



Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Delivery Progress Report

September 2023



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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improvement **service**

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Key Messages



- This data collection provides an update on the status of ELC delivery in September 2023.
- Data returned by local authorities indicates that approximately 94,655 children were accessing funded ELC in the week commencing 11th September 2023.
- Of these, 98% (93,091 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 90% (85,051 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours
- There has been an increase in the total number of children reported to be accessing funded ELC (1% increase) compared to September 2022.
- There has been a decrease in numbers of 3- to 4-year-old children reported to be accessing funded ELC (2% decrease) compared to September 2022.
- Amongst eligible 2-year-olds, there has been continued year-on-year increase in the number of children accessing funded ELC (7% increase since September 2022).
- Amongst 5-year-olds (deferrals), there has been a year-on-year increase of 29%.
- The local authority ELC workforce is reported to have increased by 9,081 FTE since academic year 2016/17, with a decrease by 88 FTE since April 2023.
- Funded providers in the private and voluntary sectors and childminders provide 31% of all funded provision.
- 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 1st August 2021. To provide information on the implementation of this commitment, the Improvement Service (IS) collect and analyse data on the delivery 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 11th September 2023. This report aims to summarise the status of the sector near the beginning of the academic year as reported by local authorities, comparing this to their reported position from the previous academic year.

Objectives, Methodology and Assumptions

To collect the data, all 32 Scottish local authorities were issued with an online form containing instructions for completion. Many councils reported difficulty in preparing this data for the proposed deadline due to limited capacity within ELC teams, resulting in some delays. One local authority was unable to provide data in this collection period or in April 2023 so the most recent figures available have been used in place (September 2022 data). All figures noted are an estimation due to this.

Each collection requests the status of delivery in a reference week. For this collection, the reference week was that commencing on 11th September 2023. To reduce the volume of data which local authorities would need to collect and process, the Improvement Service aligned the reference week with that of the ELC Census.

Although the IS have liaised with individual local authorities in seeking to ensure consistency of data returns, they have 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.

Data Analysis

Uptake

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

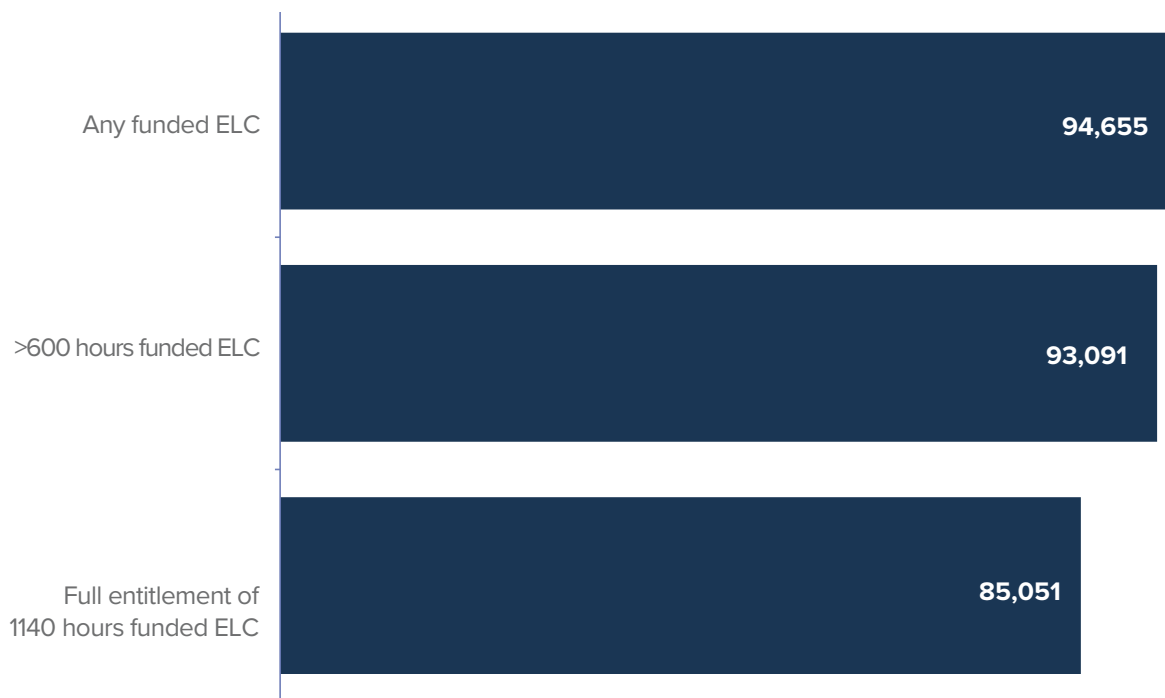


Figure 1: Number of children (2-5-years-old) accessing levels of funded ELC

The number of children reported to be receiving funded ELC in September 2023 was 94,655. Of these, 98% (93,091 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 90% (85,051 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. As such, the number of children accessing funded ELC is necessarily lower in this session (September 2023) than was noted in the last Delivery Progress Report (April 2023). For a comparison point, we instead compare against the collection that took place in August 2022. In doing so, the year-on-year change in the numbers of 2- to 5-year-old children reported to be accessing funded ELC can be seen at a national level – see Table 1.

Table 1: Change in number of 2–5-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC in August 2021, August 2022, and August 2023

Year	Number of 2-5-year-old children accessing funded ELC	Year on year change
August 2021	90,836	N/A
August 2022	93,902	+ 3.4%
September 2023	94,655	+ 0.8%

The number of children accessing any amount of funded ELC has increased by 0.8% overall (increasing from 93,902 in September 2022 to 94,655 in September 2023). This represents a smaller increase than seen between August 2021 and August 2022.

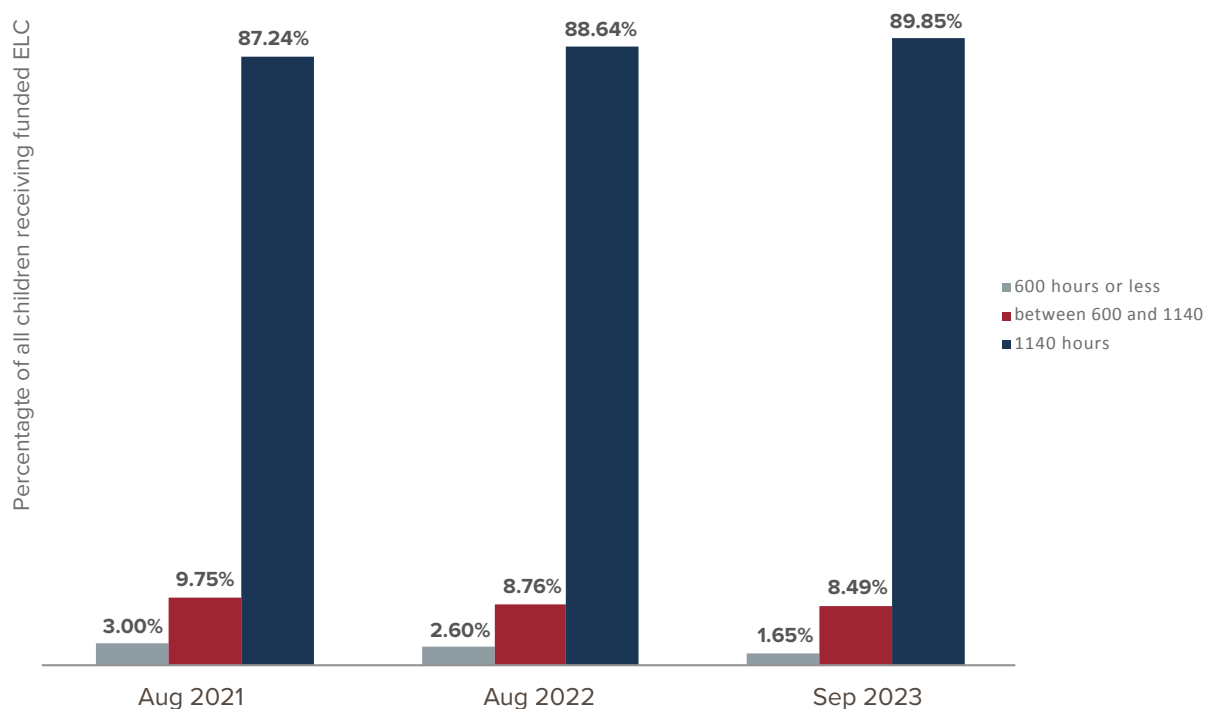


Figure 2: Year-on-year change to uptake proportions by hour band

In addition to an overall increase in the number of children receiving any amount of funded ELC since August 2022, the proportion of children receiving their full entitlement of 1,140 hours of funded ELC has increased year on year. Between August 2021 and August 2022 this increased by 1.4 percentage points, and then by a further 1.2 percentage points between August 2022 and September 2023. See Figure 2 above.

It should be noted that this measurement reflects the number of children accessing different levels of provision, which does not directly reflect the hours that are available. In August

2021 all local authorities confirmed by correspondence that they were able to offer a place to all eligible children who applied for funded ELC up to 1,140 hours. 100% uptake of the full 1,140 hours was not expected at any point through the expansion. As in all previous delivery progress reports there is variability between local authorities. 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

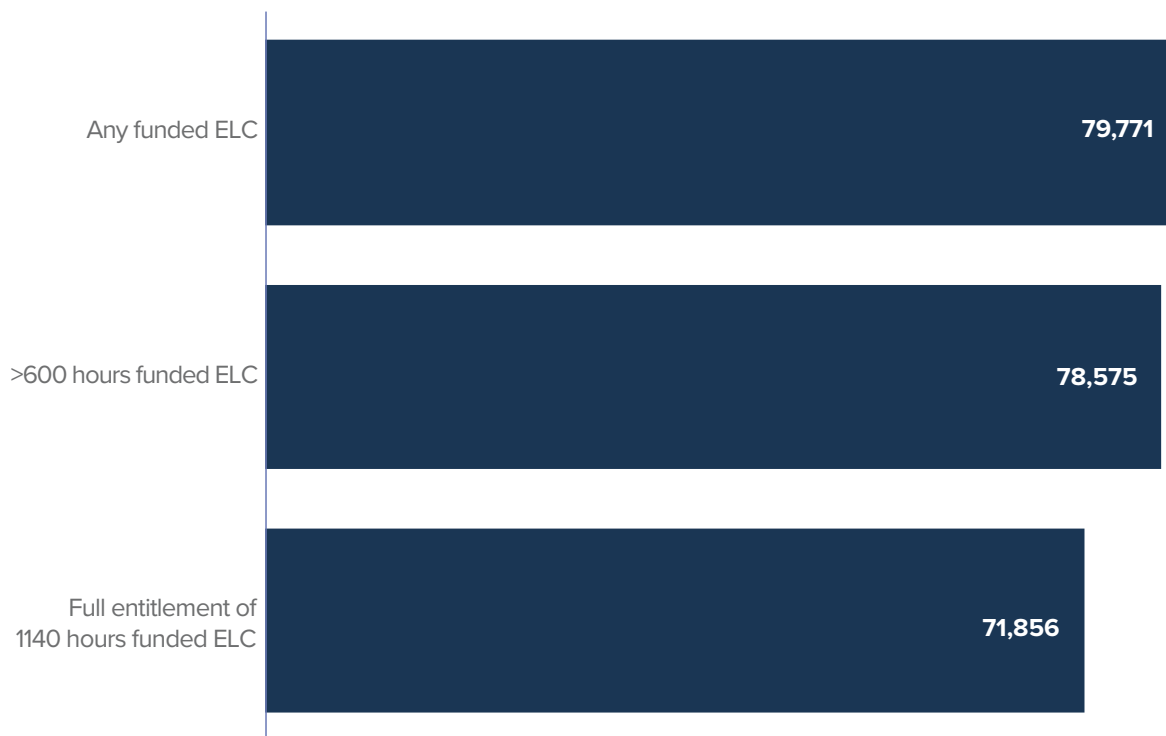


Figure 3: Number of children (3-4-years-old) accessing levels of funded ELC

The number of 3- to 4-year-olds reported to be receiving funded ELC in September 2023 was 79,771 children. Of these, 98.5% (78,575 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 90% (71,856 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours (Figure 3). The number of 3- to 4-year-old children accessing funded ELC has decreased by 1.9% since the previous year (from 81,310 in September 2022).

Table 2: Change in number of 3–4-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC in August 2021, August 2022, and September 2023

Year	Number of 3 and 4-year-old children accessing funded ELC	Year on year change
August 2021	79,801	N/A
August 2022	81,310	+ 1.9%
September 2023	79,771	- 1.9%

Variability continues to be seen at a local level, with some local authorities reporting that 100% of 3- to 4-year-old children receive 1,140 hours of funded ELC.

2-Year-Old Uptake of Funded ELC

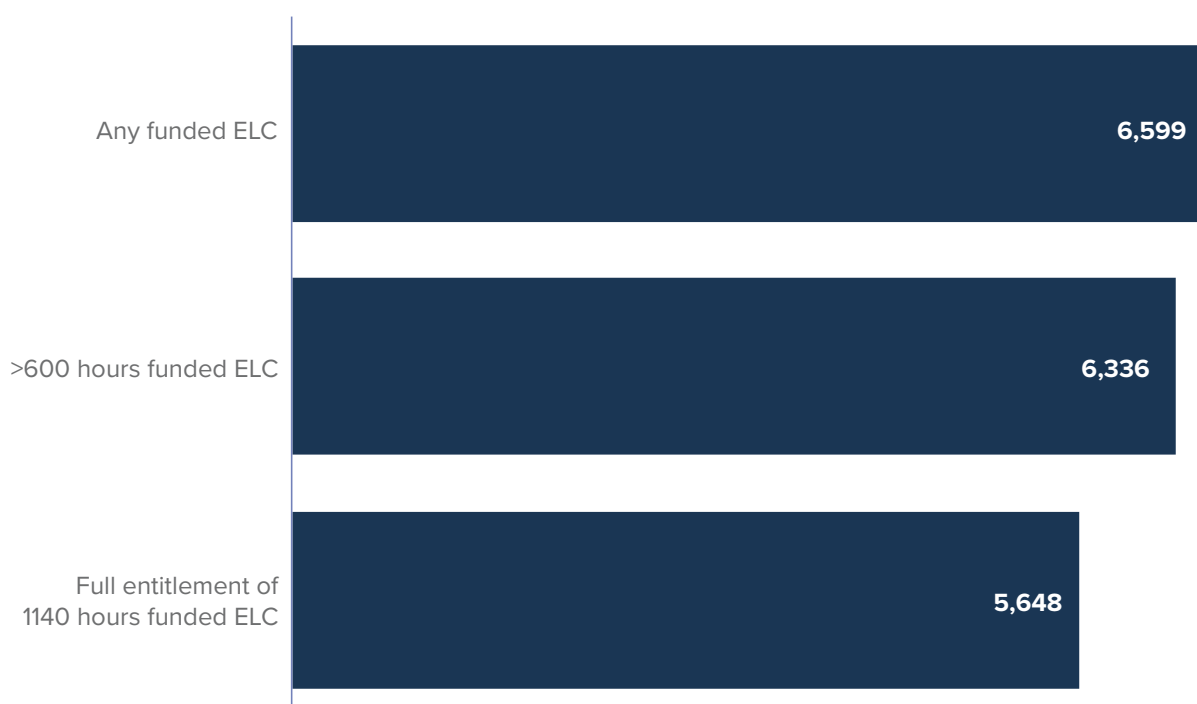


Figure 4: Number of children (2-years-old) accessing levels of funded ELC

The number of 2-year-olds reported to be receiving funded ELC in September 2023 was 6,599 children. Of these, 96% (6,336 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 86% (5,648 children) were reported to be accessing 1,140 funded hours (Figure 4).

Proportions of those children accessing funded ELC who are accessing expanded hours (both categories of over 600 hours and 1,140 hours) remain lower for the 2-year-old

population than they are for the 3- to 5-year-old population. However, a continued year on year increase has been observed since the statutory duty came into effect, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Change in proportion of 2-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC who are accessing expanded hours in August 2021, August 2022, and September 2023

	Aug 2021	Aug 2022	Sep 2023
1140 hours	73%	84%	85%
More than 600 hours	92%	94%	96%

There has also been a year-on-year increase in the number of 2-year-old children accessing funded ELC, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Change in number of 2-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC in August 2021, August 2022, and September 2023

Year	Eligible 2s	Year on year change
August 2021	5,900	N/A
August 2022	6,188	+ 4.9%
September 2023	6,599	+ 6.6%

5-Year-Old Uptake of Funded ELC

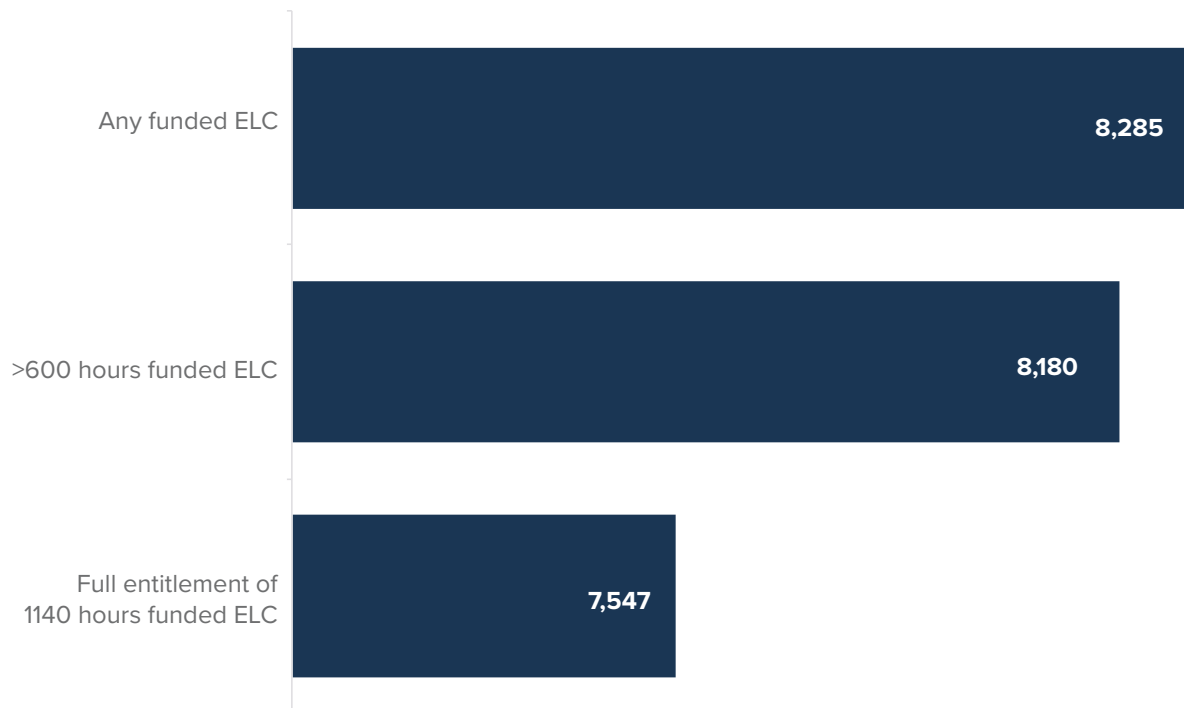


Figure 5: Number of children (5-years-old) accessing levels of funded ELC

The number of 5-year-olds reported to be receiving funded ELC in September 2023 was 8,285 children. Of these, 99% (8,180 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 91% (7,547 children) were reported to be accessing 1,140 funded hours (Figure 5). The year-on-year change in the numbers of 5-year-old children accessing funded ELC is shown in Table 5. A large 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.

Table 5: Change in number of 5-year-old children in receipt of funded ELC in August 2021, August 2022, and September 2023

Year	Number of 5-year-old children accessing funded ELC classed as deferrals	Year on year change
August 2021	5,135	N/A
August 2022	6,404	+ 24.7%

Year	Number of 5-year-old children accessing funded ELC classed as deferrals	Year on year change
September 2023	8,285	+ 29.4%

Provision in Local Authority, Private Partner and Childminder Settings

The graph below, Figure 6, shows the reported proportion of uptake split by provider types in September 2023.

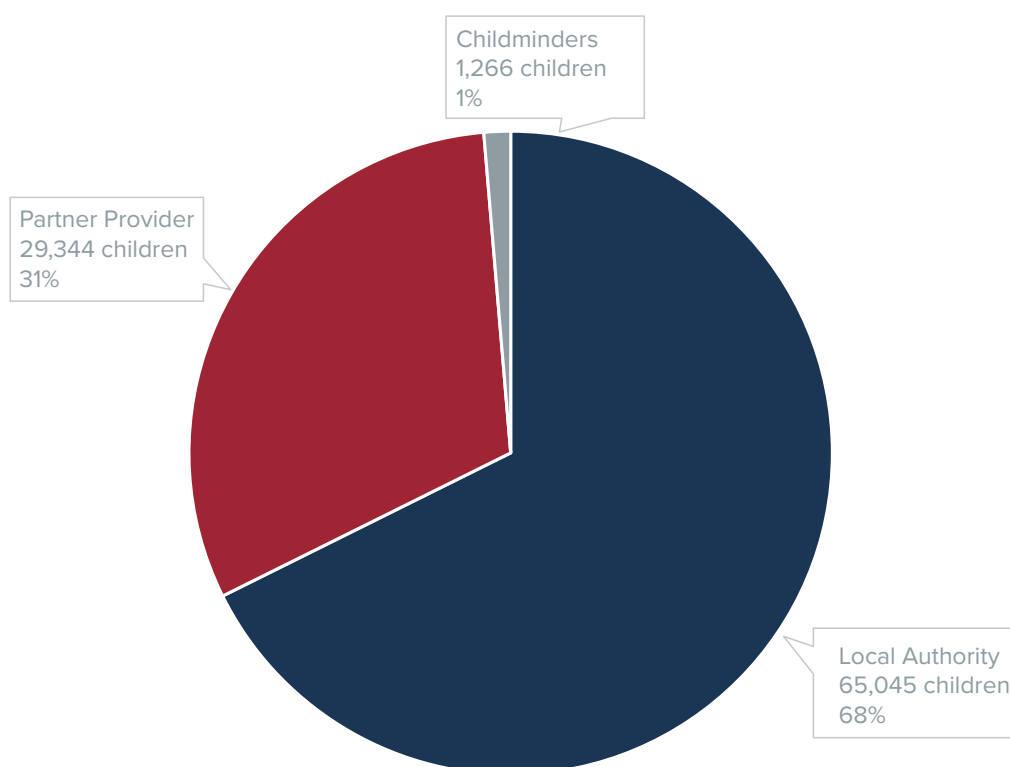


Figure 6: Uptake of funded ELC split by provider type

Figure 6 shows that for September 2023, 31% of provision was being accessed in private and voluntary, compared to 68% in local authority settings, with the remainder being accessed with childminders. These proportions have remained relatively static since August 2021.

Of all children who are accessing most of their hours with private and voluntary providers, 87% are accessing 1,140 hours, compared with 91% in local authority settings and 64% for childminders.

The table below, table 6, shows the total number of services delivering funded ELC split by setting type for the last three data collections.

Table 6: Number of settings delivering funded ELC split by setting type, in August 2022, April 2023, and September 2023

Setting Type	August 2022	April 2023	September 2023	Change since April 2023
Childminders	1138	1075	992	-83
Local Authority Settings	1658	1651	1639	-12
Partner Providers	1007	983	983	0

Local authorities have collectively reported that there are 83 fewer childminders delivering funded ELC compared to April 2023. The number of Local Authority settings has reduced by 12 and there is no change in the number of partner providers. It has not been verified whether any reduction in Local Authority settings can be attributed to consolidation in settings, nor does the collection capture any turn-over of private settings despite there being no change to the number of settings.

Local Authority ELC Workforce

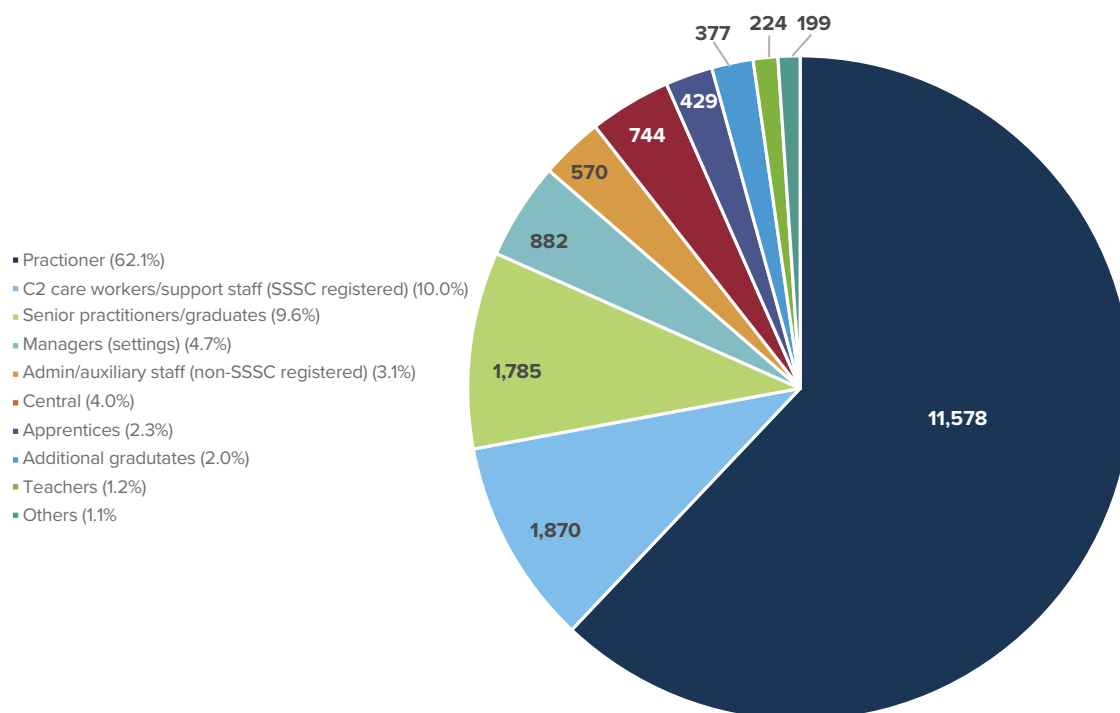


Figure 7: Local Authority ELC workforce split by job type

Local authorities reported that in September 2023 the ELC workforce in local authorities comprised of 18,647 FTE across Scotland. Figure 7 shows the split of job types in ELC nationally as of August 2023. By far the largest section of the ELC workforce are Practitioners, comprising of 11,578 FTE (62%). The proportional split between roles has not changed significantly since April 2023, though the total FTE across Scotland has reduced by -0.5%. Since local authorities increase staff to meet demand throughout the course of the year it is not surprising that there has been little change in staff since April 2023 (when authorities would be experiencing peak demand).

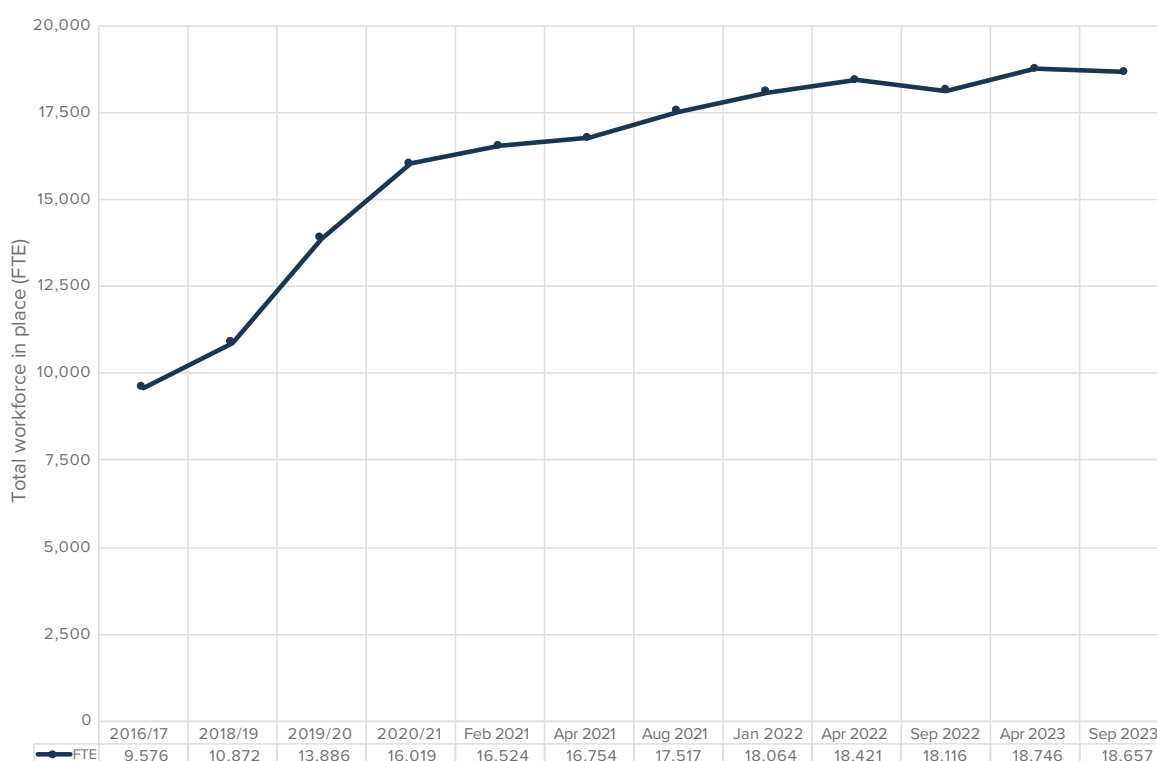


Figure 8: Change to total local authority workforce (FTE) in place since beginning of expansion

Figure 8 shows the profile of the local authority workforce over time since the beginning of expansion activities in academic year 2016/17. Figures for 2018/19, 2019/20, and 2020/21 capture the workforce at the beginning of the academic year. Review of previously published figures with local authorities indicated that there were discrepancies in the way roles are recorded and reported in a small number of authorities, which affected the accuracy of the workforce figures published in the September 2022 report. While it is not reasonable to try and retrospectively record workforce data for these periods, it is believed that while there was a reduction in the total local authority workforce between April and September 2022, the scale of the reduction is lower than indicated. For this reason, in this report comparison has been made to the workforce at April 2023 rather than a year-on-year comparison.

Scottish Futures Trust – Infrastructure Summary

As of September 2023, Local Authority data returns stated that the total number of New Build, Extension, Outdoor or Refurbishment projects in the capital programme was 895, which when all complete will deliver c.22,000 additional ELC spaces.

96% of these capital projects are now complete, delivering 91% of the total planned additional space. 2% of projects are currently in construction and 2% of projects are still in development.

Figure 9 illustrates the status of the overall capital programme as of September 2023.

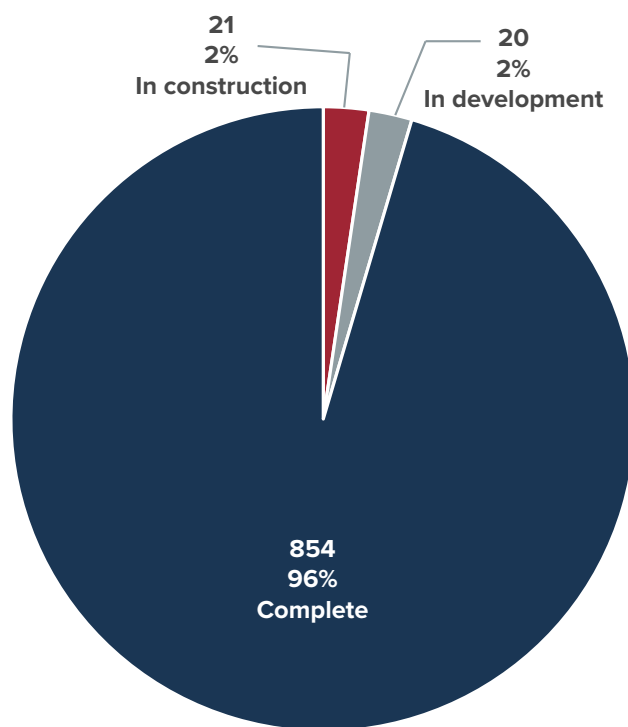


Figure 9: Current Status of Programme Split By Project Status

It is important to note that even though not all capital projects are operational, 1,140 hours has been being delivered by all Local Authorities since the statutory deadline of August 2021. This is partly being delivered through robust contingency plans or 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.

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.

One local authority was unable to provide data in this collection time frame, so the most recent figures we have for this academic year have been used in place (September 2022 data). All figures noted are an estimation due to this.

Data returned by local authorities indicates that approximately 94,655 children were accessing funded ELC in the week commencing 11th September 2023. Of these, 98% (93,091 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 90% (85,051 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours.

Comparing this uptake to that seen in September 2022, at a national level, there has been a year-on-year increase in numbers of 2- to 5-year-old children reported to be accessing funded ELC (1% increase).

Amongst eligible 2-year-olds, there has been continued year-on-year increases both in the number of children accessing funded ELC, and in the proportion of children accessing the full 1,140 hours. The largest increase in uptake was among children aged 5 who have deferred their P1 start date, which increased by 29% since September 2022.

The local authority ELC workforce is reported to have increased by 9,081 FTE since academic year 2016/17, with a decrease of 88 FTE since April 2023.

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