



# Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Delivery Progress Report

April 2024



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# Key Messages



- This data collection provides an update on the status of ELC delivery in April 2024.
- Data returned by local authorities indicates that approximately 117,735 children were accessing funded ELC in the week commencing 22nd April 2024.
- Of these, 96.1% (113,160 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 85.1% (100,196 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours (Figure 1).
- As this collection at the end of the academic year represents the peak of demand, there has been an increase in the number of children reported to be accessing funded ELC since the last collection in September 2023, up by 22,940 children (a 24% increase).
- There has been an overall decrease in the total number of children reported to be accessing funded ELC (1.2% decrease) compared to April 2023.
- There has been a year-on-year decrease in numbers of 3- to 4-year-old children reported to be accessing funded ELC (3.8% decrease) compared to April 2023.
- While there has been a fall in the number of 3-4-year-olds, other age groups have shown increases.
- Amongst 2-year-olds, there has been continued year-on-year increase in the number of children accessing funded ELC (9.7% increase since April 2023) however it is possible that there was some undercounting in April 2023 (see Objectives, Methodology, and Assumptions).
- Amongst 5-year-olds (deferrals), there has been a continuation of year-on-year increases; 29.3% since April 2023.
- Of all children accessing funded ELC in Scotland, 68.4% receive all or most of their funded hours with Local Authorities, 30.4% with private partner nurseries and 1.2% with childminders – this is consistent with previous collections.
- The number of childminders delivering funded ELC has decreased by 9.5% since April 2023.
- The total ELC workforce reported in April 2024 was 18,401 FTE which is approximately 95 FTE more than in September 2023 representing a 0.5% increase. The reported figure for the total local authority ELC workforce has decreased year-on-year by 255 FTE.
- Variability at the local level remains a key feature of the expansion.

## Background and Context

The duty on local authorities to secure 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare (ELC) for all eligible children has been in effect since August 2021. To provide information on the implementation of this commitment, the Improvement Service (IS) collects and analyses data on the delivery of funded ELC across local authorities. The objective of this data collection is to understand the status of the ELC sector across the country regarding uptake, workforce, and capacity as of the week commencing the 22nd of April 2024. This report aims to summarise the status of the sector near the end of the academic year as reported by local authorities, comparing this to their reported position from the previous academic year.

# Objectives, Methodology and Assumptions

All 32 Scottish Local Authorities were issued with a link to an online form in which to submit data as well as a guidance document to aid completion. This offered more prescriptive guidance on how councils should count workforce and uptake. Paragraphs below describe this in detail. Councils were also asked to update and submit an Excel workbook which captured information about Service Improvement Periods – this data will not be included in this report. Each collection requests the status of delivery in a reference week, in this case that commencing on 22nd April 2024. A complete response was received from each council except for one; Midlothian Council submitted a partial response and cited resource issues as a barrier for providing workforce figures. The most recently provided workforce figures for Midlothian Council were used in lieu of up-to-date data. Although the Improvement Service has liaised with individual Local Authorities to ensure consistency of data returns, it has not undertaken an audit of the data, systems and processes used to capture the data within the 32 Local Authorities. The data submitted by Local Authorities is, therefore, presented in good faith without having been audited by the IS.

## Changes and Clarifications to guidance in this collection

### Workforce

Some councils communicated confusion around the workforce categories previously included in this return. Therefore, in this iteration of the collection we have provided further clarifications on which staff should be counted in some roles, and collated other roles. In some councils this has resulted in a small shift in full-time equivalent staff between categories, however this has had a negligible effect on workforce role proportions nationally. In this report we have mapped historic workforce roles to the newer roles (aggregating some categories) when calculating percentage and absolute change. Some historic figures have been adjusted slightly due to Local Authorities providing corrections. These adjustments have not significantly altered historic workforce figures but result in slight differences in time-series data when comparing with those published in earlier reports.

A method has not been prescribed for the calculation of full-time equivalent staff but instead it has been recommended in guidance that councils continue to use the same method they would normally use to calculate full-time equivalent workforce figures. This has on occasion resulted in inconsistent responses from councils previously where FTE is not routinely used so a recommended FTE calculation method (based on ELC Census guidance) has been included.



By providing more detailed guidance for this collection it is anticipated that some councils will have adjusted how they report their FTE workforce and therefore care must be taken when comparing with previous collections. This update to guidance will help to ensure greater accuracy and consistency of reporting in the future.

## Uptake

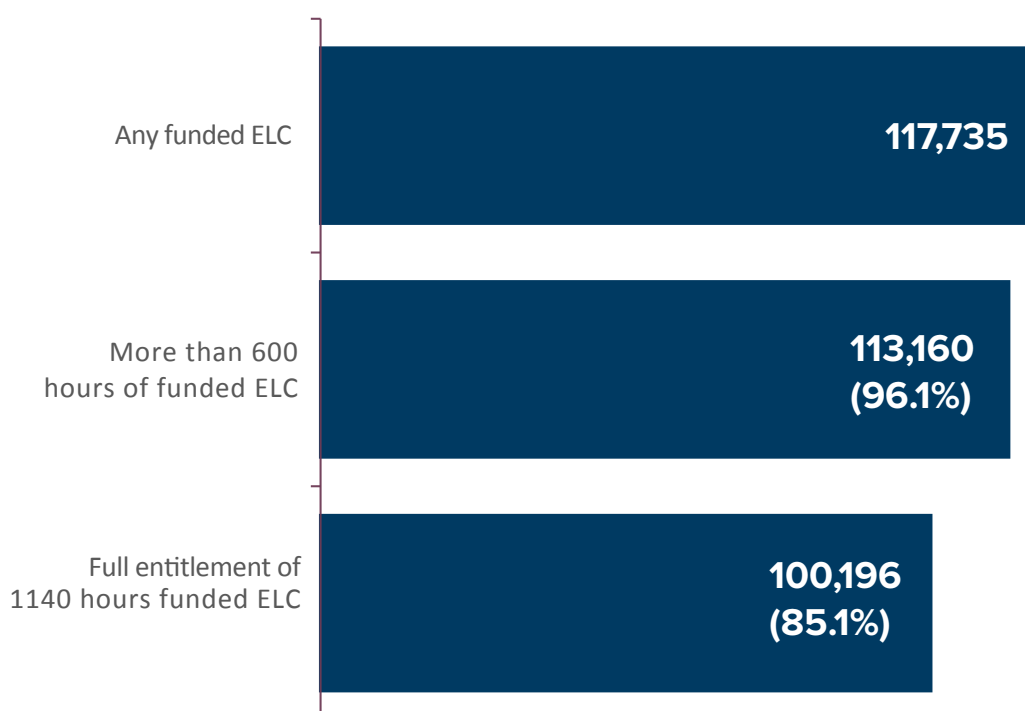
In this collection, the guidance clarified that places the local authority provides to children who do not meet the statutory criteria, under their discretionary powers, should be included in reported figures. It was recognised that some councils had previously omitted discretionary places because the guidance was not explicit that these should be included. This clarification may have contributed to the increase seen in some categories in this collection. We understand this has particularly impacted on the reported numbers for 2-year-olds. Comparison of deferral uptake figures reported to the Improvement Service in September 2023 with those in April 2024 show very slight changes, suggesting that the impact of clarifications in the guidance on deferral uptake figures is low.

# Data Analysis

## Uptake

### 2- to 5-Year-Old Uptake of Funded ELC

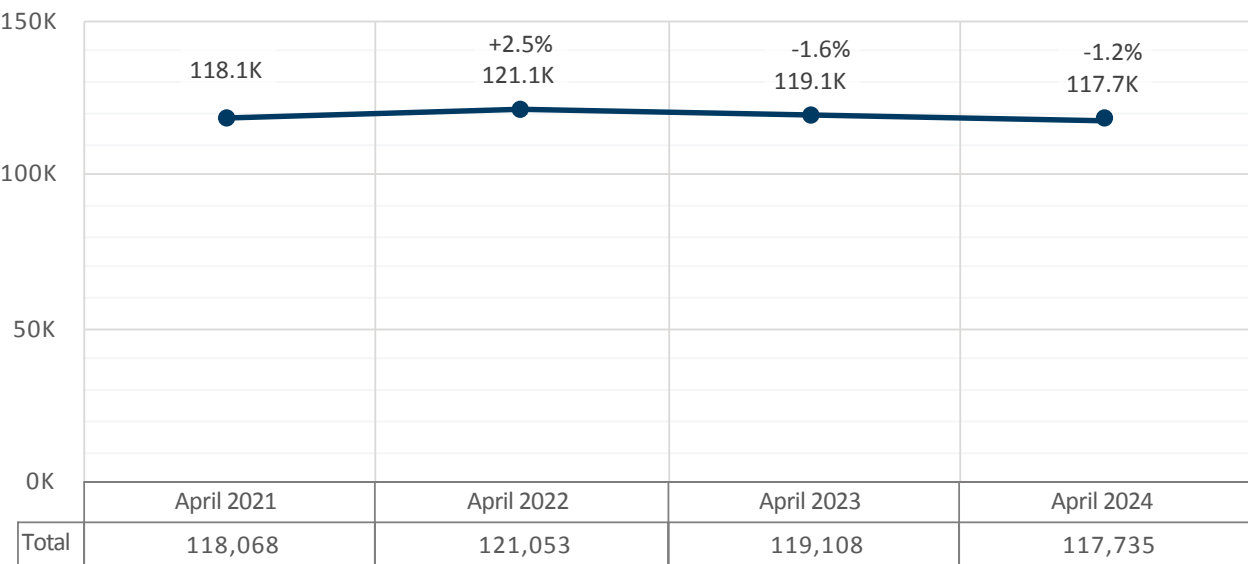
**Figure 1: Number of children (2-5-years-old) accessing levels of funded ELC**



The number of children reported to be receiving funded ELC in April 2024 was 117,735. Of these, 96.1% (113,160 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 85.1% (100,196 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours (Figure 1).

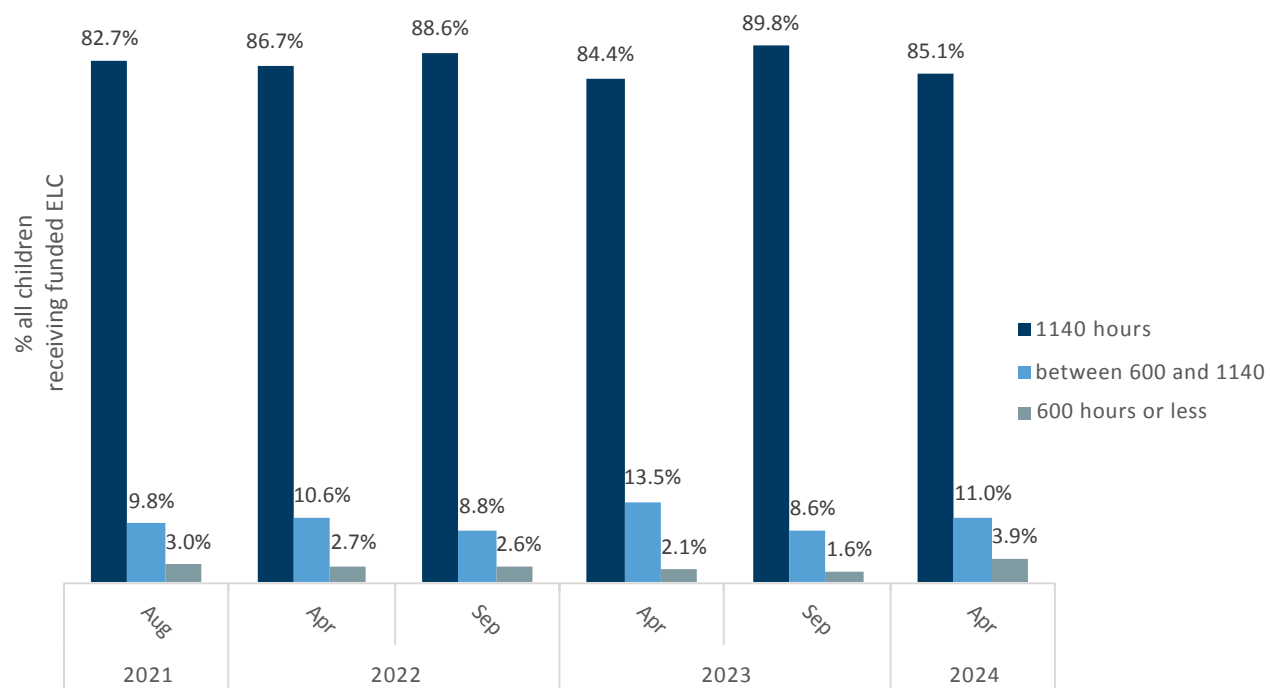
The total number of children eligible for funded ELC increases throughout the academic year as more children turn 3-years-old (to a lesser extent as children turn 2). For a more stable comparison point, we instead compare against the historic collections which took place in April – see figure 2.

Figure 2: Change in number of 2–5-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC in April from 2021 to 2024



The number of children reported to be accessing any amount of funded ELC has decreased by 1.2% since the previous April collection in 2023. This is the second consecutive year in which there has been a reported decrease.

Figure 3: Year-on-year change to uptake proportions by hour band



The proportion of children reported to be receiving their full entitlement of 1,140 hours of funded ELC remains high and has increased by 0.8 percentage points between April 2023 and April 2024



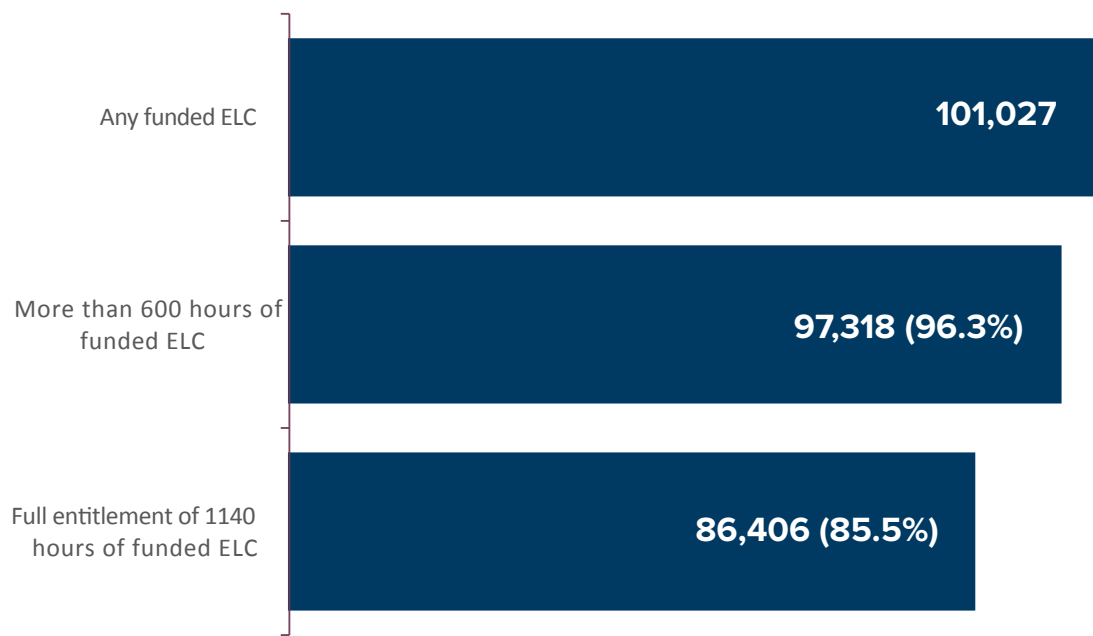
from 84.4% to 85.1%. This proportion has been consistently slightly lower in April collections compared to September/August collections - see Figure 3 above. The proportion of children reported to be receiving 600 hours or less of ELC has also increased since April 2023 when it was 2.1% and is now 3.9%.

It should be noted that this measurement reflects the number of children accessing various levels of provision and does not necessarily reflect the hours that are available. Uptake of less than 1,140 hours is not necessarily a resource/capacity issue and can sometimes reflect parental choice. As in all previous delivery progress reports there is variability between how local authorities report uptake. Some local authorities report that all children in receipt of funded ELC are accessing 1,140 hours, while others report lower uptake of the full offer.

3- to 4-Year-Old Uptake of Funded ELC

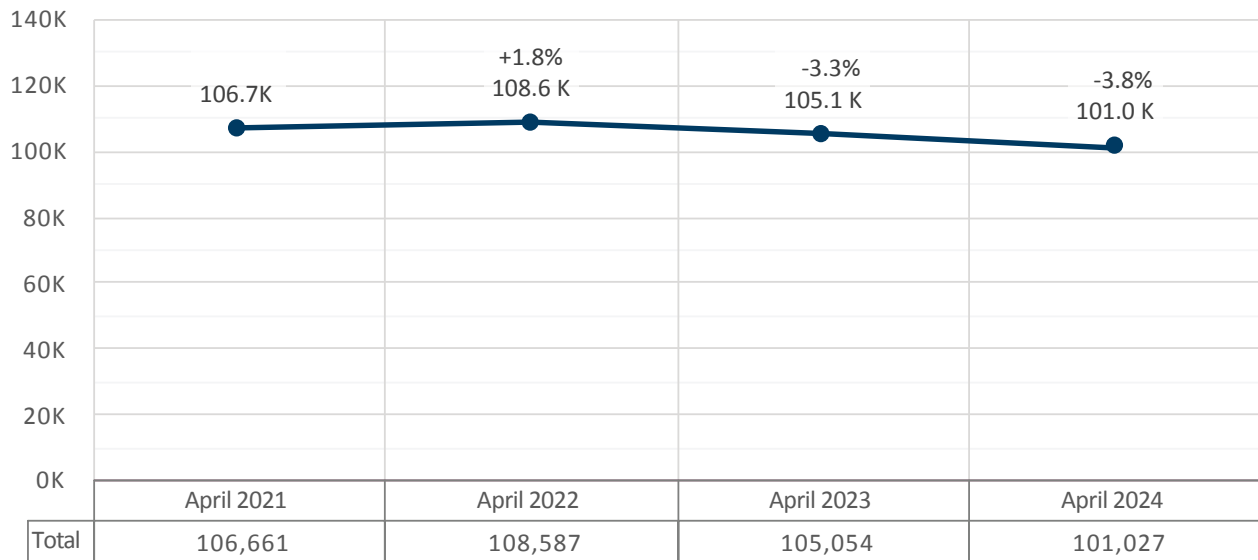
The number of 3- to 4-year-olds reported to be receiving funded ELC in April 2024 was 101,027 children. Of these, 96.3% (97,318 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 85.5% (86,406 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Number of children (3-4-years-old) accessing levels of funded ELC**



The number of 3- to 4-year-old children reported to be accessing funded ELC has decreased by 3.8% since the previous year (from 105,054 in April 2023).

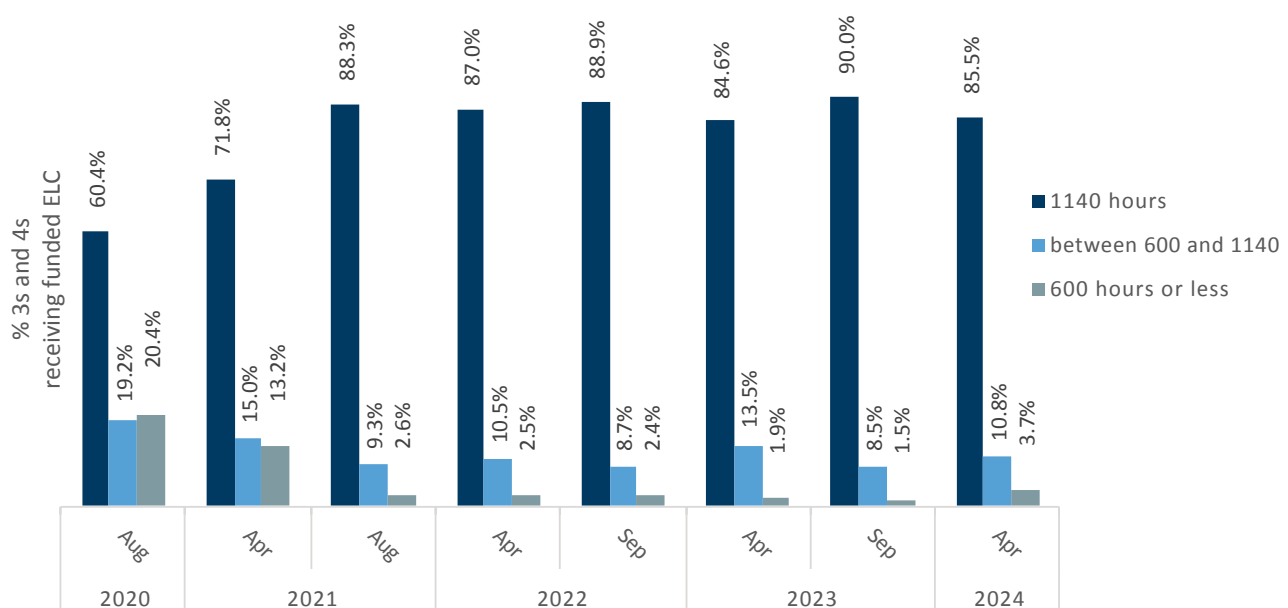
**Figure 5: Change in number of 3–4-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC in August from 2021 to 2024**



Variability continues to be seen at a local level, with 26 out of 32 councils reporting a decrease in uptake for this age group.

The proportion of 3s and 4s receiving the full 1140 and the proportion receiving 600 hours or less have both increased since April 2023 and are reported to be 85.5% and 3.7% respectively (see Figure 6 below).

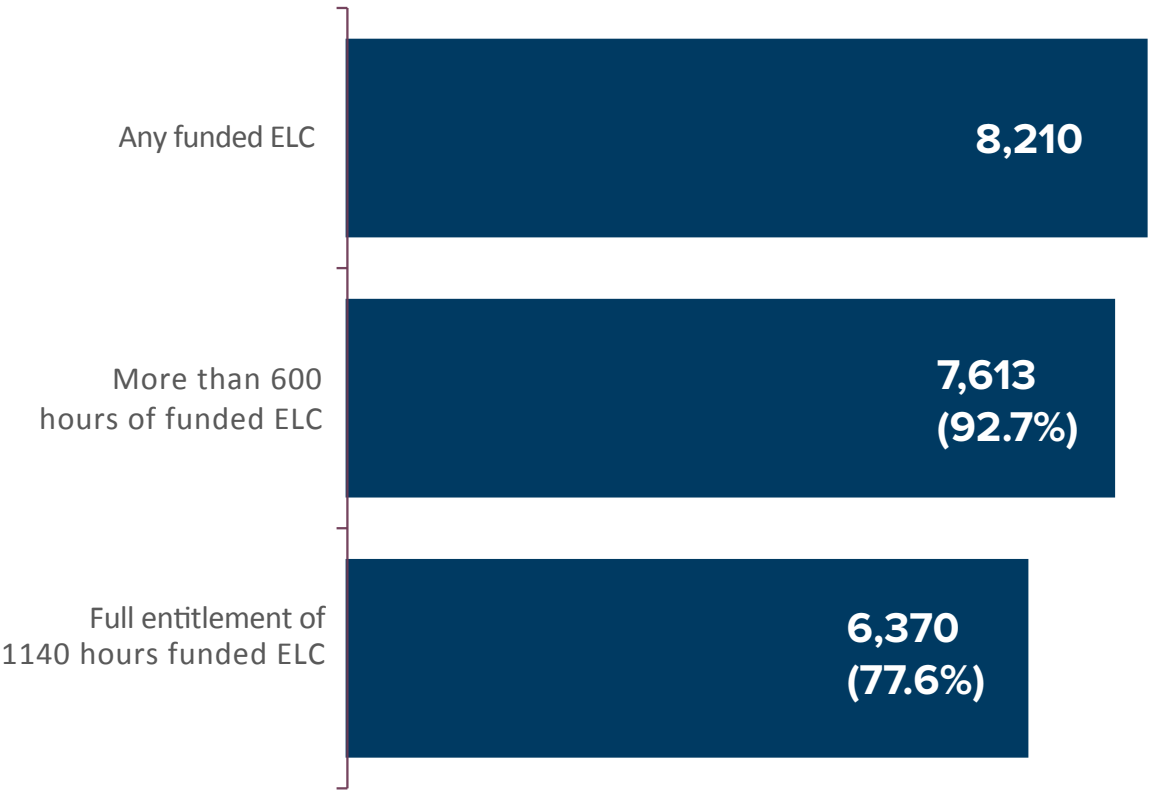
**Figure 6: Year-on-year change to uptake proportions by hour band for 3s and 4s**



2-Year-Old Uptake of Funded ELC

The number of 2-year-olds reported to be receiving funded ELC in April 2024 was 8,210 children. Of these, 92.7% (7,613 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 77.6% (6,370 children) were reported to be accessing 1,140 funded hours (Figure 7).

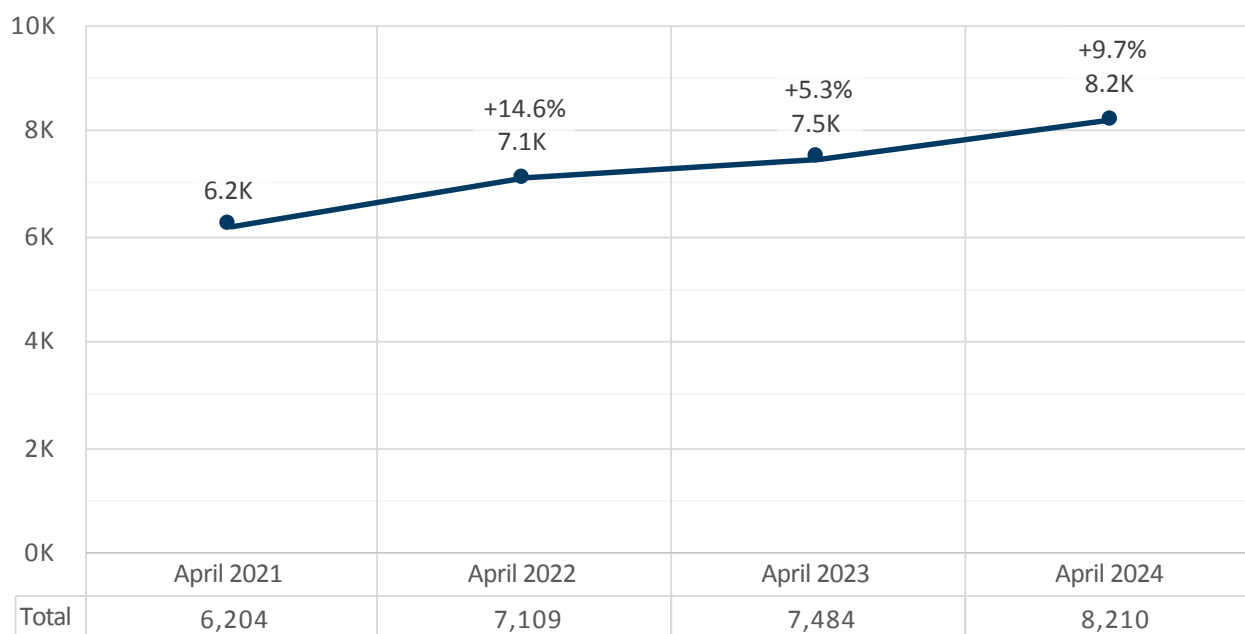
Figure 7: Number of children (2-years-old) accessing levels of funded ELC



As highlighted in the Objectives, Methodology, and Assumptions section, instructions in the reporting template (and guidance document) clarified that 2-year-old children who do not meet the statutory criteria but are provided with funded ELC places through the Local Authorities discretionary powers should be counted in the return. It was recognised that some Local Authorities had omitted these children in previous returns, however correspondence with Local Authorities indicates that this has mostly affected the September 2023 return suggesting that figures in that return are an undercount of the number of 2-year-olds in receipt of funded ELC. This report does not contain comparisons between the most recent data collection and the September 2023 collection.

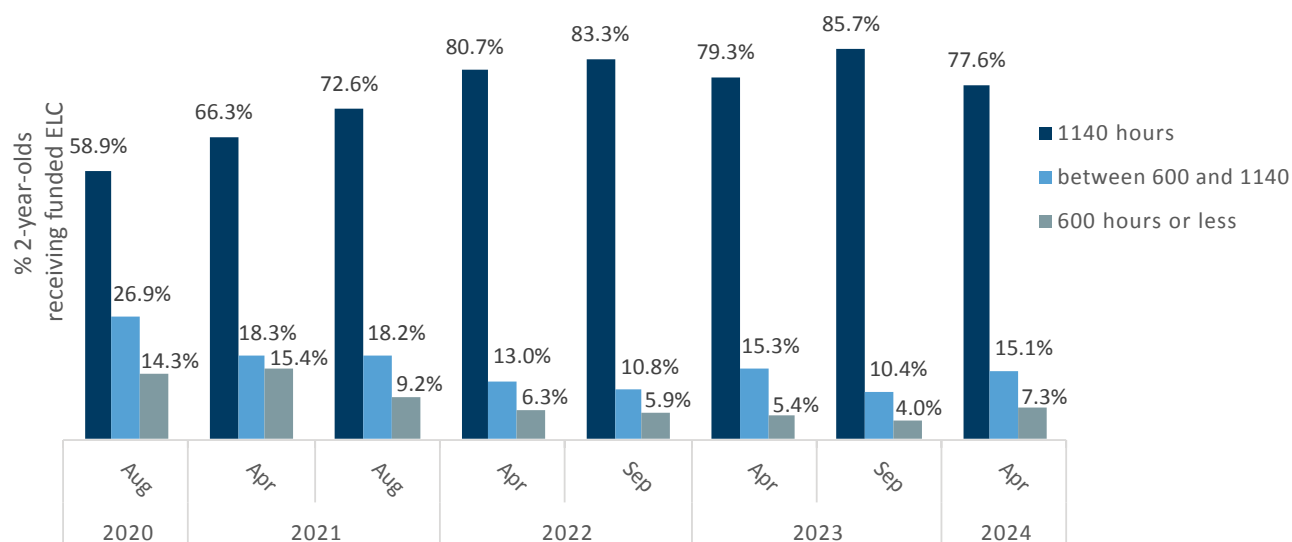
Comparison with April 2023 figures show a continuation of year-on-year increases in the number of 2-year-old children accessing funded ELC, as shown in figure 8.

**Figure 8: Change in number of 2-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC in April from 2021 - 2024**



The proportion of 2-year-olds accessing funded ELC who are accessing 600 hours or less had been decreasing to September 2023 but now shows a slight increase in April 2024 to 7.3% of 2-year-olds from 5.4% of 2-year-olds in April 2023 (see Figure 9).

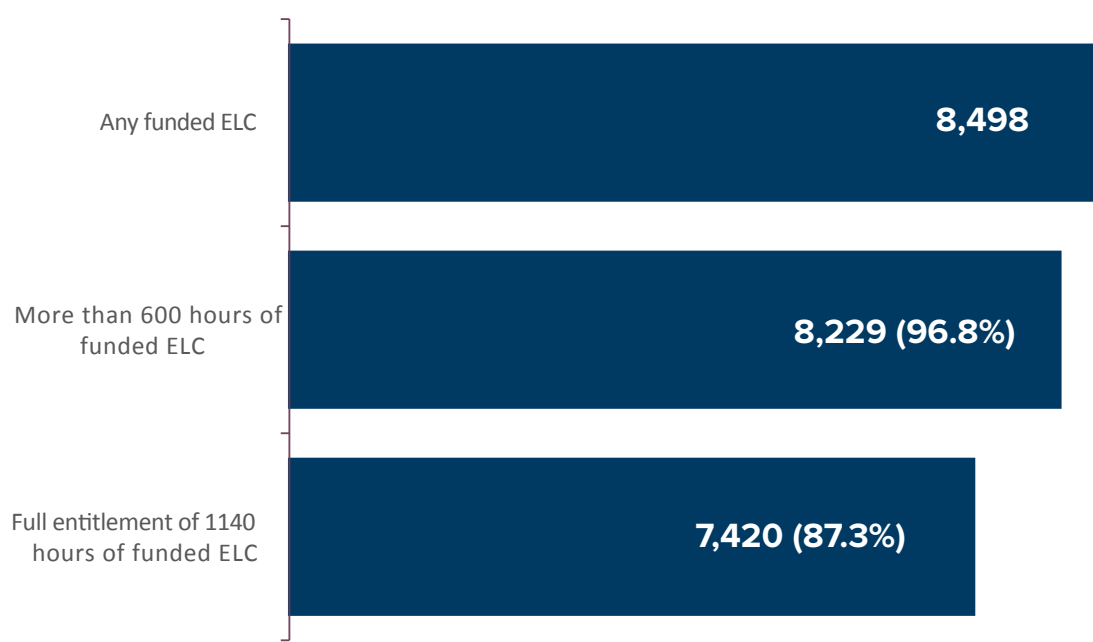
**Figure 9: Change in proportion of 2-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC who are accessing expanded hours in from August 2021 to April 2024**



5-year-old uptake of funded ELC

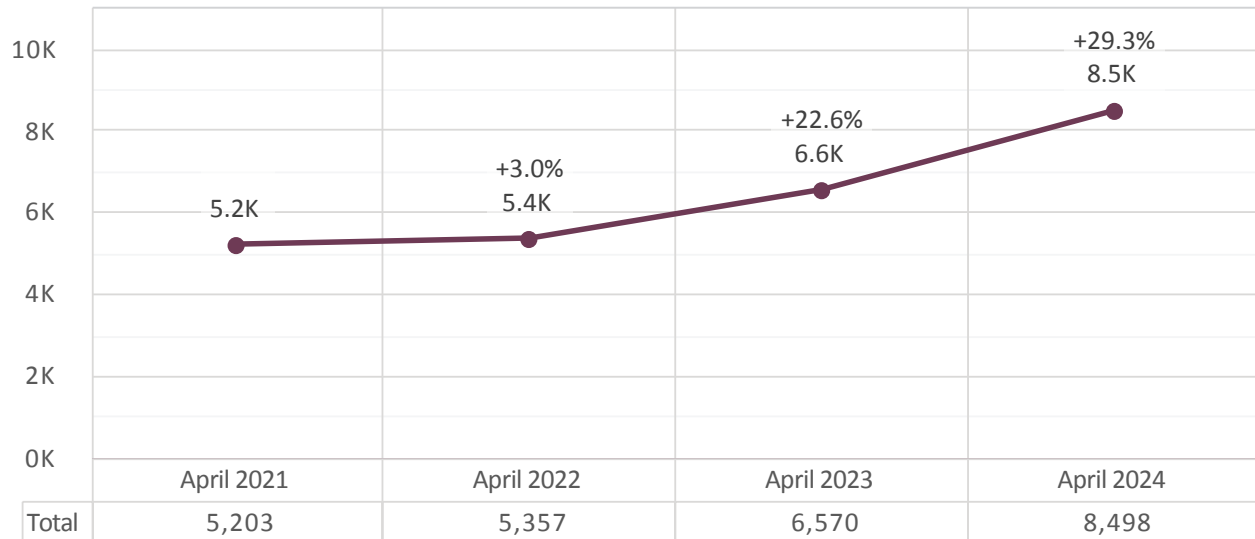
The number of 5-year-olds reported to be receiving funded ELC in April 2024 was 8,498 children. Of these, 96.8% (8,229 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 87.3% (7,420 children) were reported to be accessing 1,140 funded hours (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Number of 5-year-olds (deferrals) in receipt of funded ELC in April 2024



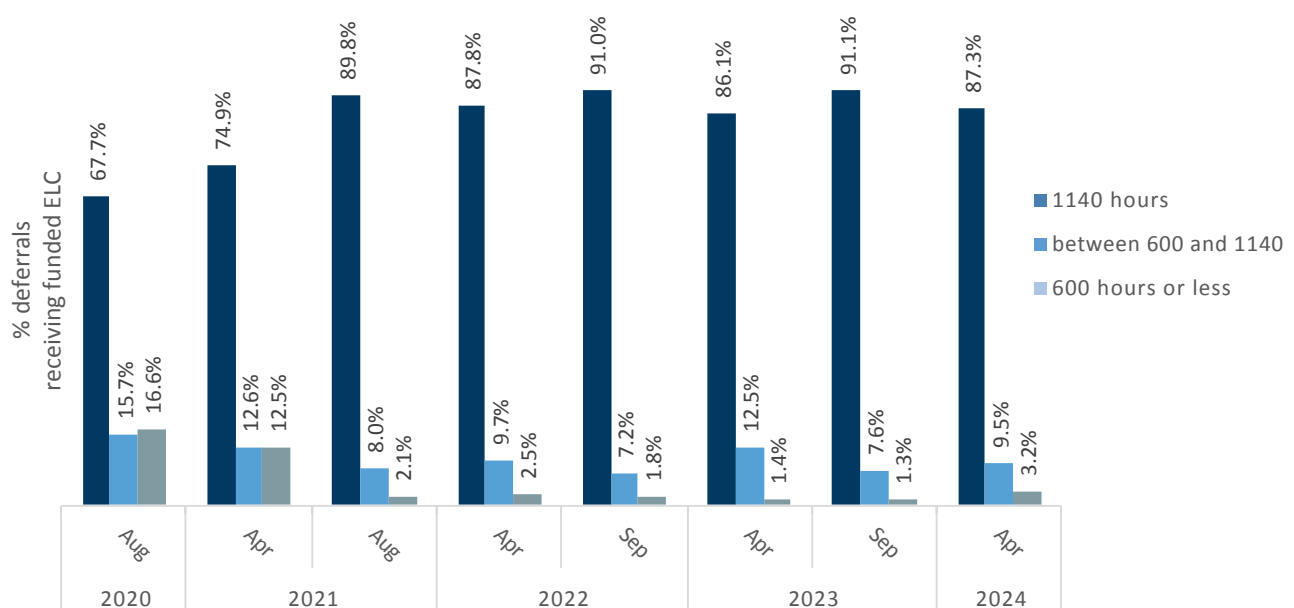
The year-on-year change in the numbers of 5-year-old children accessing funded ELC is shown in figure 11. A significant increase in deferrals in this reporting period was expected due to the change in legislation (implemented in August 2023) that expanded entitlement to a funded deferred year to all children who are still 4 on the date they are eligible to start school. The significant increase reported in the previous year was likely due to increases in deferrals in those councils piloting the afore-mentioned expansion. The number of deferrals reported in this collection is 59% higher than that reported in April 2021. After reviewing the increase in deferral figures since the beginning of the academic year, it was determined that clarifications to the collection guidance regarding the inclusion of children receiving discretionary places had a very minimal impact on the deferral figures.

**Figure 11: Change in number of 5-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC in April from 2021 - 2024**



As with 2-year-olds and 3-and-4-year-olds, the proportion of deferring children who take 600 hours or less of funded ELC has increased for the first time since 2021; compared to April 2023 this proportion has increased from 1.4% to 3.2%. The proportion taking 1,140 hours remains high at 87.3%.

**Figure 12: Change in proportion of deferrals in receipt of funded ELC who are accessing expanded hours in from August 2021 to April 2024**



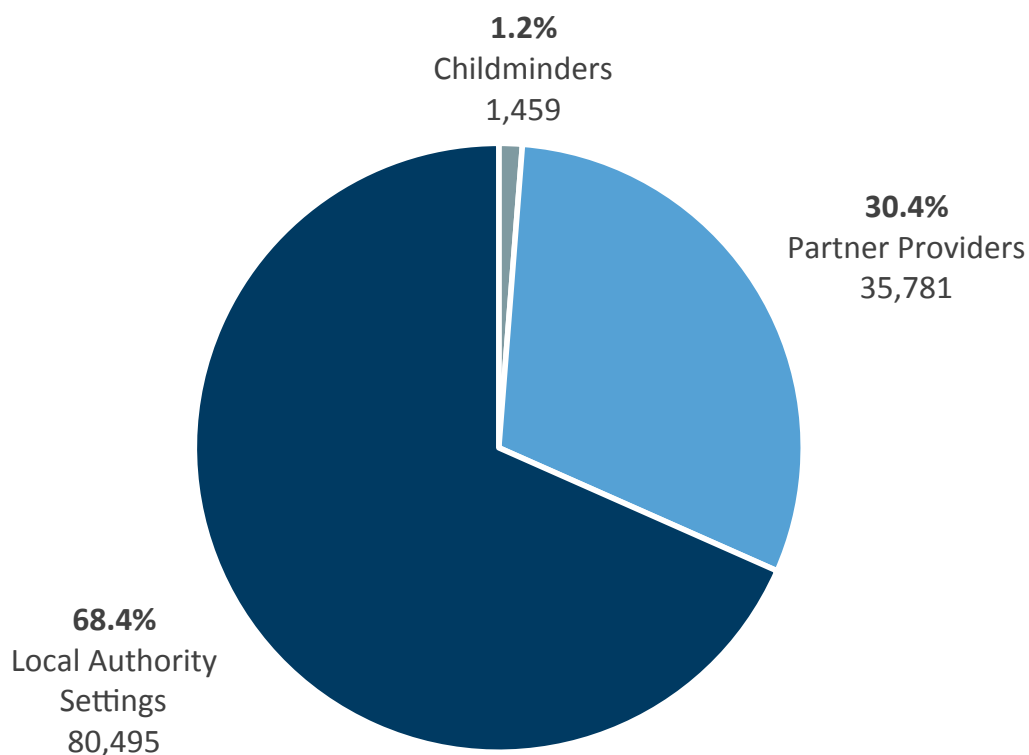


## Provision in Local Authority, Private Partner and Childminder Settings

When capturing the setting type in which children receive their funded ELC, Local Authorities are asked to record each child once. When a child receives a blended placement, such as spending some funded hours in a Local Authority setting and some with a childminder, Local Authorities are instructed to count that child in the setting type where most of their hours are spent. As a result, the distribution of children by the service type where they spend most of their funded hours does not reflect the demand for ELC or the number of registrations for each service type. Figures have been recorded in this way to avoid the double-counting of children who receive blended placements.

Figure 13 shows that, for April 2024, 30.4% of all children accessing funded ELC were accessing all or most of their funded hours with private and voluntary providers, compared to 68.4% in Local Authority settings, with the remainder (1.2%) accessing all or most of their hours with childminders. These proportions have remained relatively static since August 2021.

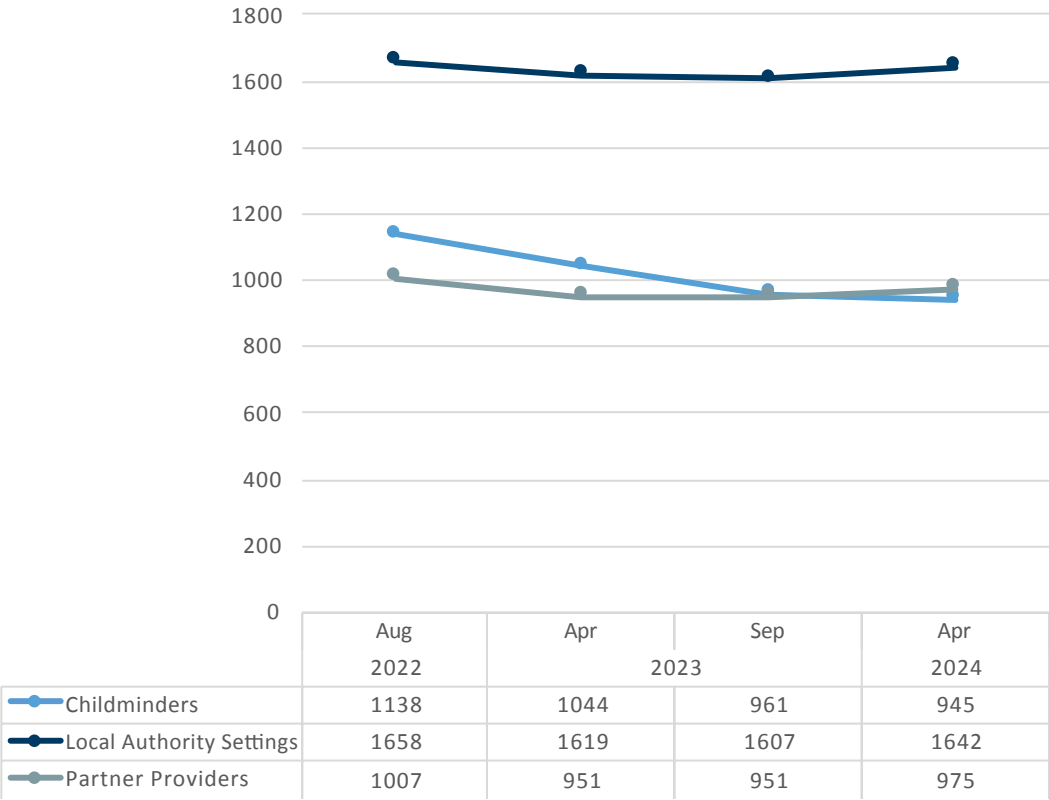
**Figure 13: Distribution of children by the provider type where they receive all or most of their funded hours**



## Number of Settings

Local Authorities reported an additional 21 Local Authority settings in April 2024 compared to 2023 as well as 24 additional private partner nurseries (see Figure 14 below). In contrast, the number of childminders in partnership to deliver funded hours has declined by 99 in the last year; 16 since September 2023. This represents a near 17% decrease in childminder numbers delivering funded ELC since August 2022.

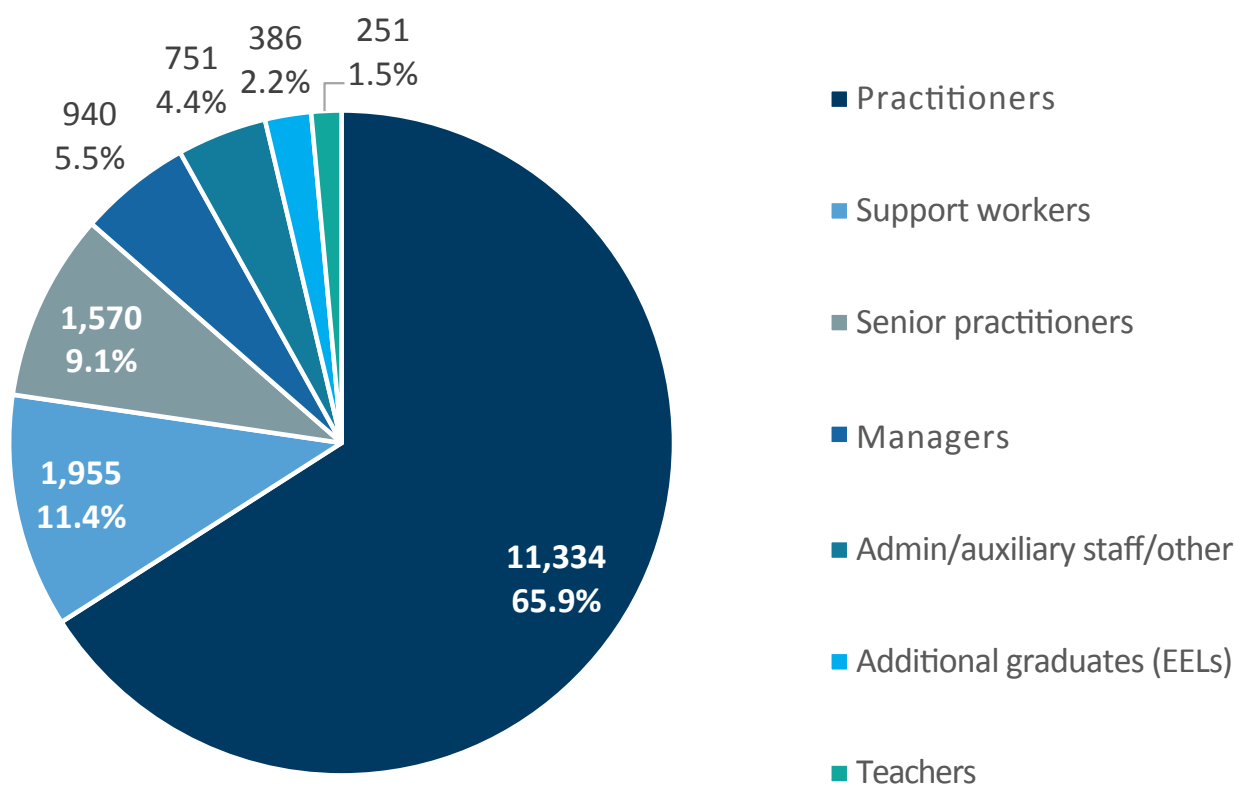
**Figure 14: Number of settings delivering funded ELC split by setting type, in August 2022, April 2023, and September 2023**



## Local Authority ELC Workforce

Local Authorities reported that in April 2024 the workforce in Local Authority ELC settings comprised of 17,186.6 FTE (full-time equivalent) workers, not including apprentices. Figure 15 (below) shows the FTE split by role type. By far the biggest role type in the ELC workforce is Practitioners, comprising of approximately 11,334 FTE (65.9%). Practitioners are defined in this collection as individuals registered with the SSSC (Scottish Social Services Council) under the Practitioner category and are differentiated from Senior Practitioners who have additional responsibilities such as day-to-day supervision or management of other staff, or operational leadership responsibilities. The proportional split between roles has not changed significantly since April 2023, though the reported Local Authority setting FTE across Scotland has decreased year-on-year by 2.35% from 17,600 FTE. Since September 2023, the number of staff working in Local Authority settings (as opposed to being part of central local authority staff) was reported to have increased by 52.72 FTE (+0.31%).

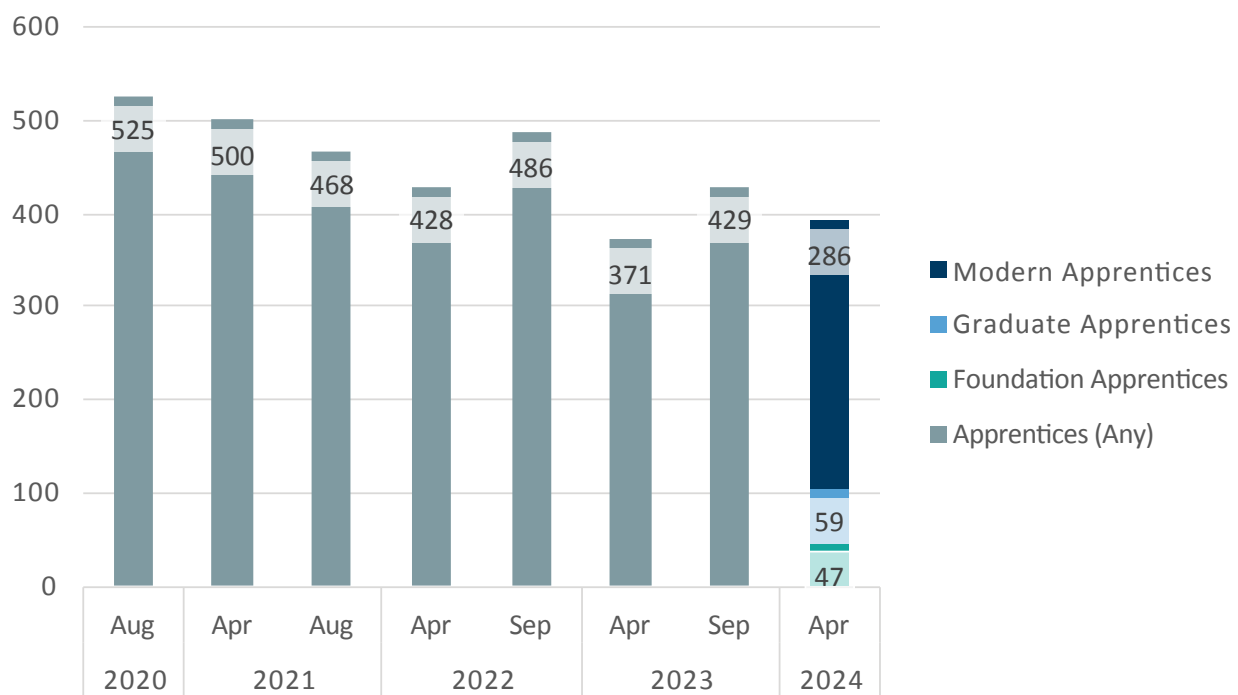
**Figure 15: Breakdown of Full-Time Equivalent staff in Local Authority settings (excluding Apprentices) in April 2024**



Despite the additional guidance provided as part of this data collection, figures suggest that there is still some inconsistency on whether some Local Authorities are submitting apprentice figures as a count of individuals or as a full-time equivalent calculation. Therefore, apprentices have not been included in the table above. The time series of reported apprentice figures

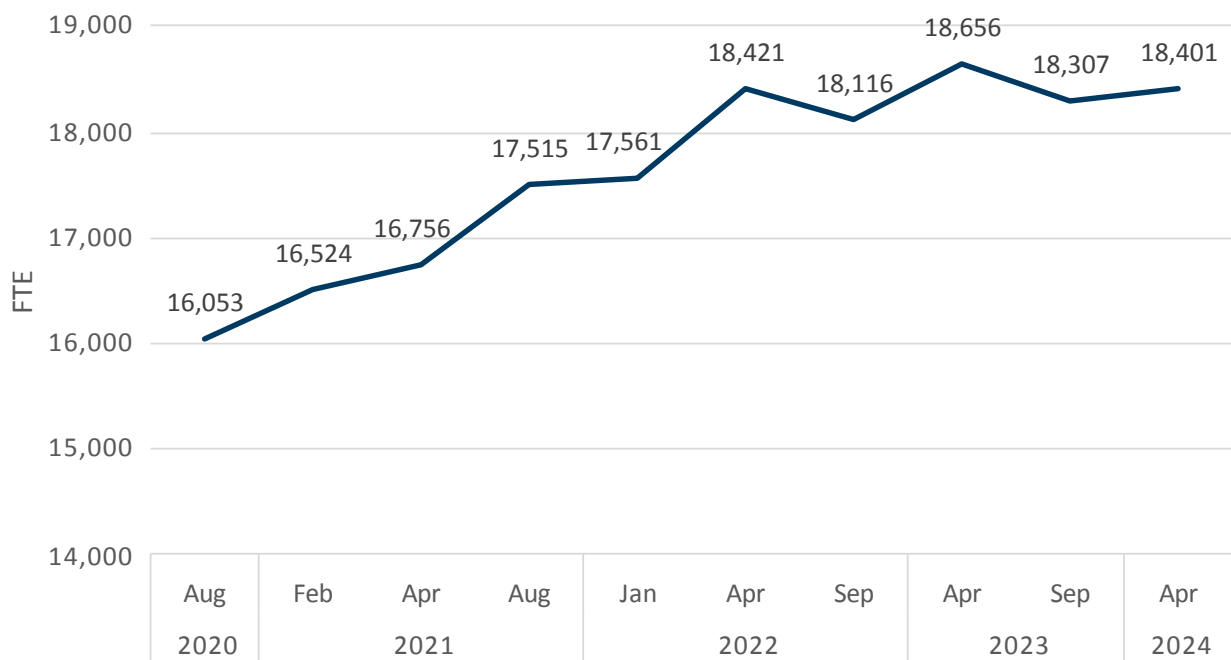
are as shown below in Fig 16. In April 2024 councils were asked to submit the number of apprentices under three categories totalling 392 apprentices working in Local Authority ELC settings across Scotland, the majority of which were Modern Apprentices (286).

**Figure 16: Number of apprentices working in Local Authority ELC settings from August 2020 to April 2024**



The total ELC workforce (in Local Authority settings and central teams) is shown below in Figure 17. Reported figures in April 2024 are 0.51% higher than in September 2023 (+95 FTE). This is a smaller within-year percentage change than has previously been captured (between September and April data collections within the same academic year). Between August 2021 and April 2022, the total workforce FTE increased by 4.9% (+906 FTE), and between September 2022 and April 2023 the total workforce increased by 2.9% (+540 FTE).

Figure 17: Total ELC FTE workforce from August 2020 to April 2024 (apprentices included)



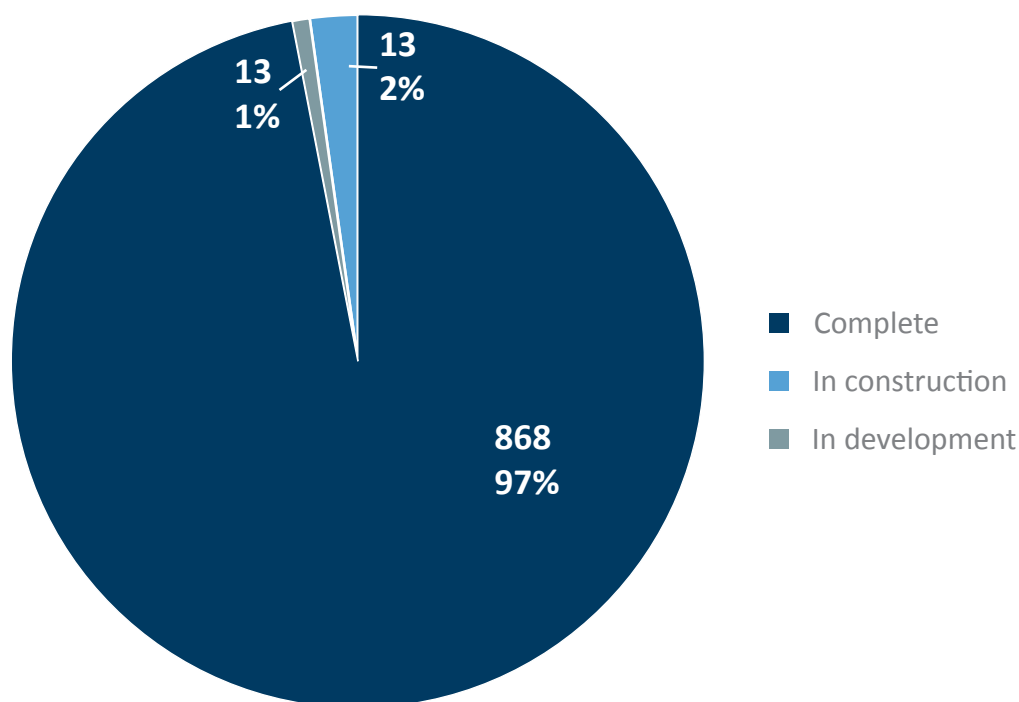
The year-on-year percentage change to the total Local Authority ELC workforce is -1.36% representing a decrease of approximately 255 FTE. Compared to September 2023 the total ELC workforce has increased by 0.52%; an increase of approximately 95 FTE.

# Scottish Futures Trust - ELC 1,140-hour expansion infrastructure

As of May 2024, Local Authority data returns stated that the total number of New Build, Extension, Outdoor or Refurbishment projects in the capital programme was 894, which when all complete will deliver c.21,200 additional ELC spaces.

97% of these capital projects are now complete, delivering 93% of the total planned additional space. 2% of projects are currently in construction and 1% of projects are still in development. Figure 18 illustrates the status of the overall capital programme as of May 2024.

**Figure 18: Current status of programme split by project status**



It is important to note that even though not all capital projects are operational, 1,140 hours have been delivered by all Local Authorities since the statutory deadline of August 2021. This is partly being delivered through transitional arrangements which have been put in place to ensure continued service delivery until the remaining projects are complete.

The remaining projects in construction/development will also provide increased flexibility and accessibility in line with the original vision of the expansion. They also accommodate forecast growth and longer-term learning estate development.

SFT will continue to monitor the progress of the remaining projects in the programme.

# Conclusions

Local authorities successfully delivered the expansion of funded ELC in August 2021 to secure 1,140 hours of funded ELC for all eligible children.

Across the key indicator measurements and incorporating returned narrative, the national picture shows continued high uptake of the expanded offer, and success in resourcing the requisite capacity and workforce to support this despite large increases in the deferral and 2-year-old categories.

As in previous delivery progress reports, there is variability at a local level with some local authorities reporting higher uptake of the expanded funded hours than others.

Data returned by local authorities indicates that approximately 117,735 children were accessing funded ELC in the week commencing 22nd April 2024. Of these, 96.1% (113,160 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 85.1% (100,196 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours (Figure 1). There has been an overall decrease in the total number of children reported to be accessing funded ELC (1.2% decrease) compared to April 2023, but an increase of 24% (+22,940 children) since September 2023.

This collection has captured another year of large increases among 2-year-olds receiving funded ELC and deferrals; +9.7% and +29.3% respectively. Contrastingly the three-and-four-year-old group decreased slightly for the second consecutive year with a 3.8% decrease between April 2023 and April 2024.

Since April 2023, the number of childminders delivering funded ELC has reduced by 99 (-9.5%), but the number of Local Authority settings and private and voluntary partner nurseries have increased by 21 (+1.2%) and 24 (+2.5%) respectively.

The total ELC workforce reported in April 2024 was 18,401 FTE which is approximately 95 FTE more than in September 2023 representing a 0.5% increase. The increase for the same period in the last academic year (September 2022 to April 2023) was approximately 3%. The reported figures for the total workforce have decreased year-on-year by 255 FTE.



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