



# Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Delivery Progress Report

September 2024



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# Key Messages



- This data collection provides an update on the status of funded early learning and childcare (ELC) delivery in September 2024.
- Data returned by local authorities indicates that approximately 95,331 children were accessing funded ELC in the week commencing 2nd September 2024.
- Of these, 97.9% (93,306 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 88.0% (83,863 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours.
- The number of children aged 3 and older (not including deferrals) taking any amount of funded ELC has been relatively stable since August 2021 with a 0.03% year-on-year decrease reported in the last year (a difference of 22 children).
- Local authorities reported a total of 6,735 two-year-olds receiving funded ELC as of September 2024, including 711 children in receipt of discretionary funded ELC (outlined in more detail in the Methodology section). However, because some two-year-olds receiving funded ELC under discretionary powers were not captured in previous collections, a direct year-on-year comparison of uptake for this age group is not included in this report.
- As this collection captures a snapshot of ELC delivery in a single week early in the academic year, year-on-year comparisons can be affected by delays in applications for places and by differences in the distribution of children becoming eligible across the year. A small number of local authorities attributed a portion of the drop in their eligible 2 uptake to the above reasons and marginal changes for the other age categories may be impacted by this also.
- The number of children accessing an additional year of funded ELC and deferring entry into primary school increased by 5.6% year-on-year (460 additional children) to a total of 8,745. This is a much smaller increase than reported in the two years previous. Deferral numbers have increased by 70.3% (from 5,135) compared to August 2021. A change in Scottish legislation was piloted (in 2021-22 and 2022-23) and introduced (2023-24) during this period, automatically entitling all children still 4 years old on the first day of the school term to an additional year of funded early learning and childcare if their school entry was deferred.

## Key Messages



- The number of settings available to deliver funded hours has decreased since last year with a reduction of 34 Local Authority settings, 49 private and voluntary partner settings (henceforth referred to as partner settings), and 158 childminders compared to April 2024. Of the 971 childminders in partnership, 208 were categorised as inactive (meaning they had no children registered to receive funded ELC) during the reference week. This was also the case for 8 Local Authority nurseries and 1 partner setting.
- Of all children accessing funded ELC in Scotland, 66.6% receive all or most of their funded hours with local authorities, 32.2% with private partner nurseries and 1.2% with childminders. Since August 2021 the number of children accessing all or most of their funded hours in private nurseries has increased by 11.4%, compared to 1.7% in Local Authority nurseries. This has slightly shifted the proportional split between Local Authority nurseries and private nurseries. The proportion of children receiving all or most of their hours with childminders has remained stable.
- The total ELC workforce reported in September was 18,028 FTE which is approximately 278 FTE fewer than in September 2023 representing a 1.5% decrease.

# 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 settings in place as of the week commencing the 2nd of September 2024 and to capture change in uptake and workforce patterns. 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

Each collection requests a snapshot of the status of funded ELC delivery in a reference week, in this case that commencing on 2nd September 2024. Comparison is made with data collected at a similar point in the year in September 2023, specifically the week commencing 11th September 2023. A complete response was received from every council except for one which has continued to cite that lack of resource is a barrier to submitting a return. The last available data from this council from the beginning of the academic year has been used in lieu of updated figures (September 2022). 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.

To improve the accuracy and overall quality of data returns, the Improvement Service has implemented adjustments to the data collection process; namely providing more detailed guidance and using a return template which includes data validation checks.

The data return template each Local Authority now receives is an Excel workbook which compares their input figures to their figures from the previous year. This template flags year-on-year changes that exceed a set threshold, prompting authorities to review their figures and to provide free text context where necessary. This process helps minimise inconsistencies by allowing sense-checking of returns and allows local authorities to identify instances where previous figures may not fully align with current guidance.

Additionally, a more detailed guidance document is provided to local authorities which includes more explicit instructions addressing specific areas of confusion relating to workforce categories and 2-year-old uptake – these changes and their impact are outlined in more detail in the next section entitled ‘Changes and clarifications in guidance’.

While these clarifications improve the accuracy of figures moving forward, it should be noted that since earlier figures represent a slight over-count of eligible 2-year-olds (or an undercount of all 2-year-old uptake), direct comparisons between this year’s figures and earlier returns have not been included in the report as these may not accurately reflect changes in uptake.

Local authorities occasionally report minor updates and revisions to historic figures in-between reporting periods. These updates are incorporated into the time-series figures in subsequent reports which can result in small differences between figures published in this report and earlier reports.



## Changes and Clarifications to guidance

### Workforce

In its April 2024 data collection, the Improvement Service provided further clarifications on which staff should be counted in some roles, and collated other roles. This collection is the second which has used these adjusted categories but since comparisons are made to September 2023 figures (pre-dating the revisions implemented in April 2024), some shift in workforce category proportions is attributable to adjustments in reporting methods made by local authorities in response to the revisions. 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.

A more detailed guidance document for this collection (and in April 2024) helps to ensure greater accuracy and consistency of reporting now and in the future.

### Uptake

From the April 2024 data collection onward, the guidance formalises the inclusion of two distinct groups of two-year-olds in local authority returns:

#### **1. Statutorily eligible two-year-olds**

These are children who meet the national eligibility criteria outlined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. These children have a statutory entitlement to funded ELC.

#### **2. Discretionary two-year-olds**

These are children provided with funded ELC as a result of local authorities exercising their discretionary powers under the 2014 Act. Local authorities have the flexibility to extend

funded ELC to children who do not meet the national eligibility criteria but are identified as benefiting from funded early learning and childcare based on local priorities and needs. Access to funded ELC for discretionary two-year-olds depends entirely on decisions made by individual local authorities, reflecting their specific contexts and priorities.

It is also important to note that some children accessing funded ELC through discretionary places may incidentally meet statutory eligibility criteria, even if this has not been formally verified.

In previous data collections, there was inconsistency in how these groups were reported. While some authorities included discretionary two-year-olds in their uptake figures, others did not. The revised guidance ensures that both groups are now explicitly accounted for, improving the accuracy and consistency of reported figures across Scotland.

Direct comparisons between 2024 data and earlier returns have not been included in this report for 2-year-olds considering the impact of the explicit guidance in April 2024. Year-on-year percentage change in 2-year-old uptake will be reported in the next delivery progress report onwards.

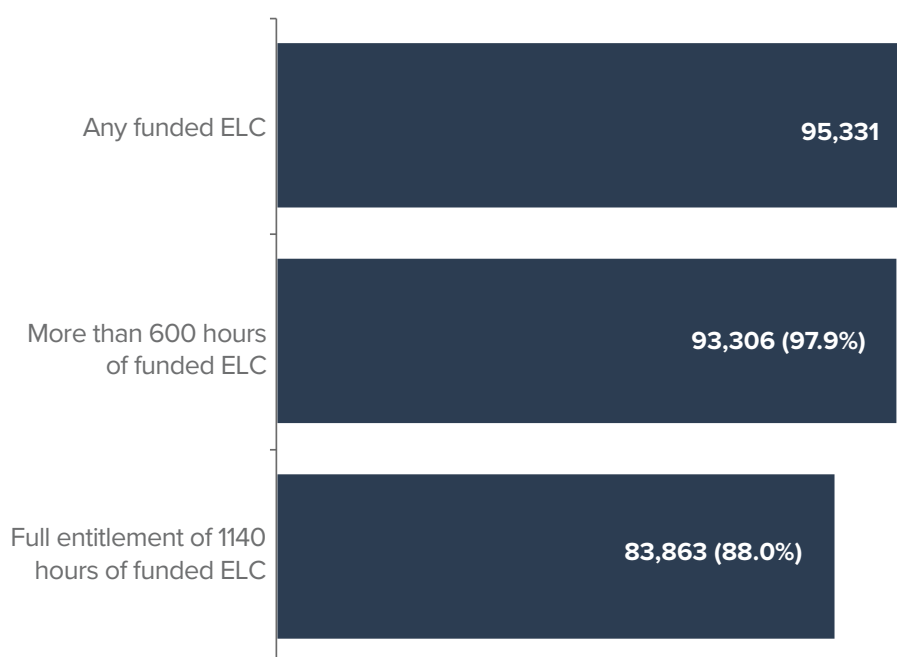


# Data Analysis

## Uptake

Uptake of funded ELC – all children

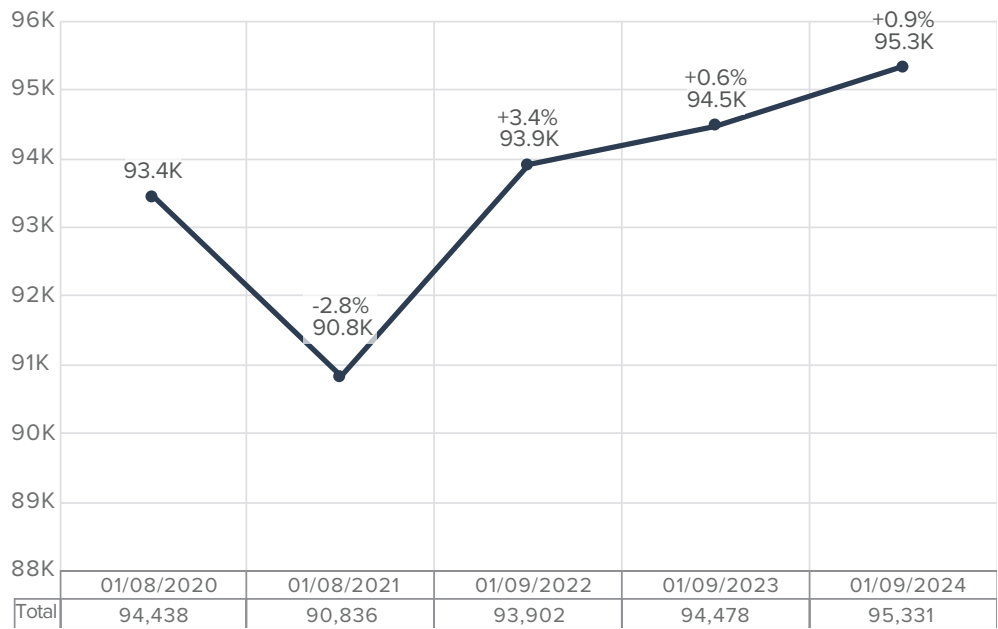
**Figure 1: Number of eligible children (any age) accessing funded ELC.**



The number of children (any age) reported by local authorities to be receiving funded ELC in September 2024 was 95,331. Of these, 97.9% (93,306 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 88.0% (83,863 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 become eligible. This snapshot does not represent the demand for the autumn term as some local authorities have additional intake periods which may result in changes to uptake numbers in the weeks following this data collection exercise.

Figure 2: Change in number of children (any age) in receipt of funded ELC in from August 2020 to 2024

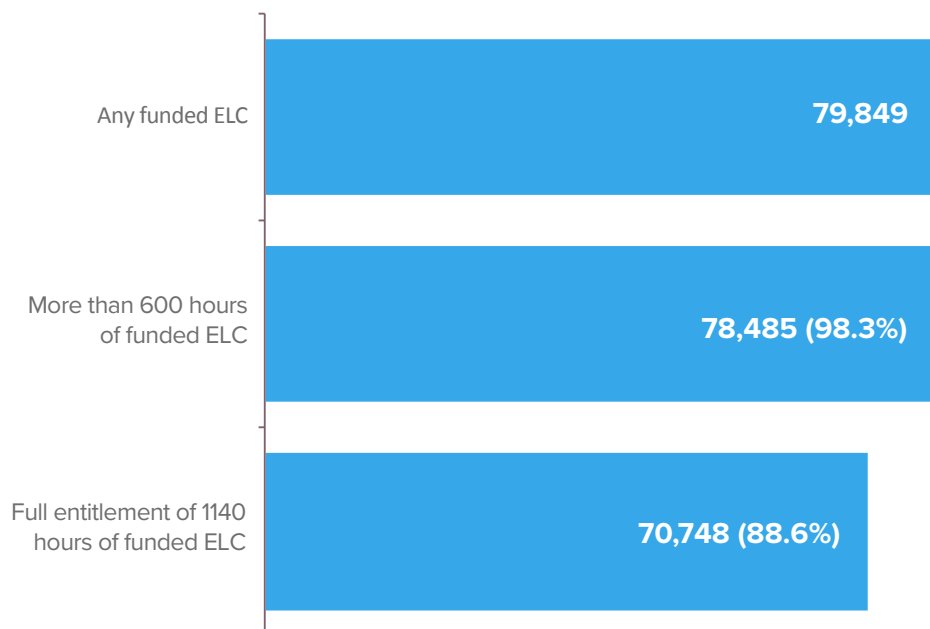


The number of children reported to be accessing any amount of funded ELC in September 2024 is similar to that reported in September 2023; the reported uptake increased slightly by 0.9%. A portion of this increase is attributable to more consistent inclusion of discretionary 2-year-olds across Scotland.

### Uptake of funded ELC by children 3-years-old and older (not including deferrals)

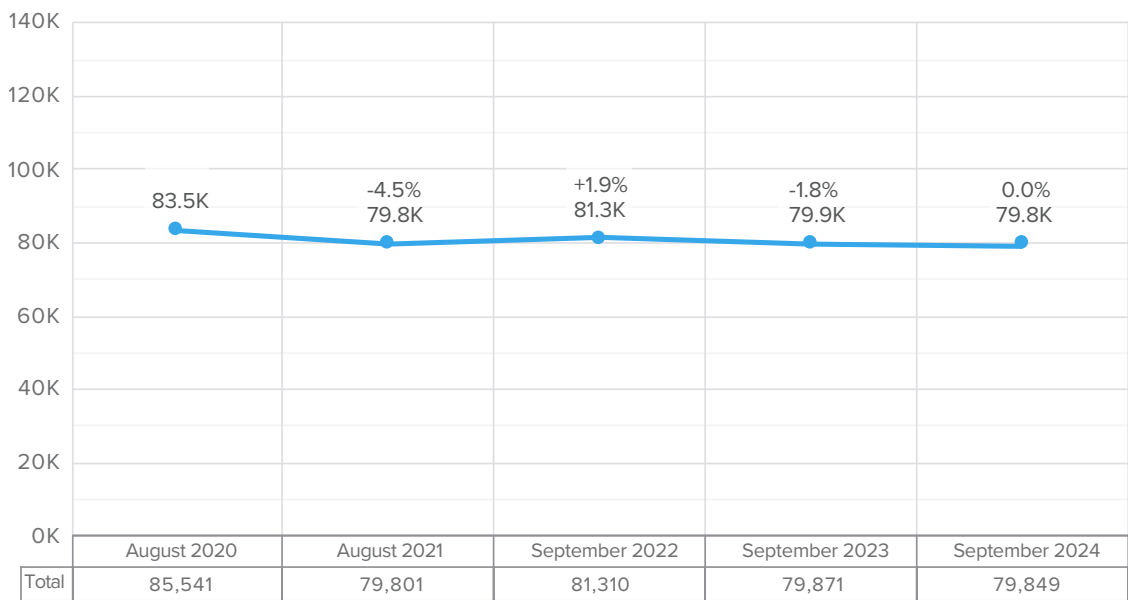
Local authorities reported a total of 79,849 children aged three and older (not including deferrals) were receiving funded ELC in September 2024. Of these, 98.3% (78,485 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 88.6% (70,748 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Number of children aged 3+ (not including deferrals) accessing levels of funded ELC.**



The number of eligible children aged 3 and older who were accessing funded ELC in September has not changed significantly since the previous year; the number has decreased by 22 children since September 2023 representing a 0.03% decrease.

Figure 4: Change in number of children aged 3+ (not including deferrals) in receipt of funded ELC in August from 2021 to 2024



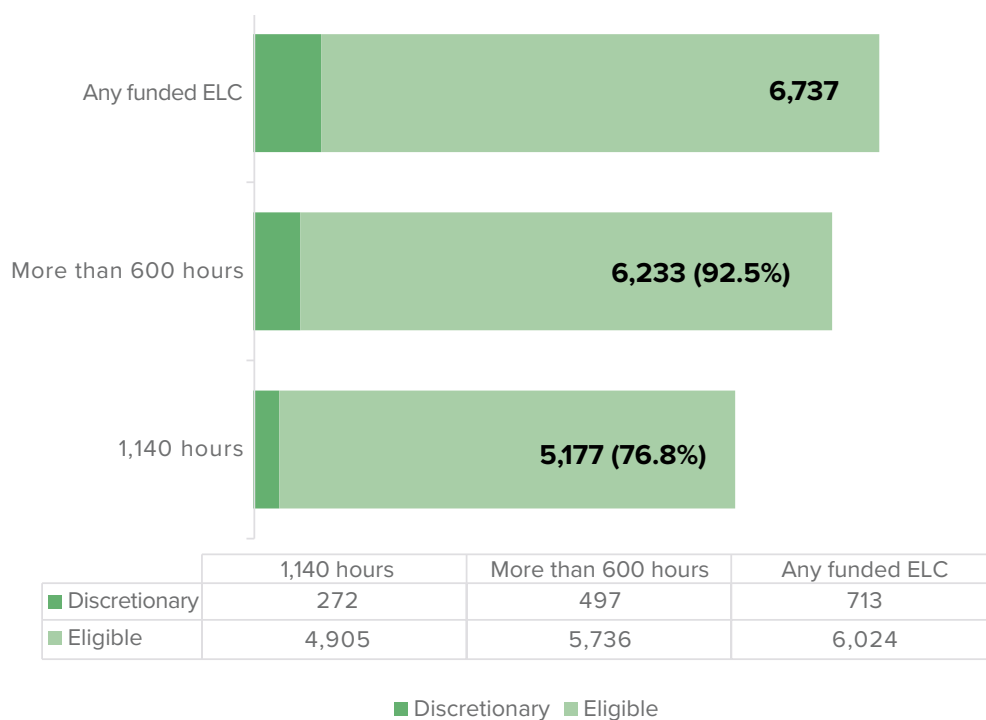
Variability continues to be seen at a local level, with 24 out of 31 councils reporting a decrease in uptake for this age group, with a median year-on-year percentage change of -1.5%.

## Uptake of funded ELC by eligible 2-year-olds

As highlighted in the *Objectives, Methodology, and Assumptions* section, this data collection now makes a distinction between 2-year-olds who are receiving funded ELC because they meet eligibility criteria and 2-year-old children who do not meet the statutory criteria but are provided with funded ELC through a local authority's discretionary powers. There was some inconsistency in the inclusion of the latter in earlier returns.

The number of 2-year-olds reported to be receiving funded ELC in September 2024 was 6,737 children (of which 713 were categorized as discretionary). Of these, 92.5% (6,233 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 76.8% (5,177 children) were reported to be accessing 1,140 funded hours (Figure 5).

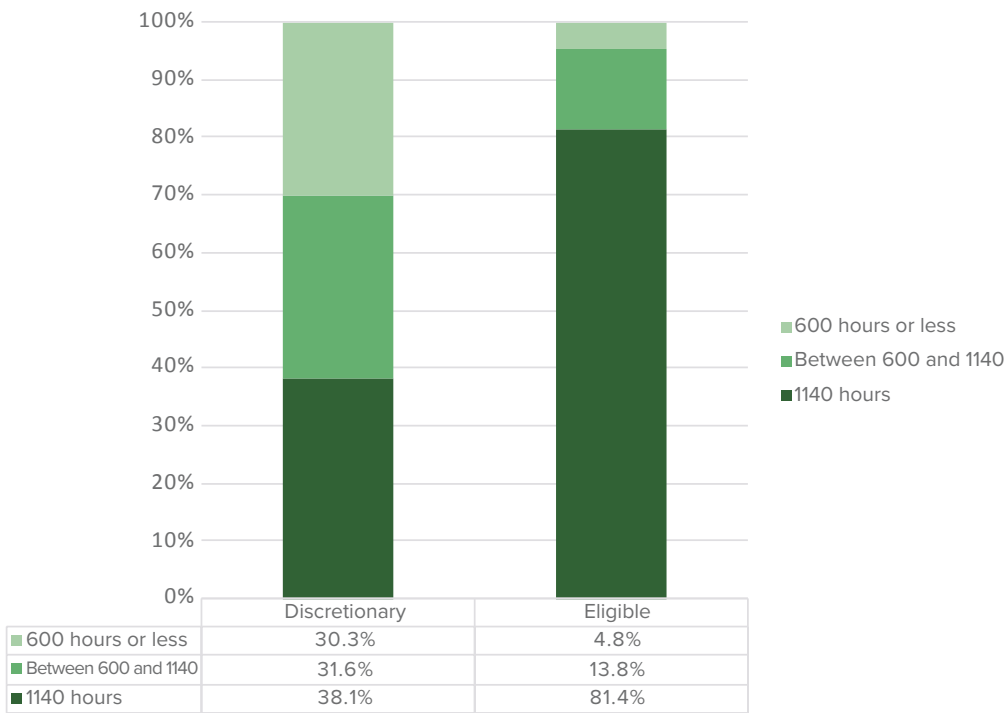
**Figure 5: Number of eligible 2-year-olds accessing different levels of funded ELC**



Local authorities vary in the number of funded hours of ELC they offer to discretionary 2-year-olds since they are not under a statutory duty to provide any amount of ELC to children who do not meet national eligibility criteria. The inclusion of discretionary 2s in the above figure therefore contributes to a smaller proportion of 2-year-olds accessing 1,140 hours compared to previous years.

This difference in the distribution between hour bands is captured in Figure 6 below, which shows 81.4% of eligible 2-year-olds accessing 1,140 hours compared to 38.1% of discretionary 2-year-olds.

**Figure 6: Proportion of Discretionary and Eligible 2-Year-Olds Accessing Different Hour Bands of Funded ELC**



Eligible and discretionary 2-year-olds also differ in their distribution between the different service types which offer funded ELC (Figure 7). Among children categorised as being in receipt of discretionary places, a higher proportion receive all or most of their funded hours in Local Authority settings compared to the eligible 2-year-old category; 92.7% compared to 72.4% respectively.

**Figure 7: Variations in Service Types Utilised for Funded ELC by Different Categories of 2-Year-Olds**

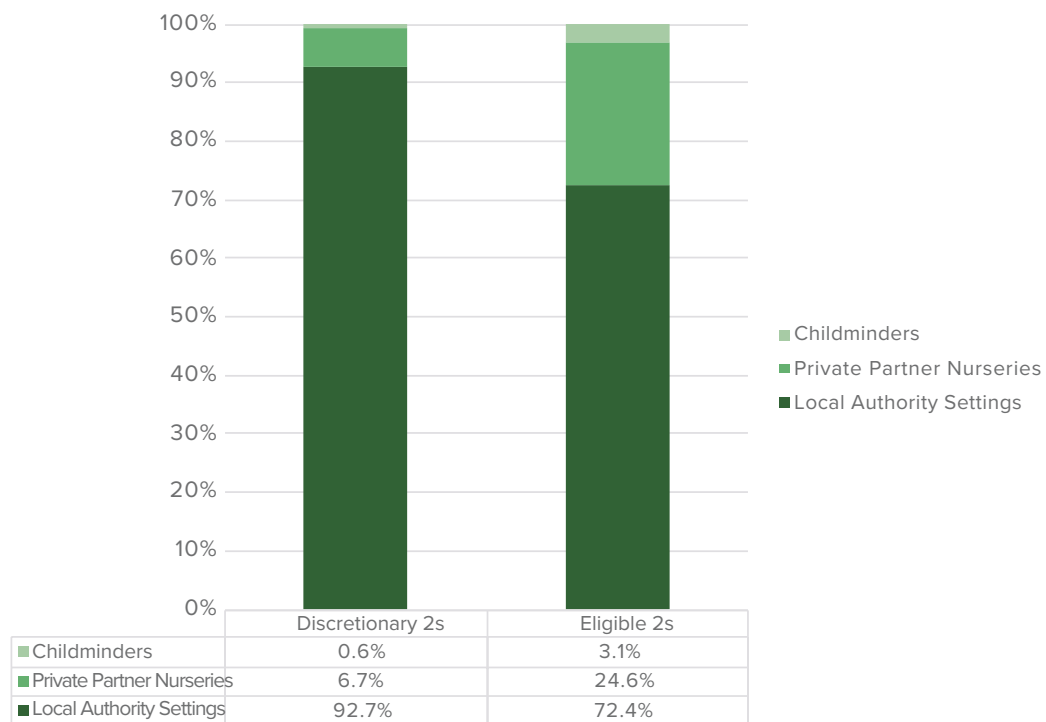
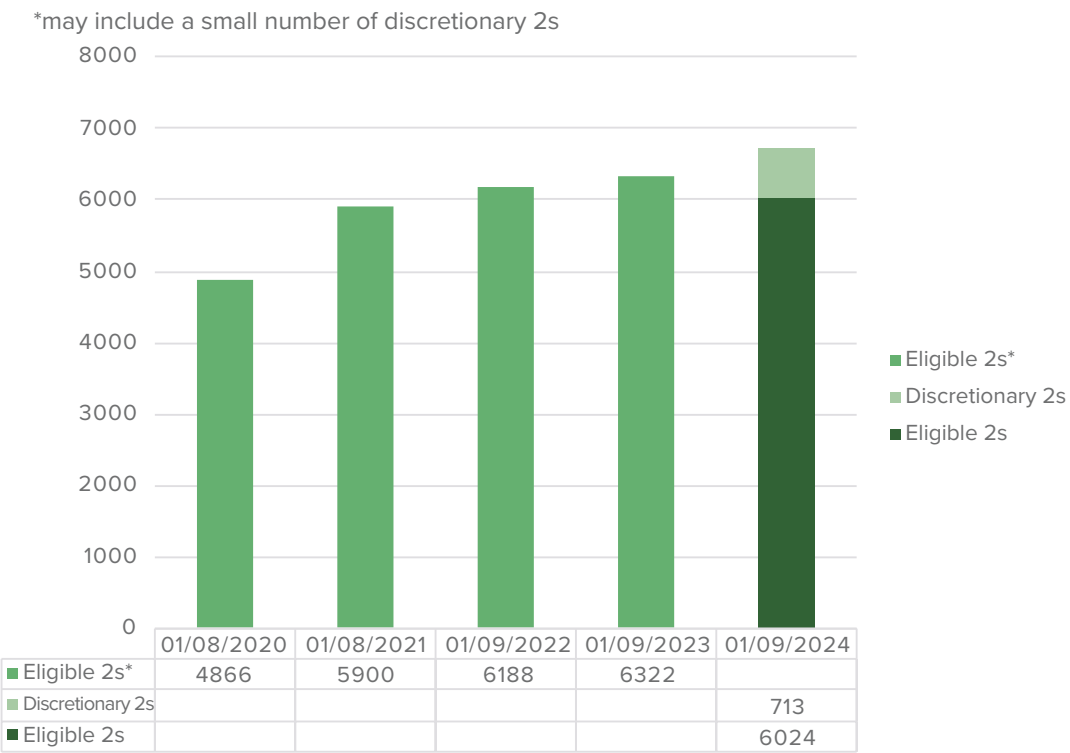


Figure 8 below shows the number of 2-year-olds reported by local authorities at the beginning of each academic year starting in August 2020. Since there was inconsistency in the inclusion of discretionary 2s prior to April 2024, direct comparison between 2-year-old uptake in this year and previous years are not guaranteed to accurately reflect change in demand.



Figure 8: 2-year-old uptake at the beginning of each academic year starting in August 2020



## Uptake of funded ELC by children deferring entry to primary school

It is important to understand changes to deferral uptake numbers in context with legislative change which has adjusted eligibility criteria for a funded year of ELC for those deferring entry to primary school. This change in Scottish legislation was introduced in August 2023 and ensured all children whose parents or carers exercised their legal right to defer their child's entry into primary school (as they had not reached the age of 5 at the start of the school term) received an additional year of funded ELC. Previously a child was only automatically entitled to funding during their deferral year if they would still be 4 at the end of the calendar year during which they were first eligible to attend school. Some pilot local authorities introduced the expanded entitlement in the academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23 and some local authorities, not included in the pilot, chose to introduce the expanded entitlement in advance of August 2023 to ensure preparedness.

The number of deferring children reported to be receiving funded ELC in September 2024 was 8,745 children. Of these, 98.2% (8,588 children) were reported to be accessing more than 600 funded hours, and 90.8% (7,938 children) were reported to be accessing 1,140 funded hours (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Number of deferrals in receipt of funded ELC in September 2024**



The year-on-year change in the numbers of deferrals accessing funded ELC is shown in Figure 10. A significant increase in deferrals in September 2023 was expected due to the change in legislation (implemented in August 2023) that expanded entitlement to an additional funded year of ELC while deferring entry into primary school to all children who are still 4 on the first day of the school year. The significant increase reported in the

previous year (September 2022) was likely due to increases in deferrals in those councils piloting the afore-mentioned expansion. The rate of increase of uptake for this category of children has now slowed significantly with a 5.6% year-on-year increase reported in the September 2024 collection: an increase of 460 children. Deferral numbers have increased by 70.3% (from 5,135) compared to August 2021.

**Figure 10: Change in number of deferring children in receipt of funded ELC in April from 2020 - 2024**

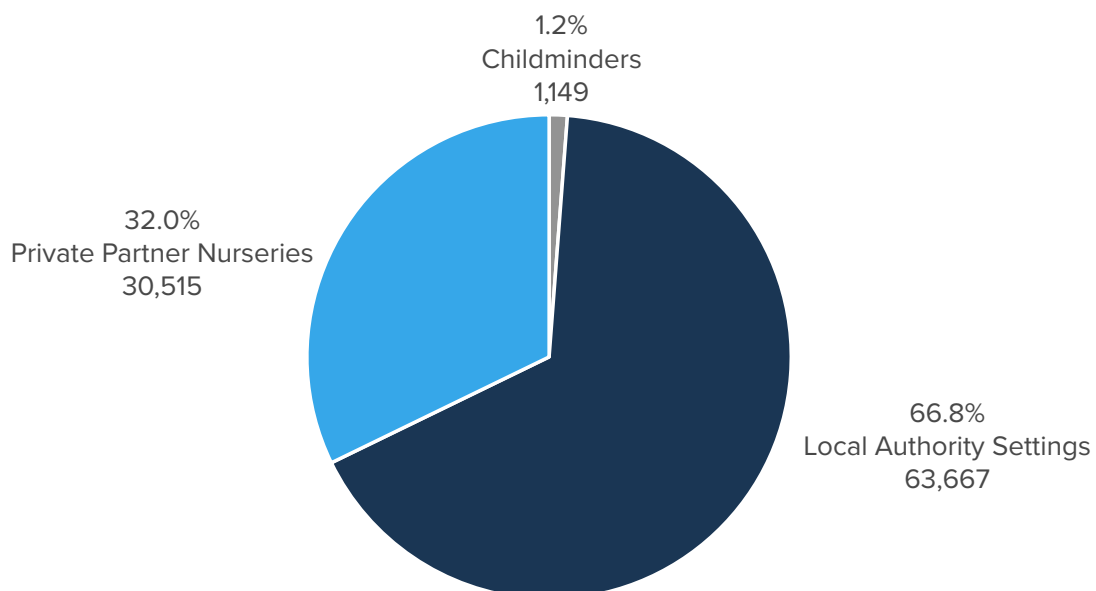


## Provision in Local Authority, Private Partner, and Childminder Settings

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.

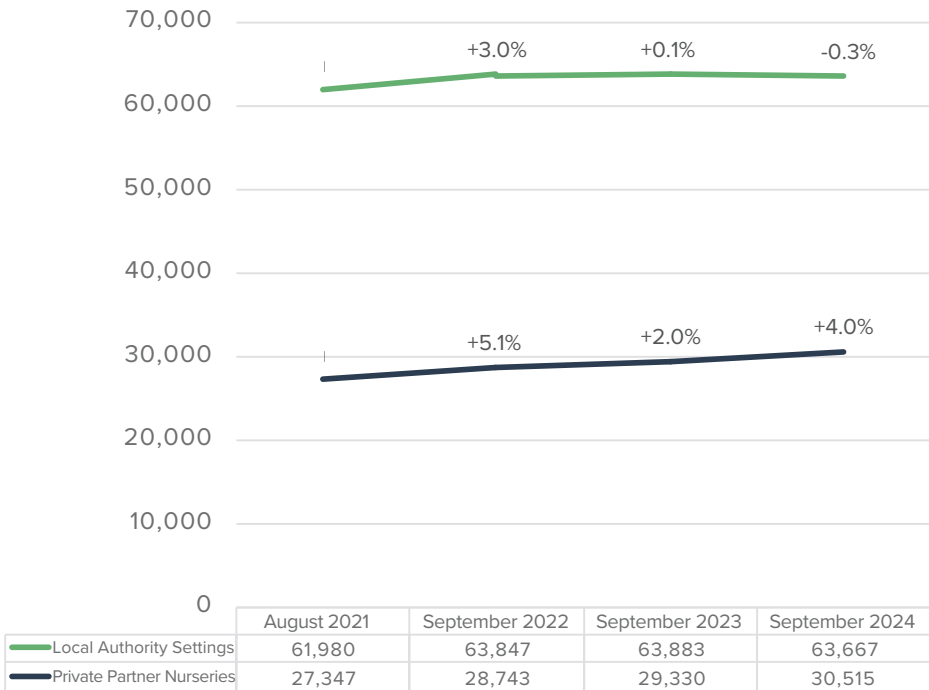
Figure 11 shows that, for September 2024, 32% of all children accessing funded ELC were accessing all or most of their funded hours with private and voluntary providers, compared to 66.8% in Local Authority settings, with the remainder (1.2%) accessing all or most of their hours with childminders.

**Figure 11: Distribution of children by the provider type where they receive all or most of their funded hours of ELC**



The proportion of children receiving all or most of their funded hours has remained stable for childminders, increased slightly among private partner nurseries, and decreased slightly among Local Authority nurseries.

Figure 12: Change to number of children receiving all or most of their hours in private nurseries compared to Local Authority nurseries (2021 – 2024)

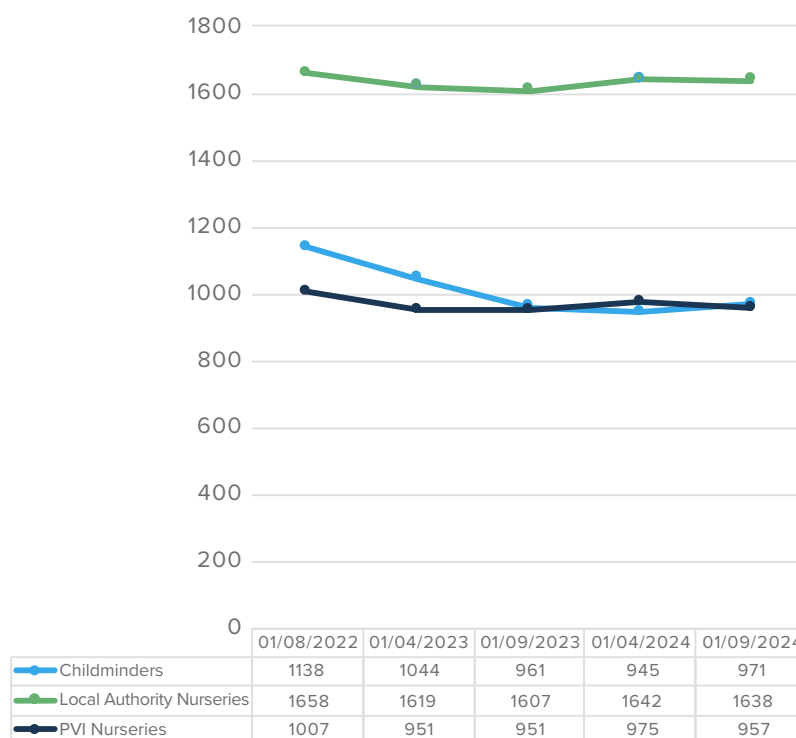


The number of children receiving all or most of their hours in private partner nurseries has increased by 11.6% since August 2021, compared to an increase of 2.7% in Local Authority settings. A large proportion of children – approximately two thirds – continue to receive all or most of their hours in Local Authority settings.

## Number of Settings

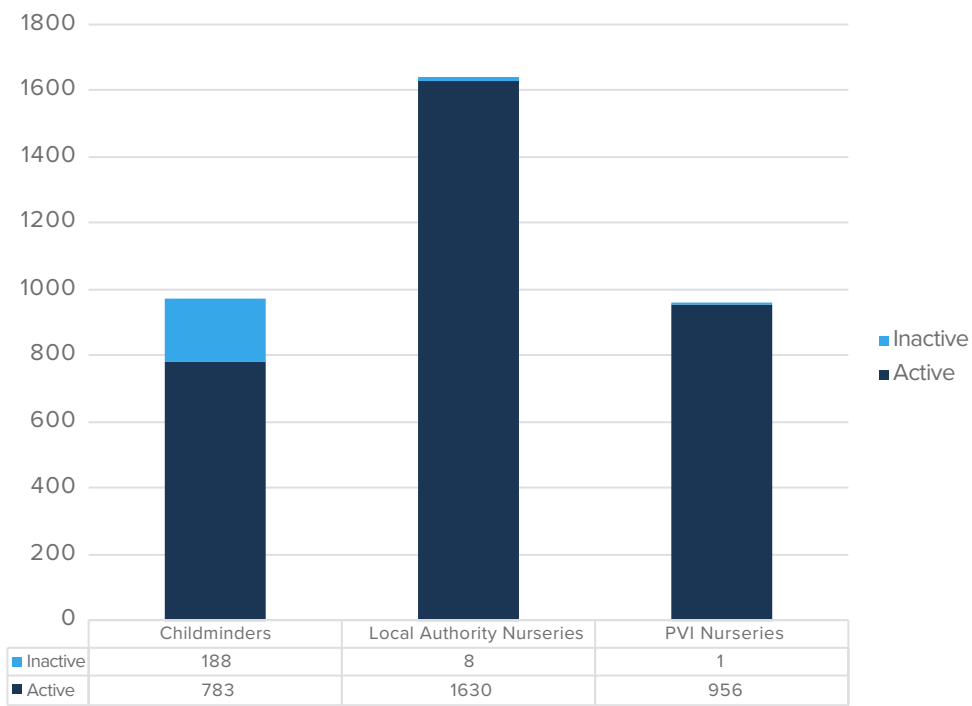
Nationally, 1 additional Local Authority setting was reported in September 2024 compared to September 2023, and 25 fewer private nurseries (see Figure 13 below). The number of childminders in partnership to deliver funded hours has increased by 26 in the last year; while this is a modest increase, this number had previously been reducing for several years.

**Figure 13: Number of settings delivering funded ELC split by setting type for collections in academic year 2022/23 to 2024/45**



In the September 2024 collection, the Improvement Service asked local authorities to identify those settings which did not have children registered to deliver funded ELC during the reference week (Figure 14). These 'inactive' settings (which are included in the totals in figure 13) are not closed, are still registered with the Care Inspectorate, and were more commonly identified in rural local authorities. A higher proportion of childminders were identified as inactive (19%), although it is important to note that, since childminding services are usually individuals and can provide care to a very wider age range of children beyond 1,140 eligibility, they are more likely to have no children registered in a given week.

Figure 14: Number of each setting type which were in partnership but not actively delivering funded ELC during the reference week

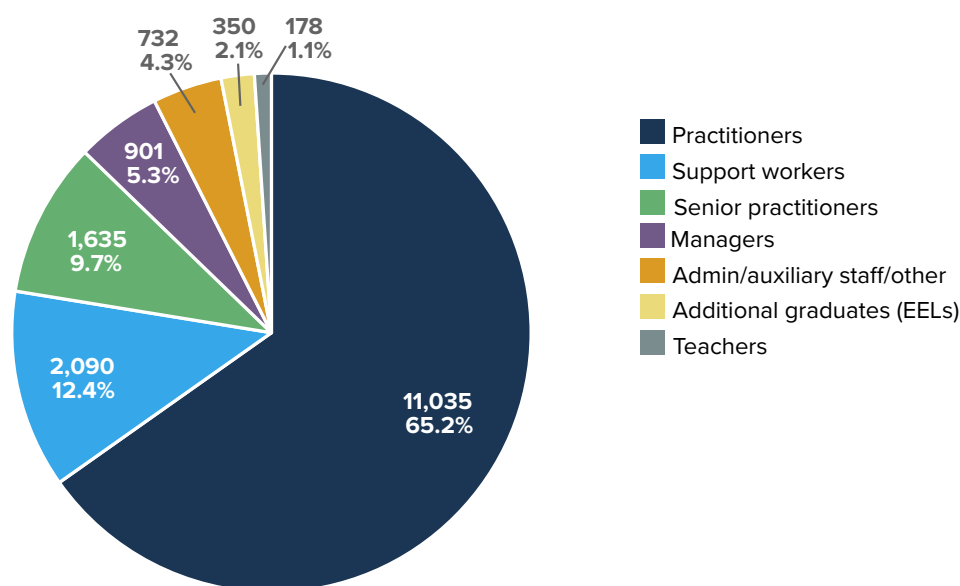




## Local Authority ELC Workforce

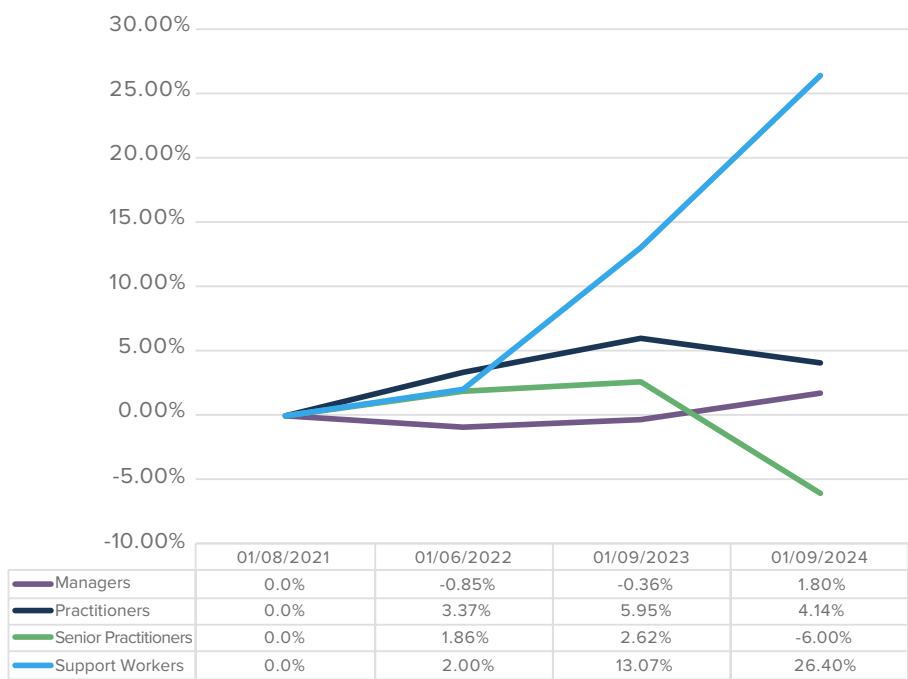
In September 2024, councils reported that the workforce in local authority ELC settings (not including central teams) comprised of 16,921 FTE (full-time equivalent) staff, not including apprentices unless also registered under another SSSC registration (e.g., Support Worker). Figure 15 (below) shows the FTE split by role type.

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



By far the biggest role type in the ELC workforce is Practitioners, comprising of approximately 11,035 FTE (65.2%). 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 also hold the SSSC Practitioner registration), 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 September 2023. The overall FTE within Local Authority settings has decreased by 1.2% since September 2023.

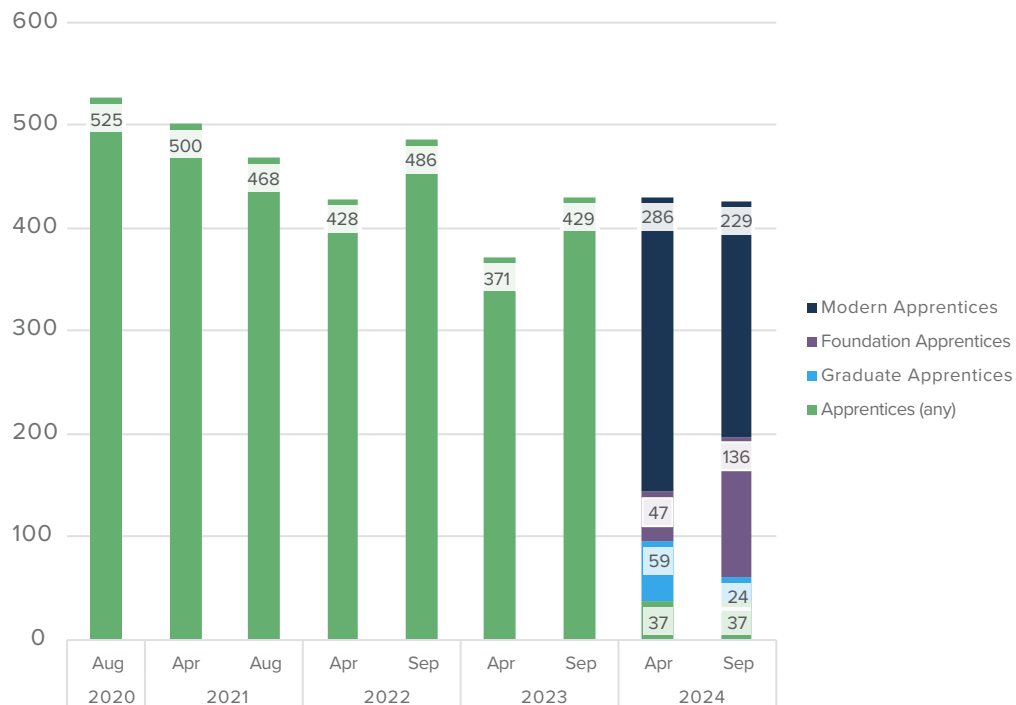
Figure 16: FTE percentage change with respect to the status in August 2021 for the four largest LA setting workforce categories



Of the four largest workforce categories in Local Authority settings, the support worker category has seen the largest relative growth and is now, in September 2024, 26.4% greater than the FTE reported in August 2021. Senior practitioner FTE increased for two consecutive years but is now 6% lower than in August 2021. Local authorities reported a 4.1% increase in FTE practitioners relative to August 2021; however, FTE was higher in September 2023. Local authorities reported a year-on year decrease of 192 FTE practitioners in September 2024. In both September 2022 and September 2023, local authorities reported fewer FTE Managers, however this category increased by 19 FTE in the last year and is now 1.8% higher than in August 2021.

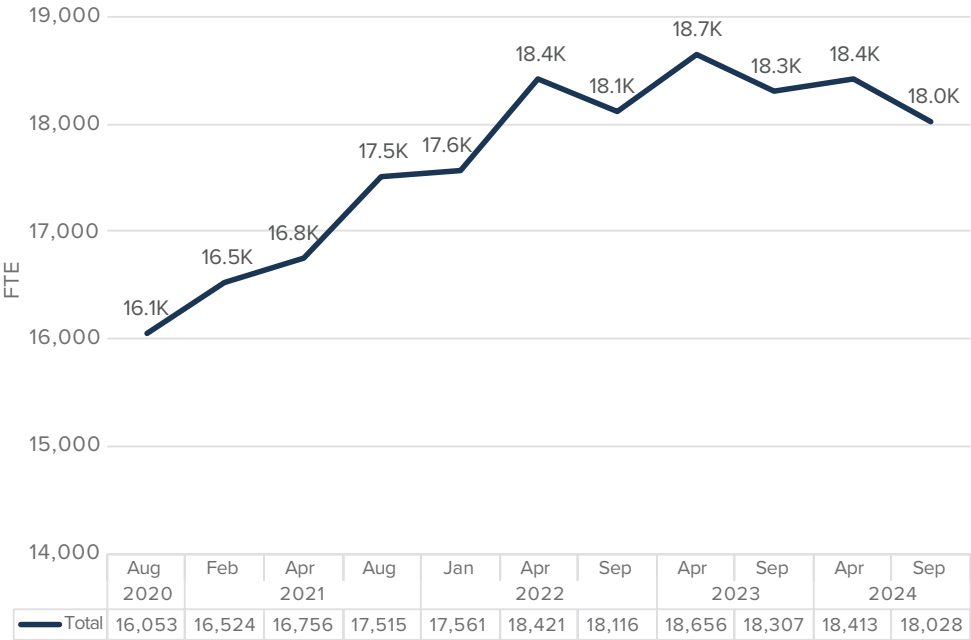
The time series of reported apprentice figures are as shown below in Figure 17. From April 2024 councils were asked to submit the number of apprentices they employed under the three different apprenticeship types. In September 2024, local authorities reported that there were 426 apprentices in place, the largest sub-category being Modern Apprentices (229), followed by Foundation (136), and then Graduate Apprentices (24). Apprentice numbers and workforce FTE have been carried over from September 2022 for the council which did not submit data in either September 2023 or September 2024. This was prior to apprentice type being reported and therefore these have been included under the category ‘Apprentices (any)’.

**Figure 17: 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 18. Reported figures in September 2024 are 1.5% lower than in September 2023 (-278 FTE). As this snapshot has been collected at the beginning of the academic year, it is expected that the workforce FTE will increase in the next data collection as local authorities increase staffing to meet demand, however this is the first August/September collection in which local authorities have reported a year-on-year decrease, albeit a small one.

Figure 18: Total ELC FTE workforce from August 2020 to April 2024 (apprentice numbers included)



# Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) - ELC

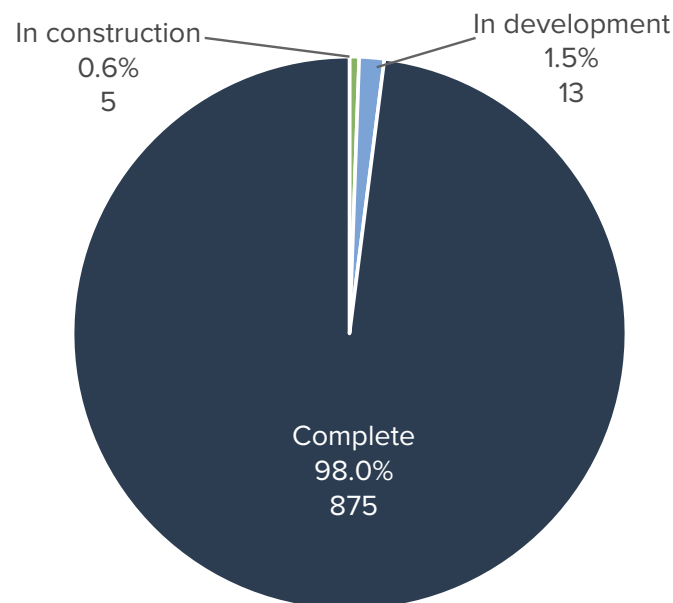
## 1,140-hour expansion infrastructure

As of October 2024, local authority data returns stated that the total number of New Build, Extension, Outdoor or Refurbishment projects in the capital programme was 893, which when all complete will deliver c.21,000 additional ELC spaces.

98% of these capital projects are now complete, delivering 98% of the total planned additional space. 1% of projects are currently in construction and 1% of projects are still in development.

Figure 19 illustrates the status of the overall capital programme as of October 2024.

**Figure 19: 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 longer-term learning estate development.

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

## Summary

Since August 2021, all local authorities have offered 1,140 hours of funded ELC to eligible children, with some extending additional hours at their discretion.

Data for the week of September 2nd, 2024, shows that 95,331 children were accessing funded ELC. Of these 88.0% (83,863 children) were reported to be accessing 1140 funded hours, similar to figures from the September 2023 collection.

The largest group, 3- and 4-year-olds, totalled 79,849—a 0.1% increase from the previous year. Deferrals rose by 5.6% to 8,745, though this increase was much smaller than in previous years. Deferrals now account for 9.2% of children accessing funded ELC, up from 5.7% in 2021. It should be noted that legislative changes introduced in 2024 expanded the entitlement to an additional year of funded ELC to defer entry to primary education to children who are not yet 5 on the first day of the school year.

Local authorities reported a total of 6,737 2-year-olds accessing funded ELC and identified that 713 of these were being offered funded ELC through a Local Authority's discretionary powers.

Private partner nurseries saw relatively larger growth in the number of children registered (to receive all or most of their hours there) compared to Local Authority settings. This despite a decrease of 25 private partner settings and 1 additional Local Authority setting. The proportion of children receiving all or most of their funded hours with childminders has remained stable while the number of childminders increased by 26, or 2.7%, following a 10% decrease last year.

For the first time, the IS data captured “inactive” settings with no children registered: councils identified 1 Local Authority nursery, 8 private nurseries, and 188 childminders (19% of partner childminders) without any children registered to receive funded ELC during the reference week. A higher proportion of inactive childminders may be expected due to the wider age range of children in attendance who may be outside of 1140 eligibility.

The full-time equivalent (FTE) Local Authority staff count, including setting and central staff, was 18,028 in September 2024, marking a 1.5% decrease from 2023. The proportion of FTE support workers in Local Authority settings rose to 12.4%, up from 10.9% last year, due to larger relative growth than other staff roles such as practitioners, senior practitioners, and managers.

In accompanying narratives, councils reported adjustments to service delivery in response to budget constraints and increased ELC uptake. Measures included limiting some Local

Authority settings to term-time only, thereby reducing capacity and flexibility, reducing staff, and reducing or removing a discretionary offer of earlier start dates to three-year-olds (e.g. an earlier start date beyond statutory could be offering places to children the week or month after turning three). Some local authorities also mentioned facing challenges with recruitment of settings staff.



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