To create the sum, each factor was given a score of one, which means that the indicator ranges from 0-9. Since a variable with 10 categories was not a very useful analytical tool, the categories were combined in the following two ways:

1) Four levels of multiple disadvantage:

- No factors of disadvantage (28% of children in the study),
- 1 factor of disadvantage (21%)
- 2-3 factors of disadvantage (22%)
- High level: 4-9 factors of disadvantage (28%).

2) Two levels of multiple disadvantage:

- No/low level: 0-3 factors of disadvantage
- High level: 4-9 factors of disadvantage

Analysis in Chapter 3 focuses on families experiencing a high level of multiple disadvantage (4-9 risk factors).<sup>4</sup> In other chapters, either the first or the second variable was used as a break variable depending on the number of cases available for the analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> Since this report uses non-equivalised income, number of children has been included to capture the need for household income to spread further in larger families.

<sup>4</sup> Ninety per cent of children in these highly disadvantaged families were living in households with annual gross income of under £20,000 (table not shown).

## 1.5 Interpreting results in the report

### **Weights**

In most of the analysis, a 'family-level' weight was applied to the data, which ensures that the research findings are representative of 3 and 4 year old children in England who were eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision in 2008-2009. Where the analysis was limited to 'selected children' only (i.e. one child per household chosen randomly during the survey) – because particular survey questions were asked about the 'selected child' only and not about any other children in the family – a 'child-level' weight was applied to the data. The child-level weight combines the family-level weight with an adjustment for the probability of the child being selected for the additional questions. Full details of the weighting are provided in the main reports on the 2008 and 2009 surveys in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents series (Speight *et al.* 2009, Smith *et al.* 2010).

### **Bases**

The tables in this report contain the total number of cases in the whole sample (i.e. all eligible 3 and 4 year olds) or the number of cases in the particular sub-group being analysed (e.g. all eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage). The total base figure includes all the eligible cases (i.e. all respondents or all respondents who were asked a particular question) minus cases with missing data (coded 'don't know' or 'not answered'). Thus, while the base description may be the same across several tables (e.g. all eligible 3 and 4 year olds), the base sizes may differ slightly due to the exclusion of those coded 'don't know' or 'not answered'.<sup>5</sup>

### **Percentages**

Due to rounding, percentage figures may not add up to exactly 100%. Furthermore, where the information in tables is based on multi-coded questions (that is, respondents were allowed to give more than one response), the percentages in the table could add up to more than 100%.

### **Statistical significance**

Throughout the report, whenever the text comments on differences between sub-groups of the sample, these differences have been tested for statistical significance using the survey commands in SPSS 15.0 or STATA 10.0, and found to be significant at the 95% confidence level or above. In the regression analysis limited to families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage, differences between sub-groups are also commented on if they are significant at the 90% confidence level only (as there were only 1309 cases used for that analysis).

### **Symbols in tables**

The symbols below have been used in the tables and they denote the following:

- [ ] percentage based on fewer than 50 respondents (unweighted)
- + percentage value of less than 0.5
- 0 percentage value of zero.

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<sup>5</sup> Occasionally the proportion of people saying 'don't know' or 'not sure' was sufficiently high to warrant showing them within the table (and therefore they are included in the base). This is particularly the case for questions about perceptions of childcare provision in the local area.

## 2 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children from different backgrounds

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines take-up of the entitlement to free early years provision by families with eligible 3 and 4 year old children.<sup>6</sup> The data used are from two surveys (2008 and 2009) in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents series and are for all children of eligible age in the families surveyed.

We explore whether take-up of the entitlement to free early years provision varies for children with different socio-demographic characteristics, and whether there are associations between take-up, and characteristics of children's families (and of mothers in particular) and of the areas where they live.

### 2.2 Take-up of early years provision and child's age

Table 2.1 shows proportions of children aged 3 and 4 who were receiving early years provision and the entitlement to free early years provision in particular. The figures are based on whether the parent reported that their child received any early years provision, as well as a separate question specifically about whether they received any 'free hours' of early years provision.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 2.1 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by age of child**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds*

	Age of child		Total
	3 years	4 years	
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>	%	%	%
Received free hours (or attended school)	77	94	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	7	2	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	3	1	2
Did not receive any early years provision	13	3	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	1272	1565	2837
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1929	2462	4391

Overall, 92% of children eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision received some form of early years provision (i.e. some free hours; some early years provision but not any free hours; or some early years provision with uncertainty about free hours).<sup>8</sup> The take-up varied by child's age, being substantially higher for 4 year olds (97%) than for 3

<sup>6</sup> Children are eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision from 1 April, 1 September or 1 January following their 3rd birthday, and are entitled to up to six terms of provision before reaching statutory school age, which is the first term following their 5th birthday. However, even though it is not compulsory for children to attend school until the first term following their 5th birthday, more than half of 4 year olds attend school full- or part-time (usually, a reception class). The base for the figures on the entitlement to free early years provision is all children who are eligible. To ensure that take-up of the entitlement to free early years provision does not appear artificially low, children attending school are included here in the proportion of children receiving their entitlement (even though parents of children who attended reception class *only* were not asked the question about free hours).

<sup>7</sup> Early years provision is defined as: nursery school, nursery class, day nursery, reception class, special day school/nursery, playgroup, childminder and other nursery education provider. For more details about these types of providers, see section 1.3 and Appendix B.

<sup>8</sup> The figures in Table 2.1 are somewhat lower than the official statistics for January 2010 that 92% of 3 year olds and 98% of 4 year olds were receiving the entitlement to free early years provision (DfE 2010). It is likely that this is due to the survey being about a *reference* term-time week when some children might not have received their entitlement due to one-off circumstances such as being away on holiday, or being ill.

year olds (87%). As shown later in this chapter, this difference by age was in large part due to the role of reception classes in providing early years provision for 4 year olds.

With regard to the entitlement to free early years provision in particular, 77% of 3 year olds and 94% of 4 year olds were receiving their entitlement (or attending primary school), according to parents' reports. Parents of 7% of 3 year olds and of 2% of 4 year olds said their children were receiving early years provision but not any free hours. In Chapter 4, we discuss our concerns around the survey estimates of how many children were receiving early years provision but not any free hours, as there is evidence suggesting that a substantial proportion of parents may have underreported their receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision.

Table 2.2 shows at which providers children received early years provision (regardless of whether they received any free hours there or not). Overall, children were receiving early years provision at a relatively wide range of providers, including nursery classes (28%), reception classes (27%), playgroups/pre-schools (19%), day nurseries (18%) and nursery schools (15%). However, for 4 year olds there was less variety of providers as about half of them (47%) were in reception classes at school.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, they were less likely than 3 year olds to attend playgroups, day nurseries and nursery schools.

**Table 2.2 Providers of early years provision attended by 3 and 4 year olds, by age of child**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds who received early years provision*

Providers of early years provision	Age of child		
	3 years	4 years	Total <sup>10</sup>
Nursery class	29	27	28
Reception class	+	47	27
Playgroup or pre-school	30	10	19
Day nursery	26	12	18
Nursery school	18	12	15
Childminder	7	7	7
Special nursery/school	1	1	1
Other nursery education provider	+	+	+
Reception / nursery class <sup>11</sup>		05	3
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>1104</i>	<i>1513</i>	<i>2617</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1631</i>	<i>2374</i>	<i>4005</i>

### 2.3 Take-up of early years provision by other child characteristics

Apart from child's age, we examined whether take-up of early years provision was associated with the following child characteristics: sex, whether they had a long-standing illness or disability, and whether they had special educational needs (SEN). The findings are discussed in this section.

With regard to child's sex, the level of take-up of early years provision by boys and girls was the same (see Table A2.1 in Appendix A).

<sup>9</sup> The true estimate of the percentage of 4 year olds attending reception classes is somewhat higher than 47%, as for 5% of 4 year olds we know that they were also attending school but do not know whether it was a reception or nursery class (see Table 2.2).

<sup>10</sup> Total includes 1% of children who received early years provision but provider could not be classified.

<sup>11</sup> These cases are from the 2008 data, where parents of 4 year olds reported their children as attending school but were not asked whether it was a reception or nursery class. In the 2009 survey, this additional question about reception v nursery class was added to the questionnaire.

Table 2.3 and Table 2.4 show how the take-up varied depending on whether the child had a long-standing illness or disability<sup>12</sup> and on whether they had special educational needs.<sup>13</sup> The small differences apparent in the tables were not statistically significant.

**Table 2.3 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by whether child has a long-standing illness or disability**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds*

	Whether child has an illness or disability		
	Yes %	No %	Total %
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>			
Received free hours (or attended school)	87	86	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	5	4	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	2	2	2
Did not receive any early years provision	7	8	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	200	2633	2833
<i>Unweighted base</i>	306	4078	4384

**Table 2.4 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by whether child has special educational needs or other special needs**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds*

	Whether child has a SEN		
	Yes %	No %	Total %
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>			
Received free hours (or attended school)	81	87	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	6	4	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	2	2	2
Did not receive any early years provision	11	8	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	133	2699	2832
<i>Unweighted base</i>	213	4168	4381

In Chapter 1 we briefly discussed the extent of research on impact and uptake of early years provision by children with disabilities and/or special needs. Given what is known from research about the beneficial impact of early years provision on such children, the finding that there were only small and non-significant differences in uptake in our sample is reassuring. This finding may reflect the growing range of practice interventions aimed at reducing this difference (Oppenheim 2007). However, it could also indicate that the survey measurements of children's disability and SEN status were not sensitive enough to identify those whose condition had a considerable impact on their ability to take part in early years provision.

<sup>12</sup> Overall, 7% of 3 and 4 year old children eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision were identified by their parents as having a long-standing illness or disability (table not shown). This figure is slightly higher than the numbers for English local authorities. These have been estimated at 3-5%, but use of definitions and practice in identification has been found to be quite variable between local authorities (Mooney *et al.* 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Five per cent of 3 and 4 year old children eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision were reported by parents as having special educational needs (tables not shown). The most recent official statistics for the incidence of stated and unstatemented SEN suggest a total of 2.5% in state funded primary and nursery schools combined (DfE, 2010). This is a bit lower than the percentage estimated in this sample. As has proven the case with the identification and definition of disability, definitions of SEN in children below the age of statementing may be quite variable and not correspond to the figures supplied in official statistics.

## 2.4 Take-up of early years provision by characteristics of family and mother

In this section, we examine whether take-up of early years provision by eligible 3 and 4 year olds varied depending on their social background and, in particular, on socio-demographic characteristics of their mothers.

Table 2.5 shows proportions of children receiving early years provision in different types of families. While the take-up was similar for children in two-parent and lone-parent families, there were substantial differences depending on the parents' work status. Children from families where both parents were in paid employment (or where the lone parent worked) were much more likely to receive early years provision than children from families where none of the parents worked or where there were two parents and only one of them worked.

**Table 2.5 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by family type and work status**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds*

Receipt of free early years provision	Couple families			Lone parents			
	Both working %	One working %	Neither working %	All couples %	Working %	Not working %	All lone parents %
Received free hours (or attended school)	92	84	76	88	88	78	81
Received early years provision but not free hours	3	4	5	4	7	6	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	1	1	3	1	2	4	3
Did not receive any early years provision	4	11	16	7	3	12	9
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>1167</i>	<i>816</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>2134</i>	<i>236</i>	<i>467</i>	<i>703</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1727</i>	<i>1367</i>	<i>271</i>	<i>3365</i>	<i>308</i>	<i>718</i>	<i>1026</i>

A similar picture emerges if we examine the take-up by mother's work status, with children of mothers who were not in paid employment being much less likely to receive early years provision than children of mothers who were working.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the number of hours mothers worked did not make a difference to whether the child received early years provision (see Table A2.2 in Appendix A).

There was a strong association between the level of family income and how likely 3 and 4 year olds were to receive early years provision. Among children from the highest income group (family annual income of £45,000 or more) only 4% were not receiving early years provision, whereas this was the case for 13% of children from the lowest income group (income under £10,000, see Table 2.6).

<sup>14</sup> Among mothers of children aged 3 and 4 and eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision, just under half (48%) were not in paid employment (table not shown).

**Table 2.6 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by family income**

Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds

Receipt of free early years provision	Family annual income					Total %
	Under £10,000 %	£10,000-19,999 %	£20,000-29,999 %	£30,000-44,999 %	£45,000 or more %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	77	78	89	90	92	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	7	6	3	3	3	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	2	3	1	1	1	2
Did not receive any early years provision	13	12	7	5	4	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	337	626	484	521	703	2671
<i>Unweighted base</i>	451	1029	794	814	1052	4140

As transport difficulties could be a potential barrier to taking up the entitlement to free early years provision, we examined whether family's access to a car was associated with children's attendance at early years provision. Table 2.7 shows that indeed, children from families where the main carer (usually mother) did not have a full driving licence or did not have access to a car, van or motorcycle were less likely to receive early years provision than those whose parents had a car at their disposal. (At the same time, as access to a car is strongly correlated with family income, it is important to look at these factors in conjunction with each other, which we do later in this chapter when using regression modelling techniques.)

**Table 2.7 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by whether main carer has full driving licence and access to a car, van or motorcycle**

Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds

Receipt of free early years provision	Whether main carer has full driving licence and access to a car, van or motorcycle		Total %
	Has licence and access to a car %	Has no licence or no access to a car %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	90	78	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	3	7	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	1	2	2
Did not receive any early years provision	6	13	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	1965	869	2833
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3042	1342	4384

Our analysis also revealed a strong association between mothers' educational qualifications and their children's receipt of early years provision. Sixteen per cent of children whose mothers had no academic qualifications were not receiving early years provision, compared with 4-10% of children of mothers who had qualifications at different levels (see Table 2.8).

**Table 2.8 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by mother's highest academic qualifications**

Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds

Receipt of free early years provision	Mother's educational level					Total <sup>15</sup> %
	First degree and higher %	A-level and equivalent %	GCSE grade A-C/GCE O-level passes and equivalent %	Lower academic qualifications %	No academic qualifications %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	93	89	87	81	76	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	3	5	4	6	5	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	1	1	2	3	3	2
Did not receive any early years provision	4	5	7	10	16	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>649</i>	<i>496</i>	<i>825</i>	<i>281</i>	<i>460</i>	<i>2791</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>942</i>	<i>740</i>	<i>1287</i>	<i>462</i>	<i>774</i>	<i>4323</i>

The number of children in the family was another characteristic that was strongly associated with children's receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision.<sup>16</sup> While having one or two children did not make a difference to whether the family was using early years provision for their 3 and 4 year old (only 5-6% of children in these families were not receiving any early years provision), the situation was different for families with three or more children, who were all less likely to take-up early years provision. For families with five or more children, as many as 19% of eligible children were not attending any early years provision (see Table 2.9).

**Table 2.9 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by number of children aged 0-14 in the household**

Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds

Receipt of free early years provision	Number of children in household					Total %
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5+ %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	87	88	85	78	76	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	5	4	4	4	3	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	3	1	2	2	2	2
Did not receive any early years provision	5	6	10	16	19	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>672</i>	<i>1366</i>	<i>564</i>	<i>165</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>2837</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>543</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>1175</i>	<i>439</i>	<i>230</i>	<i>4390</i>

<sup>15</sup> Total includes mothers who reported 'other' academic qualifications.

<sup>16</sup> Previous estimates based on major surveys (Lacovou and Berthoud 2006) suggest that large families, taking as a threshold those with four or more children, account for less than five per cent of the population of all families but for around twenty per cent of families with poor children. Ranking them in categories, one finds that up to a quarter of Pakistani and Bangladeshi families are large, with stepfamilies forming the next category of large families.

Maternal employment rates decline in line with the number of children, while larger families also tend to have lower educational levels, lower parental earnings and lower family income than other families. So it is possible that it is not the size of the family as such but their socio-demographic profile that is the major influence on whether they take-up early years provision. We explore this issue later in this chapter using logistic regression analysis, which allows us to explore the effect of the size of the family on children's receipt of early years provision controlling for any differences in work status, income, education etc. between families of different size.

Recent findings from the Millennium Cohort Study confirm the trend for large families to be less likely to use any form of early years provision (Roberts *et al.* 2010). Despite concern about low levels of uptake of early education and childcare among large families having been raised previously (Dickens *et al.* 2005), our data suggest these problems persist. Given the body of evidence for the beneficial impact of early education on disadvantaged children's educational trajectories (Sylva *et al.* 2004) and the longer-term poverty reducing effects of education and training (Machin and McNally 2006), it is important that appropriate strategies for addressing the issue continue to be developed.

Next our analysis explored the role of ethnic background in whether children were receiving early years provision. As the data on the child's own ethnicity was available for the selected child only<sup>17</sup> (and therefore the number of cases available for the analysis was only just over half that for other characteristics explored in this chapter), we focus here instead on the ethnicity of the child's mother. Table 2.10 shows that take-up of early years provision was different for children from different ethnic backgrounds. Compared with children whose mothers were White, children of Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were substantially less likely to receive early years provision. (For results using child's own ethnicity as defined by their parents, see Table A2.3 in Appendix A.)

**Table 2.10 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by mother's ethnicity**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds*

Receipt of free early years provision	Mother's ethnic group								Total %
	White %	Black - Caribbean %	Black - African %	Indian %	Pakistani %	Bangladeshi %	Mixed race %	Other %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	89	74	71	91	72	[64]	87	75	87
Received early years provision but not free hours	4	17	9	4	4	[13]	6	10	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	1	3	5		3	[3]		3	2
Did not receive any early years provision	7	6	16	5	20	[19]	7	12	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	2199	49	80	51	88	26	40	85	2617
<i>Unweighted base</i>	3423	63	129	77	157	46	59	117	4071

These figures are in line with those from earlier parent surveys which found a proportionally lower use of early education and childcare among parents from different ethnic backgrounds compared with White families (Bell *et al.* 2005; Kazimirski *et al.* 2006).

<sup>17</sup> The 'selected child' is one child per family selected randomly. The surveys collected more detailed information about the 'selected child' than about other children in the family (see Smith *et al.* 2010) for further details about the survey methodology).

The links identified between ethnicity and greater poverty levels, lower educational qualifications and larger family size are related to this lower level of use of early years provision. In addition, differences in work patterns, language difficulties and levels of trust in staff may all affect uptake (Oppenheim, 2007), while qualitative studies also report different attitudes towards work, family and early years provision at the level of minority ethnic parents and communities (Aston *et al.* 2007; Roberts 2008).

Recent analyses of data from the Millennium Cohort Study reveal differences in intellectual development between different ethnic groups compared with White children, particularly for Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean children at age 5 (Dearden and Sibieta 2010). These and other gaps are primarily linked to mediating factors such as family education and income levels, whose role has been mentioned already.

The research literature consistently finds adult inequality and lack of social mobility being linked to early and persistent gaps in achievement and behaviour. Early years factors affecting the 2000 Millennium cohort are not found to be much different in this respect from the 1970 and mid-1980s cohorts (Blanden and Machin 2010). These and our own findings would seem to reinforce the need to make early years provision attainable, attractive and acceptable to Black and minority ethnic communities.

## 2.5 Take-up of early years provision by region and area characteristics

In this section, we examine how take-up of early years provision varied by region and by such area characteristics as levels of urbanisation and of multiple deprivation.

Focussing first on region and level of urbanisation, there were some variations in the proportions of children receiving early years provision in different regions of England, with the main difference being between London, where the take-up was the lowest at 88%, and all of the other regions where it was higher (see Table A2.4 in Appendix A). Outside of London, the take-up was slightly higher in rural than in urban areas (95% and 93% respectively, see Table 2.11).

**Table 2.11 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by region and area urbanisation**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds*

	Region and area urbanisation			Total %
	London %	Outside London - Urban %	Outside London - Rural <sup>18</sup> %	
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>				
Received free hours (or attended school)	76	87	93	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	9	4	1	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	3	2	0	2
Did not receive any early years provision	12	7	5	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	488	1915	435	2837
<i>Unweighted base</i>	614	3045	732	4391

<sup>18</sup> This category also includes sparsely populated urban areas.

London's socio-economic conditions differ considerably from those elsewhere in the country and this appears to make itself felt in the uptake of early education and childcare. Among the characteristics differentiating London from the other English regions are:

- The highest child poverty rates in England: 48% compared with 30% nationally;
- Low maternal employment rates: 54% compared with 65% of mothers nationally;
- Childcare costs being 25% higher than in other regions, and;
- The lowest uptake of Working Tax Credit in the country.

Low qualification levels, high rates of worklessness and considerable income inequalities that disproportionately affect Black and minority ethnic, and lone parent families are typical of the London population as a whole. Other factors influencing childcare uptake and employment rates, and particularly affecting London women, include relatively high levels of lone motherhood, atypical working patterns in various industries, low pay and a relatively high gender pay gap, in the context of high housing, living and transport costs. All these conditions are documented in a series of GLA Economics reports on women in London's economy published since 2005 (Mayor and GLA Economics 2005).

The London Childcare Affordability Programme started off in 2005 as a pilot intervention addressing these issues. Its aims included the creation of a range of up to 10,000 affordable childcare places with childminders and in group settings in order to promote equality of opportunity for children and families and help eradicate child poverty in the capital by 2020. To date its aims have only been partially realised in the face of such sizeable economic challenges (SQW Consulting 2009).

We have also explored the relationship between the level of multiple deprivation in the area as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation and how likely 3 and 4 year olds were to receive early years provision, and found a strong association. In the least deprived areas only 3% of children were not receiving early years provision, whereas this figure was as high as 13% in the most deprived areas (see Table 2.12).

**Table 2.12 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by area deprivation**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds*

Receipt of free early years provision	Index of multiple deprivation					Total %
	1 <sup>st</sup> quintile - least deprived %	2nd quintile %	3rd quintile %	4th quintile %	5 <sup>th</sup> quintile - most deprived %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	94	91	89	84	77	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	2	3	4	5	7	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	1	1	1	2	3	2
Did not receive any early years provision	3	4	6	9	13	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>525</i>	<i>495</i>	<i>515</i>	<i>589</i>	<i>714</i>	<i>2837</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>832</i>	<i>792</i>	<i>780</i>	<i>874</i>	<i>1113</i>	<i>4391</i>

## 2.6 Take-up of early years provision by level of multiple disadvantage experienced by the family

In this section, we examine how take-up of early years provision varied by level of multiple disadvantage experienced by the family.

As shown in Table 2.13, there was a clear pattern of association between the level of multiple disadvantage experienced by the family and the receipt of early years provision by 3 and 4 year olds: in families experiencing no disadvantage only 3% of children were not attending any early years providers, whereas the proportion was higher for families experiencing some or a lot of disadvantage, with the highest figure (13%) found among the most disadvantaged families.

**Table 2.13 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by level of multiple disadvantage experienced by family**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds*

Receipt of free early years provision	Level of multiple disadvantage				Total %
	1 (No) %	2 %	3 %	4 (High) %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	94	89	85	77	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	3	3	6	6	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	1	2	1	3	2
Did not receive any early years provision	3	6	9	13	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>793</i>	<i>607</i>	<i>630</i>	<i>807</i>	<i>2837</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1045</i>	<i>979</i>	<i>1032</i>	<i>1335</i>	<i>4391</i>

Table 2.14 shows that there were also differences in the types of providers attended by children depending on the level of disadvantage experienced by their families. Children from the most disadvantaged families were more likely to receive their early years provision at nursery classes and less likely to receive it at playgroups/pre-schools, day nurseries and childminders. Attendance at reception classes and nursery schools did not vary by level of multiple disadvantage.

**Table 2.14 Providers of early years provision attended by 3 and 4 year olds, by level of multiple disadvantage experienced by family**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds who received early years provision*

Providers of early years provision	Level of multiple disadvantage				Total <sup>19</sup> %
	1 (No) %	2 %	3 %	4 (High) %	
Nursery class	22	26	28	37	28
Reception class	27	29	27	27	27
Playgroup or pre-school	24	21	18	12	19
Day nursery	22	18	17	13	18
Nursery school	14	14	15	15	15
Childminder	10	7	6	2	7
Special nursery/school	+	1	1	2	1
Other nursery education provider	+	+	+	+	+
Reception / nursery class <sup>20</sup>	2	3	4	4	3
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>773</i>	<i>570</i>	<i>575</i>	<i>699</i>	<i>2617</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1017</i>	<i>915</i>	<i>934</i>	<i>1139</i>	<i>4005</i>

In Chapter 3, we focus exclusively on the most disadvantaged families and examine what distinguishes those of them who were using early years provision for their children (87%) from those who were not (13%).

## 2.7 Key characteristics associated with the take-up of early years provision

Take-up of early years provision has been shown to vary depending on characteristics associated with where a child lives and their social background. It is likely that the factors that determine take-up of early years provision are interrelated. For example, mothers' higher academic qualifications tend to be associated with higher rates of employment and to lead to higher family incomes, deprived areas have more non-working lower-income families than affluent areas, and lower-income families are less likely to have access to a car. In order to disentangle these effects, we have undertaken logistic regression analysis. In this section we discuss its findings.

All variables that were explored in the bivariate analysis in sections 2.2-2.5 were initially included in the logistic regression. However, the model displayed in Table 2.15 includes only the variables that were found to be significantly associated with take-up of early years provision, while controlling for all other variables in the model.

<sup>19</sup> Total includes 1% of children who received early years provision but provider could not be classified.

<sup>20</sup> These cases are from the 2008 data, where parents of 4 year olds reported their children as attending school but were not asked whether it was a reception or nursery class. In the 2009 survey, this additional question about reception v nursery class was added to the questionnaire.

**Table 2.15 Logistic regression model for receipt of early years provision***Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds*

	Odds ratio	SE
<b>Child's age (3 years old)</b>		
4 years old	***5.42	0.88
<b>Family type (Couple)</b>		
Lone parent	*1.44	0.23
<b>Mother's employment status (Not working)</b>		
Working full- or part-time	***1.98	0.32
<b>Family annual income (£20,000+)</b>		
Under £20,000	**0.64	0.11
<b>Mother's educational level (No academic qualifications)</b>		
First degree or higher	***2.67	0.68
A-level and equivalent	**2.32	0.57
GCSE grade A-C/GCE O-level passes and equivalent	**1.66	0.31
Lower academic qualifications	1.41	0.34
<b>Number of children in household (1)</b>		
2	0.71	0.17
3	**0.47	0.12
4	***0.35	0.10
5+	**0.37	0.12
<b>Region and area urbanisation (London)</b>		
Outside London – Urban	**1.69	0.31
Outside London – Rural	1.70	0.47
<b>Area deprivation (least deprived)</b>		
2nd quintile	0.88	0.23
3rd quintile	0.73	0.20
4th quintile	*0.58	0.16
5th quintile – most deprived	**0.51	0.13
<i>Weighted base</i>		2791
<i>Unweighted base</i>		4322

Note: \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Odds ratio >1 indicates higher odds of receiving early years provision, and odds ratio <1 indicates lower odds, compared with the reference category in bold and brackets. Children with missing values for any of the variables in the analysis were excluded from the models, with the exception of those with missing income, who were included as a separate category (because of the relatively large proportion of missingness at this variable) but are not shown in the table. Children of mothers with 'other' academic qualifications were also included in the model but are not shown in the table.

The dependent, or outcome, variable used in the logistic regression was receipt of early years provision, so each child has a value of 1 (received early years provision) or 0 (has not received early years provision). The figures presented in the table are odds ratios (ORs). These describe the odds of a child receiving early years provision which are associated with each factor. As all variables in the model are categorical, each odds ratio represents a ratio of the odds of receiving early years provision for the named category in the table (using child's age as an example, 4 year olds) to the odds of receiving early years provision for the 'reference category' of that same measure (in this example, 3 year olds). A figure above 1 means that the factor is associated with increased odds of receiving early years provision, and a value below 1 means the factor is associated with decreased odds of receiving early years provision.

The model shows that the age of the child, family type, mother's employment status, family annual income, mother's educational level, number of children in the household,

region and area urbanisation, and deprivation were all significantly associated with take-up of early years provision (see Table 2.15).

Variables that were associated with take-up of early years provision in the bivariate analysis but were no longer significant were access to a car and ethnicity.

Sex of the child, whether they had a long-standing illness or disability and their SEN status were not associated with their receipt of early years provision either in the bivariate analysis or in the logistic regression model.

The model shows that, when controlling for all other variables, 4 year olds were much more likely to receive early years provision than 3 year olds (OR: 5.42). As for characteristics of children's families, children from lone-parent families were more likely to receive early years provision than children from couple households (OR: 1.44). This effect was not evident in the bivariate analysis presented earlier in the chapter (see Table 2.5). Lone-parent households tend to have lower incomes, and children from lower-income households were less likely to receive early years provision (OR: 0.64). It is likely that this was masking the lone-parent effect in the bivariate analysis because income had not been controlled for.

The odds of children receiving early years provision were twice as big if their mother worked than if she did not work (OR: 1.98), and children of mothers with qualifications at GCSE/O-level and higher were more likely to receive early years provision than those whose mothers did not have any academic qualifications. Finally, children from larger families (3+ children aged 0-14) were less likely to receive early years provision than those from families with only one child.

Where children lived was pertinent to whether they were receiving early years provision. Those living outside of London in urban areas were more likely to receive early years provision than those living in London. Finally, the level of multiple deprivation in the area was important even when we took account of differences in socio-demographic profile among families living in different types of areas: children living in areas that fell into the two most deprived quintiles of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) had odds of receiving early years provision that were just half as big (ORs: 0.51 and 0.58) as those for children living in the areas falling into the most affluent quintile of IMD (see Table 2.15).

## 2.8 Summary

- Overall, 92% of 3 and 4 year olds who were eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision received some form of early years provision in 2008-2009.
- Four year olds were more likely to receive early years provision (97%) than three year olds (87%), which is largely explained by the prominent role played by reception classes in providing early years provision for 4 year olds.
- Children were receiving early years provision at a relatively wide range of providers including nursery classes (28%), reception classes (27%), playgroups/pre-schools (19%), day nurseries (18%) and nursery schools (15%).
- The take-up of early years provision was similar for boys and girls, and it did not vary by whether the child had a long-standing illness or disability or by whether they had special educational needs.
- Children from lone-parent families were more likely to receive early years provision than those from two-parent families when the analysis took account of differences in work status, income and other socio-demographic characteristics between these two types of families. (There was no difference in the overall percentages of take-up of early years provision for children from lone- and two-parent families.)

- There was a strong association with family income, with children from lower-income families being less likely to receive early years provision than those from higher-income families.
- Children whose parents had access to a car had higher rates of take-up of early years provision than those without such access. However, once we controlled for income (as car ownership is correlated with income levels), the effect of access to a car became insignificant.
- Children whose mothers were in paid employment were more likely to receive early years provision than those whose mothers did not work.
- Children whose mothers had no academic qualifications were less likely to receive early years provision than those whose mothers had qualifications, especially at higher levels.
- There was a strong association between the take-up of early years provision and family size, with children from larger families (i.e. with three or more children) being much less likely to receive early years provision than children from smaller families.
- Compared with children whose mothers were White, children of Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were substantially less likely to receive early years provision. However, once the analysis controlled for differences in socio-demographic profile between families from different ethnic backgrounds, the effect of ethnicity on uptake of early years provision was no longer significant.
- The take-up of early years provision was the lowest in London compared with other regions of England.
- Children living in deprived areas were less likely to receive early years provision than those living in more affluent areas.
- There was a strong association between the level of multiple disadvantage experienced by the family and their take-up of early years provision. In families experiencing no disadvantage only 3% of children were not attending any early years providers, whereas the proportion was higher for families experiencing some or a lot of disadvantage, with the highest figure (13%) found among the most disadvantaged families.
- Children from the most disadvantaged families were more likely to receive their early years provision at nursery classes and less likely to receive it at playgroups/pre-schools, day nurseries and childminders. Attendance at reception classes and nursery schools did not vary by level of multiple disadvantage.

### 3 Focus on families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage – what distinguishes those who take-up early years provision and those who do not?

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we restrict our analysis to families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage (from 4-9 factors of disadvantage as defined by our measure of multiple disadvantage). Twenty-eight per cent of children in the study were living in these most disadvantaged families. (For more information on our measure of multiple disadvantage, see section 1.4.)

As discussed in Chapter 2, children from families experiencing multiple disadvantage were less likely to receive early years provision than those from families with no or few factors of disadvantage. Among children from the most disadvantaged families, 13% were not attending any early years provision, which was higher than in other types of families (3-9%, see Table 2.13).

In this chapter, we explore what distinguishes those families who were and were not using early years provision for their 3 and 4 year olds. We highlight where the relationships between children’s socio-demographic characteristics and their take-up of early years provision were different among the disadvantaged families from those among all families in the study. In addition to examining socio-demographic influences, we consider the role of perceptions of local childcare and nursery education (its availability, quality and affordability) and of how well informed parents were about local childcare options.

#### 3.2 Take-up of early years provision by child characteristics

Table 3.1 shows that the take-up of early years provision among disadvantaged families varied substantially by age of child. Among 4 year olds only 5% were not receiving any early years provision, whereas the figure was as high as 24% for 3 year olds.

This age difference is greater than that seen for all families where 3% of 4 year olds received no early years provision compared with 13% of 3 year olds (see Table 2.1). This highlights the role that the entitlement to free early years provision for disadvantaged 2 year olds could have to play in targeting disadvantaged families early and improving take-up of early years provision at age 3 (Smith *et al.* 2009b).

**Table 3.1 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by age of child**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Age of child		
	3 years %	4 years %	Total %
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>			
Received free hours (or attended school)	61	91	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	10	2	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	6	1	3
Did not receive any early years provision	24	5	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	364	443	807
<i>Unweighted base</i>	592	743	1335

While for all children in the study there were no differences in the take-up of early years provision between girls and boys (see Chapter 2), there were differences among the most disadvantaged families, with girls being more likely to attend early years provision than boys (see Table 3.2). This finding can be linked with those of other studies, which found that parents were more likely to engage in home learning activities such as reading aloud and teaching songs and nursery rhymes with girls than with boys (Smith *et al.* 2009a, Sylva *et al.* 2004). However, as discussed later in this chapter (see section 3.5), once our analysis controlled for other socio-demographic characteristics of children and their families, sex of the child was no longer statistically significant.

**Table 3.2 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by sex of child**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Sex of child		
	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>			
Received free hours (or attended school)	74	81	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	6	5	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	4	3	3
Did not receive any early years provision	16	11	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>430</i>	<i>378</i>	<i>807</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>713</i>	<i>622</i>	<i>1335</i>

Similarly to what was found for all children in the study, among the most disadvantaged families there were no differences in the take-up of early years provision between children who had and did not have a long-standing illness or disability and between children with and without special educational needs (see Table A3.1 and Table A3.2 in Appendix A).

### 3.3 Take-up of early years provision by characteristics of family and mother

In this section, we examine relationships between children's take-up of early years provision and various socio-demographic characteristics of their families. Since various socio-demographic parameters were used to construct the index of multiple disadvantage (e.g. family type, work status and income), there was not as much variety in this regard among families in the most disadvantaged group as among all families in the study. In order to avoid having sub-groups of very small sizes, we have grouped some socio-demographic categories together. Furthermore, some types of analyses undertaken in Chapter 2 could not be replicated for the most disadvantaged families (e.g. analysis of the role of ethnicity) as some of the sub-groups were very small and we could not derive reliable estimates of their use of early years provision.

Turning first to the relationship between family type and whether children were receiving early years provision, children of lone parents were more likely to attend early years provision than those in two-parent families (89% and 82% respectively, see Table 3.3). This finding is consistent with our findings for all children in the study, although for all children the association could be detected only when other socio-demographic variables were controlled for (see Chapter 2).

**Table 3.3 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by family type**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Family type		
	Couple %	Lone parent %	Total %
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>			
Received free hours (or attended school)	75	79	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	5	6	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	2	4	3
Did not receive any early years provision	18	11	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	264	544	807
<i>Unweighted base</i>	498	837	1335

Children of mothers who were in paid employment were more likely to receive early years provision than those whose mothers did not work (92% and 85% respectively, see Table 3.4). (The majority of children in the most disadvantaged families – 83% – were being brought up by mothers who were not working; table not shown.)

**Table 3.4 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by mother's employment status**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Mother's employment status		
	Not working %	Working full- or part-time %	Total %
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>			
Received free hours (or attended school)	76	84	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	6	5	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	3	3	3
Did not receive any early years provision	15	8	14
<i>Weighted base</i>	666	132	798
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1115	206	1321

There was also an association with family income, with children in lower-income families (under £20,000) being less likely to receive early years provision than those in higher-income families (£20,000 or more) (see Table 3.5). (The majority of children in the most disadvantaged families – 90% – were living in households with annual gross income of under £20,000; table not shown).

**Table 3.5 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by family income**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

Receipt of free early years provision	Family annual income			Total %
	Up to £9,999 %	£10,000-19,999 %	£20,000 or more %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	78	75	86	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	7	5	4	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	2	4	3	4
Did not receive any early years provision	13	15	7	14
<i>Weighted base</i>	293	406	79	777
<i>Unweighted base</i>	393	724	172	1289

We examined whether access to a car or other vehicle was associated with the take-up of early years provision and found that this parameter did not make a difference among the most disadvantaged families (see Table A3.3 in Appendix A).

At the same time, mother's educational level was associated with the children's take-up of early years provision. Among children of mothers who had no academic qualifications 17% were not receiving early years provision, whereas this was the case for only 5% of children whose mothers had qualifications at A level or higher (see Table 3.6).

**Table 3.6 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by mother's highest academic qualifications**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

Receipt of free early years provision	Mother's educational level				Total <sup>21</sup> %
	A-level and higher %	GCSE grade A-C / GCE O-level passes and equivalent %	Lower academic qualifications %	No academic qualifications %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	85	77	75	75	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	8	6	6	5	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	3	4	5	3	3
Did not receive any early years provision	5	13	14	17	14
<i>Weighted base</i>	116	210	153	298	790
<i>Unweighted base</i>	168	346	252	524	1310

Similarly to what we found for all children in the study, among the most disadvantaged families children from larger households (that is, with four or more children) were less likely to receive early years provision than children from families that had just one child (see Table 3.7).

<sup>21</sup> Total includes mothers who reported 'other' academic qualifications.

**Table 3.7 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by number of children aged 0-14 in the household**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

Receipt of free early years provision	Number of children in household					Total %
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5+ %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	80	77	78	74	72	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	4	8	5	4	5	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	6	2	2	3	2	3
Did not receive any early years provision	10	13	15	19	21	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>204</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>807</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>169</i>	<i>387</i>	<i>419</i>	<i>207</i>	<i>152</i>	<i>1334</i>

### 3.4 Take-up of early years provision by region and area characteristics

Turning now to variations by region and area characteristics, children living in London were less likely to receive early years provision than children living outside of London, particularly those living in rural areas (see Table 2.11), although the difference between London and urban areas outside of London was only marginally significant at  $p < 0.06$ .

**Table 3.8 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by region and area urbanisation**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

Receipt of free early years provision	Region and area urbanisation			Total %
	London %	Outside London - Urban %	Outside London - Rural <sup>22</sup> %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	67	79	91	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	9	5	1	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	5	3	1	3
Did not receive any early years provision	18	13	7	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>182</i>	<i>569</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>807</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>253</i>	<i>972</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>1335</i>

The level of deprivation in the area as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) did not appear to make a difference to the children's take-up of early years provision (see Table A3.4 in Appendix A).

<sup>22</sup> This category also includes sparsely populated urban areas.

### **3.5 Key characteristics associated with the take-up of early years provision**

In this section, we explore which child, family and area characteristics were associated with receipt of early years provision by children from disadvantaged families even when other characteristics were taken into account. The method we use is logistic regression analysis.

All variables that were explored in the bivariate analysis in sections 3.2-3.4 were initially included in the logistic regression model. However, the model shown in Table 3.9 includes only the variables that were found to be significantly associated with take-up of early years provision by children from disadvantaged families while controlling for other variables in the model.

The model shows that age of the child, family type, mother's employment status, family income, mother's educational level, number of children in the household and region were all found to be significantly associated with take-up of early years provision by children from disadvantaged backgrounds (see Table 3.9).

In the bivariate analysis, the take-up also varied for boys and girls (see Table 3.2). However, when we controlled for other socio-demographic variables, sex of the child was no longer significant.

There was no association between take-up of early years provision and child's disability and SEN status, family's access to a car and the level of multiple deprivation in the area they lived in – either in the bivariate analysis or in the logistic regression model.

**Table 3.9 Logistic regression model for receipt of early years provision by children in disadvantaged families**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Odds ratio	SE
<b>Child's age (3 years old)</b>		
4 years old	***6.88	1.57
<b>Family type (Couple)</b>		
Lone parent	*1.52	0.33
<b>Mother's employment status (Not working)</b>		
Working full- or part-time	†1.66	0.51
<b>Family annual income (£20,000+)</b>		
Under £20,000	**0.34	0.11
<b>Mother's educational level (No academic qualifications)</b>		
A-level or higher	***4.50	1.87
GCSE grade A-C/GCE O-level passes and equivalent	1.29	0.32
Lower academic qualifications	1.10	0.31
<b>Number of children in household (1)</b>		
2	0.74	0.29
3	†0.50	0.19
4	*0.42	0.17
5+	*0.38	0.17
<b>Region and area urbanisation (London)</b>		
Outside London – Urban	**2.10	0.54
Outside London – Rural	*3.43	1.92
<i>Weighted base</i>		790
<i>Unweighted base</i>		1309

Note: † p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Odds ratio >1 indicates higher odds of receiving early years provision, and odds ratio <1 indicates lower odds, compared with the reference category in bold and brackets. Children with missing values for any of the variables in the analysis were excluded from the models, with the exception of those with missing income, who were included as a separate category (because of the relatively large proportion of missingness at this variable) but are not shown in the table. Children of mothers with 'other' academic qualifications were also included in the model but are not shown in the table.

As shown in Table 3.9, similarly to what was found for all children in the study, 4 year olds from highly disadvantaged families were much more likely to receive early years provision than 3 year olds (OR: 6.88). The odds of children receiving early years provision were one and a half times as big if their parents were lone parents than if they were a couple (OR: 1.52). Children from families with annual income under £20,000 were less likely to receive early years provision than those from families with income of £20,000 and over (OR: 0.34). Children whose mothers worked were marginally more likely to receive early years provision than those whose mothers did not work (OR: 1.66, significant at p<0.1). Furthermore, there was a strong effect of mothers' educational level: where mothers had qualifications at A-level or higher, the odds of children receiving early years provision were 4.5 times higher than for those whose mothers had no academic qualifications. Finally, similarly to what we found for all children, among children from disadvantaged families those from larger households were less likely to receive early years provision than those from families with just one child (see Table 3.9).

Turning to region and area characteristics, children living outside of London, whether in urban or rural areas, were more likely to receive early years provision than those living in London (ORs: 2.10 and 3.43), even after controlling for differences in socio-demographic profile between those living in London and elsewhere (see Table 3.9).

### 3.6 Perceptions of local childcare and use of the entitlement to free early years provision

While previous sections of this chapter focused on socio-demographic characteristics of children themselves and their families, in this section we explore the role of parents' views about childcare. Namely, we examine the relationship between children's receipt of early years provision and their parents' perceptions of availability, quality and affordability of local nursery education and childcare, as well as their self-assessment of how well informed they were about local childcare options. We should be aware, however, that the questions asked in the survey focused on local formal childcare and nursery education in general and were not specifically about early years provision for 3 and 4 year olds.

As shown in Table 3.10, it was not children whose parents held negative views of the availability of local childcare who were least likely to receive early years provision. Instead, it was children whose parents did not know how to answer the availability question (19% of children whose parents did not have an opinion on the childcare availability were not receiving early years provision, compared with 13% of all children in the most disadvantaged families). This suggests that lack of knowledge about local early years provision might be a substantial barrier to taking it up.

**Table 3.10 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by parents' perceptions of childcare availability**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Parents' perceptions childcare availability				Total %
	About the right number or too many %	Not enough %	Not sure %		
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>					
Received free hours (or attended school)	81	75	73		77
Received early years provision but not free hours	5	6	6		6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	4	4	1		3
Did not receive any early years provision	11	14	19		13
<i>Weighted base</i>	372	305	131		807
<i>Unweighted base</i>	600	512	223		1335

A similar pattern was found with regard to perceptions of childcare quality: over a quarter (26%) of children whose parents did not have an opinion about the quality of local childcare and nursery education were not receiving early years provision. At the same time, the figures were similar for families where parents' views were positive (10%) and where they were negative (12%) (see Table 3.11).

**Table 3.11 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by parents' perceptions of childcare quality**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Parents' perceptions childcare quality			
	Very or fairly good %	Very or fairly poor %	Not sure %	Total %
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>				
Received free hours (or attended school)	82	75	64	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	5	8	6	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	3	4	3	3
Did not receive any early years provision	10	12	26	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>537</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>157</i>	<i>807</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>880</i>	<i>188</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>1335</i>

A somewhat similar pattern of differences appeared to apply to parents' perceptions of affordability of local childcare (see Table 3.12). However, the apparent differences were much less pronounced than for other types of perceptions and were not statistically significant.

**Table 3.12 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by parents' perceptions of childcare affordability**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Parents' perceptions childcare affordability			
	Very or fairly good %	Very or fairly poor %	Not sure %	Total %
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>				
Received free hours (or attended school)	79	77	76	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	7	6	4	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	4	3	4	3
Did not receive any early years provision	11	14	17	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>278</i>	<i>324</i>	<i>206</i>	<i>807</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>431</i>	<i>555</i>	<i>349</i>	<i>1335</i>

Table 3.13 shows the relationship between the take-up of early years provision and the amount of information about childcare or nursery education that parents felt was available to them. Overall, there were no significant differences in percentages. However, the pattern of apparent differences was somewhat similar to what we found with regard to parents' perceptions of childcare availability and quality: that is, children of parents who were not sure about the information available to them appeared less likely to receive early years provision.

**Table 3.13 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by level of information available about childcare**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Level of information available about childcare			
	About right or too much %	Too little %	Not sure %	Total %
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>				
Received free hours (or attended school)	80	75	74	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	4	7	6	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	3	4	1	3
Did not receive any early years provision	12	13	19	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>379</i>	<i>346</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>807</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>627</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>1335</i>

### 3.7 Summary

- Among families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage, there were large differences in the take-up of early years provision by child's age: among 4 year olds only 5% were not receiving any early years provision, whereas the figure was 24% for 3 year olds. This age difference is greater than that seen for all families and highlights the role that the entitlement to free early years provision for disadvantaged 2 year olds could have to play in targeting disadvantaged families early and improving take-up of early years provision at age 3.
- Girls from disadvantaged families were more likely to receive early years provision than boys. However, when the analysis controlled for other socio-demographic characteristics, this difference was no longer statistically significant.
- There were no differences in the take-up of early years provision between children with and without a long-standing illness or disability and between children with and without special educational needs.
- Children of lone parents were more likely to receive early years provision than those from two-parent families.
- Children of mothers who were in paid employment were more likely to receive early years provision than those whose mothers did not work. There was also an association with family income, with children from lower-income families being less likely to receive early years provision. There was, however, no association between the take-up of early years provision and family's access to a car.
- Mother's educational level was associated with their children's take-up of early years provision: among children of mothers who had no academic qualifications 17% were not receiving early years provision, whereas this was the case for only 5% of children whose mothers had qualifications at A level or higher.
- Children from larger households (that is, with four or more children) were less likely to receive early years provision than children from families that had just one child.
- Children living in London were less likely to receive early years provision than children living outside of London.
- The level of deprivation in the area did not appear to make a difference to the take-up of early years provision by children from the most disadvantaged families.

- Parents' negative perceptions of the availability of places at local providers of nursery education and childcare, and of the quality of local provision were not a barrier to their use of the entitlement to free early years provision. Instead, it appears that lack of knowledge about local early years provision was a substantial barrier to taking it up.

## 4 Reasons for not using the entitlement to free early years provision

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we focus on two groups of children: first, those who did not receive any early years provision and, second, those who received early years provision but whose parents reported not receiving any 'free hours'. In the analysis, we focus on awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision by those who were not taking it up and on whether this lack of awareness was a particular barrier for disadvantaged families. We also explore reasons given by parents for why their children were not receiving early years provision or any free hours in particular. Finally, we examine the types of providers of early years provision attended by children who received early years provision but not any free hours, and whether these providers were different for families experiencing different levels of disadvantage.

### 4.2 Children not receiving early years provision

As discussed in Chapter 2, 8% of children aged 3 and 4 and eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision were not receiving any early years provision (see Table 2.1). In this section, we focus on these children and examine what their parents said about their awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision and reasons for not taking it up.

The data used in this section was not collected for all children in the family but only for the 'selected child', that is, one child per family chosen randomly. This limits the number of cases available for the analysis and therefore the complexity of analysis that could be carried out.

#### ***Awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision***

Table 4.1 shows that parents of 38% of children eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision, but not receiving any early years provision, were not aware that the government paid for some hours of nursery education per week for children aged 3 and 4. Low awareness of their entitlement was a particular barrier for the highly disadvantaged families, as parents of 50% of children in these families were not aware of their entitlement, compared with parents of 26% of children in less or non-disadvantaged families.

**Table 4.1 Awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision among parents not taking up early years provision, by multiple disadvantage**

*Base: Selected eligible 3 and 4 year olds who were not receiving early years provision*

Awareness	Level of multiple disadvantage		Total
	No / Low	High	
	%	%	%
Aware	74	50	62
Not aware	26	50	38
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>166</i>

### **Other reasons for not using early years provision**

Those parents who were aware of their entitlement were asked why their children were not using it. Parents of a third of children (33%) reported various constraining factors, the main one being availability of places at local providers. Parents from the most disadvantaged families were more likely to report constraining factors than those from families experiencing less or no disadvantage (47% and 23% respectively, see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Reasons for not using early years provision, by multiple disadvantage**

*Base: Selected eligible 3 and 4 year olds who were not receiving early years provision but whose parents were aware of their entitlement*

Reasons for not using early years provision	Level of multiple disadvantage		Total %
	No / Low %	High %	
Personal preference not to use early years provision	51	[42]	47
Constraining factors incl. availability, affordability, session length etc.	23	[47]	33
One-off circumstances (e.g. holiday)	25	[13]	20
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>105</i>

Note: Parents could mention several reasons for not using early years provision.

Personal preferences not to send their child to an early years provider were reported by parents of 47% of children, and one-off circumstances (e.g. being on holiday in the term-time week the survey asked about) were reported by parents of 20% of children. While some differences in the percentages by level of disadvantage experienced by the family are apparent in the table, they were not statistically significant.<sup>23</sup>

### **4.3 Children not receiving the entitlement to free early years provision**

Whereas in the previous section of this chapter we focused on children who did not receive any early years provision, in this section we focus on children who attended early years providers but whose parents reported that they did not receive any free hours.

#### **Data limitations**

As discussed in Chapter 2, parents of 4% of eligible 3 and 4 year old children reported that their children attended early years provision but did not receive any free hours in the term-time week the survey asked about (see Table 2.1). This figure, however, should be interpreted with caution. Some of the evidence presented in this section suggests that a significant proportion of these children might in fact have been benefiting from the entitlement to free early years provision but their parents did not realise it as they were confused about how the entitlement works. For example, this is likely to be the case for children who were attending nursery classes attached to schools. Also, it is possible that some parents might not have understood the fee structure at providers who charged for some hours but provided others for free.

The data analysed in this section was available for all children in the family (i.e. not only for the selected child) as long as they were receiving early years provision but not any free

<sup>23</sup> The total number of cases available for the analysis of reasons for not taking up early years provision was 105, which means that the differences by level of disadvantage needed to be exceptionally large in order to be statistically significant.

hours. However, as noted above, only 4% of children fell into this category, which means that the number of cases available for the analysis was rather low and this limited the types of sub-group analysis that could be carried out.

### ***Providers of early years provision attended by children***

The type of provider attended most frequently by children whose parents believed that they did not receive any free hours of early years provision was a nursery class attached to a school. This type of provider was attended by 40% of children in this group, and by similar proportions of children from families experiencing no/low level of disadvantage and a high level of disadvantage (see Table A4.1 in Appendix A). It is likely that many of these children were in fact receiving some free hours but their parents did not recognise them as such.

Eleven per cent of children who received early years provision but not any free hours were attending childminders, and this proportion varied substantially by level of disadvantage experienced by the family: from 17% of children from families experiencing no or a low level of disadvantage to only 1% of children from highly disadvantaged families (see Table A4.1 in Appendix A). As discussed in Smith *et al.* (2010), it is very unusual for children attending childminders to receive their free hours there. This suggests that either a very low proportion of childminders meet the eligibility criteria to be able to provide the entitlement to free early years provision or there is low awareness among parents that they could take-up their entitlement at a childminder.

### ***Awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision***

Those parents whose children received early years provision but not any free hours were asked whether they were aware that the government paid for some hours of nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds. Parents of almost half of children (45%) said they were not aware of their entitlement. Low awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision was a particular barrier for disadvantaged families: parents of 70% of children in these families were not aware of their entitlement, compared with parents of 31% of children in families experiencing little or no disadvantage, see Table A4.2 in Appendix A).

### ***Other reasons for not receiving the entitlement to free early years provision***

Those who were aware of the entitlement to free early years provision were asked about their reasons for not using it, and about a third mentioned that their provider did not offer any free hours (table not shown). Other reasons mentioned included one-off circumstances and a degree of uncertainty about whether their child was old enough and eligible to receive any free hours.<sup>24</sup>

## **4.4 Summary**

- Parents of 38% of children eligible for the entitlement to free early years provision but not receiving any early years provision were not aware that the government paid for some hours of nursery education per week for children aged 3 and 4. Low awareness of their entitlement was a particular barrier for the highly disadvantaged families, as parents of 50% of children in these families were not aware of their entitlement, compared with parents of 26% of children in less or non-disadvantaged families.
- Those parents who were aware of the free early years provision were asked why they were not using it. Parents of 47% of children mentioned personal preferences, parents of 33% of children reported various constraining factors such as lack of places at local providers, and parents of 20% of children mentioned one-off circumstances such as

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<sup>24</sup> It was not possible to compare reasons mentioned by families experiencing different levels of multiple disadvantage, as there were only 24 highly disadvantaged families who were asked this question.

being on holiday in the week the survey asked about. Parents from the most disadvantaged families were much more likely to report constraining factors as their reasons for not using their entitlement than parents from less or non-disadvantaged families (parents of 47% and 23% of children respectively mentioned these factors).

- The main reasons why some children received early years provision but not any free hours appeared to be low awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision and use of providers such as childminders who did not offer any free hours. The prevalence of these reasons varied by level of multiple disadvantage experienced by the family. Low awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision was a particular barrier to take-up for the highly disadvantaged families, while use of childminders was a factor most pertinent to families experiencing no or little disadvantage.

## 5 Hours of the entitlement to free early years provision used

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we examine the number of hours of the entitlement to free early years provision received by eligible children, and to what extent families experiencing different levels of multiple disadvantage were making full use of their entitlement. We also focus specifically on children receiving fewer than 12.5 hours per week (which was the full entitlement in most areas in 2008-2009 when the surveys took place) and examine reasons why this was the case.

### 5.2 Hours of the entitlement to free early years provision received by eligible 3 and 4 year old children

Table 5.1 shows that those children who were receiving the entitlement to free early years provision (except those who did so through attending school) received an average (median) of 12.5 free hours per week. Overall, 34% of children received fewer free hours than their full entitlement (i.e. fewer than 12.5 hours), and three year olds were more likely to receive less than their full entitlement than four year olds.

**Table 5.1 Number of free hours per week, by age of child**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds who received the entitlement to free early years provision, except those who received free hours through attending school*

Number of hours	Age of child		Total
	3 years	4 years	
	%	%	%
Fewer than 12.5 hours	38	29	34
12.5 to 14.9 hours	41	49	44
15 hours or more	21	22	21
Median	12.5	12.5	12.5
Mean	12.0	12.8	12.4
Standard error	0.1	0.2	0.1
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>912</i>	<i>585</i>	<i>1496</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1353</i>	<i>909</i>	<i>2262</i>

Comparisons by level of multiple disadvantage experienced by the family reveal that while children in all types of families received the same average (median) of 12.5 free hours per week, children from the most disadvantaged families were less likely to receive less than their full entitlement than children from less or non-disadvantaged families (25%, compared with 35-39% respectively, see Table 5.2).

**Table 5.2 Number of free hours per week, by multiple disadvantage**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds who received the entitlement to free early years provision, except those who received free hours through attending school*

Number of hours	Level of multiple disadvantage				Total %
	1 (No) %	2 %	3 %	4 (High) %	
Fewer than 12.5 hours	38	39	35	25	34
12.5 to 14.9 hours	42	44	44	47	44
15 hours or more	19	18	21	28	21
Median	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5
Mean	12.1	11.8	12.3	13.2	12.4
Standard error	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.1
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>480</i>	<i>337</i>	<i>321</i>	<i>358</i>	<i>1496</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>631</i>	<i>542</i>	<i>521</i>	<i>568</i>	<i>2262</i>

Where children received fewer than 12.5 free hours per week, parents were asked why their children did not receive more hours in the reference week. Parents of just under a half of all children (49%) reported various constraining factors, such as that they would have had to pay for more hours or that the setting had no extra sessions available. Parents of 36% of children mentioned their personal preferences not to send their child to an early years provider for more hours. Finally, for parents of 13% of children it was due to one-off circumstances that their child received fewer than 12.5 free hours in the reference week (see Table 5.3). There were no differences between answers of parents from families experiencing different levels of multiple disadvantage.

**Table 5.3 Reasons for receiving fewer than 12.5 free hours, by multiple disadvantage**

Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds who received fewer than 12.5 free hours

Reasons	Level of multiple disadvantage				Total %
	1 (No) %	2 %	3 %	4 (High) %	
<b>Constraining factors</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>49</b>
More hours would have to be paid for	25	30	27	28	27
The setting had no extra sessions available	16	14	17	19	16
The setting had extra sessions available but not at convenient times	4	3	4	5	4
This was all the child was offered / entitled to	2	2	2	1	2
The setting is difficult to get to	+	+	3	0	1
<b>Personal preference</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>36</b>
Did not need childcare for the child for longer	28	28	26	25	27
The child is too young to go for longer	8	11	7	6	8
The child would be unhappy going for longer	5	2	3	2	3
One-off circumstances (e.g. holiday, sickness)	13	11	15	15	13
Other reasons	4	4	2	6	4
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>137</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>92</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>408</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>178</i>	<i>161</i>	<i>153</i>	<i>112</i>	<i>604</i>

Note: Parents could mention several reasons.

### 5.3 Summary

- Those children who were receiving the entitlement to free early years provision (except those who did so through attending school) received an average (median) of 12.5 free hours per week (which corresponds with the level of provision in most areas in 2008-2009 when the surveys took place).
- Thirty-four per cent of children received fewer free hours than their full entitlement (i.e. fewer than 12.5 hours). Three year olds were more likely to receive less than their full entitlement than four year olds.
- Children from families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage were less likely to receive less than their full entitlement than children from less or non-disadvantaged families (25%, compared with 35-39% respectively).
- Reasons why some children received the entitlement to free early years provision for less than 12.5 hours per week did not vary by level of disadvantage experienced by the family. Parents of just under a half of those children (49%) reported various constraining factors, such as that they would have had to pay for more hours or that the setting had no extra sessions available. Parents of 36% of children mentioned their personal preferences not to send their child to an early years provider for more hours, and for parents of 13% of children it was due to one-off circumstances that their child received fewer than 12.5 free hours in the week the survey asked about.

## 6 Conclusions

Improving access to early years provision for children from disadvantaged backgrounds has been a policy goal ever since the entitlement to free early years provision was first introduced by the Labour Government in the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE 1998). The Coalition Government remains committed to identifying the continuing barriers to the uptake of early years provision among the most disadvantaged 3 and 4 year olds as an important means towards eliminating educational and socio-economic inequality (Gove 2010).

There is substantial research evidence showing that receiving good quality early years education is associated with improved outcomes for children's development, and is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Feinstein *et al.* 2008, Hansen and Hawkes 2009, Leseman 2009, Melhuish 2004, Smith *et al.* 2009b, Sylva *et al.* 2004). There is also evidence showing that children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. those from workless and low-income families) are less likely to attend early years education settings and thus to experience the benefits of it (Ghate and Hazell 2002, Speight *et al.* 2010).

In this report, we used data for 2008-2009 and explored how the uptake of early years provision varied by different dimensions of disadvantage and what barriers to using early years provision were particularly pertinent to families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage. However, it should be noted that the survey data analysed in this report may underestimate the actual scale of differences in the take-up of early years provision between families experiencing the highest level of disadvantage and those in better circumstances. This is because families and individuals most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion are often missed in social surveys. These might be found among some minority ethnic groups, those on low incomes, homeless families in temporary accommodation and mobile populations such as Gypsies and Travellers (Levitas *et al.* 2007). These groups might be somewhat under-represented in the Childcare and Early Years Surveys of Parents 2008 and 2009 due to non-response but also possibly due to not receiving the Child Benefit (as the sample for the surveys was drawn from Child Benefit records).

We found a number of socio-demographic differences associated with disadvantage between children who were receiving early years provision and those who were not. These were in relation to family income, type and size, mothers' qualifications and work status, and characteristics of the area where children lived. Namely, children from lower-income families, from larger families (with three or more children), those whose mothers did not have any academic qualifications and whose mothers did not work were all less likely to receive early years provision. However, children from lone-parent families were more likely to receive early years provision than those from two-parent families (once we controlled for differences in socio-demographic profile between these two types of families). The take-up of early years provision was the lowest in London compared with other regions of England, and children living in deprived areas were less likely to receive early years provision than those living in more affluent areas (even after controlling for their other socio-demographic characteristics).

There was a strong association between the level of *multiple disadvantage* experienced by the family and their take-up of early years provision. In families experiencing no disadvantage only 3% of children were not attending any early years provision, whereas the proportion was higher for families experiencing some or a lot of disadvantage, with the highest figure (13%) found among the most disadvantaged families.

When the analysis focused on the most disadvantaged families alone, we found many of the same patterns of differences between those taking up early years provision and not taking it up as in the case of all families in the study. In addition, we saw that there was a

greater age gap between 3 and 4 year olds' take-up of early years provision for disadvantaged families than for non-disadvantaged families. This highlights the role that the entitlement to free early years provision for disadvantaged 2 year olds could have to play in targeting disadvantaged families early and improving take-up of early years provision at age 3.

Examination of the hours used by families who were taking up the entitlement to free early years provision revealed that children from disadvantaged families were in fact receiving more free hours than those from families in better circumstances. Among the most disadvantaged families, 25% of children received fewer than 12.5 hours per week (i.e. less than the full entitlement in most areas at the time of the surveys), while among other families this figure was at the 35-39% level.

What were the main barriers to accessing early years provision experienced by disadvantaged families? Our analysis suggests that lack of awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision and a low level of information about local options for nursery education and childcare were important factors affecting take-up of early years provision by disadvantaged families. When parents of children not receiving any early years provision were asked whether they were aware that the Government paid for some hours of nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds, parents of 50% of children from the most disadvantaged families said that they were not aware of their entitlement, compared with parents of 26% of children from families with no or fewer factors of disadvantage.

We also explored the role of perceptions of local options for childcare and nursery education in parents' decisions to use early years provision, as previous research had shown that parents from the most disadvantaged families tended to hold more negative views about availability, quality and affordability of local childcare than those from families in better circumstances (Speight *et al.* 2010). We found, however, that when the analysis focused on the disadvantaged families alone and on what distinguished those of them who were taking up early years provision from those who were not, negative perceptions of childcare were not a barrier to using early years provision, whereas lack of information about local childcare appeared to be.

The way the entitlement to free early years provision is delivered through a range of providers appeared to have an impact on its uptake by disadvantaged families. When parents who were aware of their entitlement but whose children were not receiving any early years provision were asked why this was the case, parents of 33% of children reported various constraining factors such as lack of places at local providers. Those from the most disadvantaged families were much more likely to mention constraining factors than those from families in better circumstances (47% compared with 23%). While these differences could reflect variations in the availability of the early years provision between different types of areas, they also suggest that some types of providers might be more easily accessible to disadvantaged families than others.

For example, our analysis showed that where children were receiving early years provision, those from disadvantaged families were more likely to receive it at nursery classes and less likely to receive it at playgroups/pre-schools, day nurseries and childminders. This is likely to be linked with how the provision is delivered at these types of providers. Nursery classes attached to schools typically deliver just the entitlement to free early years provision and do not charge for their services, while day nurseries are open all day most of the year and therefore may provide the entitlement as part of a package where other hours need to be paid for, which might make them less accessible to disadvantaged families. This in turn suggests that there might be fewer options open to disadvantaged families with regard to where they could take-up the entitlement to free early years provision than those open to families in better circumstances.

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## Appendix A Additional tables

**Table A2.1 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by sex of child**

Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds

	Sex of child		
	Male %	Female %	Total %
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>			
Received free hours (or attended school)	86	87	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	4	4	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	2	1	2
Did not receive any early years provision	8	7	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	1474	1364	2837
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2290	2101	4391

**Table A2.2 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by mother's employment status**

Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds

	Mother's employment status					Total %
	Working full time %	Working part time (1-15 hrs/wk) %	Working part time (16-29 hrs/wk) %	Not working %		
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>						
Received free hours (or attended school)	91	91	92	81		86
Received early years provision but not free hours	5	3	4	5		4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	1	1	1	2		2
Did not receive any early years provision	4	5	4	12		8
<i>Weighted base</i>	529	258	684	1346		2817
<i>Unweighted base</i>	679	426	1032	2224		4361

**Table A2.3 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by ethnicity of child**

Base: All selected eligible 3 and 4 year olds

Receipt of free early years provision	Ethnic group of selected child								Total %
	White %	Black - Caribbean %	Black - African %	Indian %	Pakistani %	Bangladeshi %	Mixed race %	Other %	
Received free hours (or attended school)	89	[78]	70	83	82	[70]	87	78	87
Received early years provision but not free hours	4	[16]	8	3	3	[12]	7	9	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	1	[3]	4		5	[7]	1	3	2
Did not receive any early years provision	6	[3]	19	14	10	[11]	4	10	7
<i>Weighted base</i>	1361	28	55	40	57	20	89	63	1713
<i>Unweighted base</i>	2073	36	71	55	85	28	122	83	2553

**Table A2.4 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision, by Government Office Region**

Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds

Receipt of free early years provision	Government Office Region									
	North East %	North West %	Yorkshire and Humber %	East Midlands %	West Midlands %	East %	London %	South East %	South West %	Total %
Received free hours (or attended school)	83	85	88	89	86	89	76	92	91	86
Received early years provision but not free hours	8	4	3	5	5	2	9	2	2	4
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	5	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	0	2
Did not receive any early years provision	5	10	7	6	8	8	12	5	7	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	126	374	287	254	325	296	488	430	257	2837
<i>Unweighted base</i>	213	564	467	418	514	480	614	677	444	4391

**Table A3.1 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by whether child has a long-standing illness or disability**

Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage

Receipt of free early years provision	Whether child has an illness or disability		
	Yes %	No %	Total %
Received free hours (or attended school)	77	77	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	8	5	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	4	3	3
Did not receive any early years provision	11	14	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	99	708	807
<i>Unweighted base</i>	155	1179	1334

**Table A3.2 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by whether child has special educational needs**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Whether child has a SEN		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>			
Received free hours (or attended school)	77	77	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	8	6	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	4	3	3
Did not receive any early years provision	11	14	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	67	738	805
<i>Unweighted base</i>	114	1217	1331

**Table A3.3 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by whether main carer has full driving licence and access to a car, van or motorcycle**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Whether main carer has full driving licence and access to a car, van or motorcycle		Total %
	Has licence and access to a car %	Has no licence or no access to a car %	
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>			
Received free hours (or attended school)	83	75	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	2	7	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	4	3	3
Did not receive any early years provision	11	15	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	268	539	807
<i>Unweighted base</i>	454	881	1335

**Table A3.4 Receipt of the entitlement to free early years provision by children in disadvantaged families, by area deprivation**

*Base: All eligible 3 and 4 year olds in families experiencing the highest level of multiple disadvantage*

	Index of multiple deprivation				Total %
	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> quintile -least deprived %	3 <sup>rd</sup> quintile %	4 <sup>th</sup> quintile %	5 <sup>th</sup> quintile - most deprived %	
<b>Receipt of free early years provision</b>					
Received free hours (or attended school)	86	89	76	74	77
Received early years provision but not free hours	2	0	4	8	6
Received early years provision but not sure about free hours	5		3	4	3
Did not receive any early years provision	7	11	16	14	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	78	101	172	457	807
<i>Unweighted base</i>	130	173	293	739	1335

**Table A4.1 Early years providers attended by children who did not receive any free hours, by multiple disadvantage**

*Base: Eligible 3 and 4 year olds who were receiving early years provision but not the entitlement to free early years provision*

	Level of multiple disadvantage		Total <sup>25</sup> %
	No / Low %	High %	
Nursery class	40	41	40
Nursery school	20	22	20
Day nursery	14	21	17
Playgroup or pre-school	17	15	16
Childminder	17	1	11
Special day nursery	1	5	2
Other nursery education provider	1		0 +
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>77</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>124</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>177</i>

**Table A4.2 Awareness of the entitlement to free early years provision among parents whose children did not receive any free hours, by multiple disadvantage**

*Base: Eligible 3 and 4 year olds who were receiving early years provision but not the entitlement to free early years provision*

Awareness	Level of multiple disadvantage		Total %
	No / Low %	High %	
Aware	69	30	55
Not aware	31	70	45
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>176</i>

<sup>25</sup> Total includes 1% of children whose provider could not be classified.

## Appendix B                      Classification of providers of early years provision

### *Specific providers (shown to survey respondents on a show card)*

Nursery school	Usually a school in its own right, with most children aged 3-5 years. Sessions normally run for 2½ to 3 hours morning and afternoon.
Nursery class in a primary or infants' school	Often a separate unit in the school, with those in the nursery class aged 3 or 4. Sessions normally run for 2½ to 3 hours morning and afternoon.
Day nursery	Run for the whole working day and only closed for a few weeks in a year (if at all). May be run by employers, private companies, volunteers or the Local Authority. Can take children from a few months to 5 years old.
Reception class in a primary or infants' school	Most children in the reception class are aged 4 or 5. Usually provides full-time education (normal school hours).
Special Day School/Nursery or Unit for children with special educational needs	For children with special educational needs.
Playgroup / Pre-school	Fees charged, with sessions of up to 4 hours. Often run by a community/voluntary group, parents themselves, or privately.  The term 'pre-school' is commonly used to describe many types of nursery education. For the purposes of this survey pre-school is used to describe a type of playgroup.
Childminder	Most provide care from their own home, for the whole working day and whole year. May or may not provide early years provision as part of an accredited network.
Other nursery education provider	

**General terms (not shown on the survey show card)**

Crèche	This term is used to refer to various types of provider. A work-based crèche or a crèche at a university or college is likely to be a day nursery. A crèche at a shopping centre or leisure facility used for a short period of time is not covered by the codes available as it is not a provider of early years provision.
Kindergarten	A European term which can mean different things and is most closely allied with 'nursery education'. A kindergarten is most likely to be a nursery school, day nursery or could even be a play group.
Integrated care	<p>Centres offering both nursery education and daycare facilities for children. Age of child can be from a few months old up to and including five year olds. In some cases provision is for the full working day. May also offer other services for families such as: drop-in facilities; adult education and training; advice/counselling; healthcare. Some different names for integrated childcare settings include:</p> <p><i>Children's Centre</i> <i>Family Centre</i> <i>Early Excellence Centre/Early Years Centre</i> <i>Sure Start</i> <i>Neighbourhood Nursery</i></p>

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