



# The Early Advantage

## England System at a Glance

### Demographics

There are approximately 3.3 million children under 5 in England, of whom 70.7 percent are classified as White British. Many ethnicities and cultures coexist, however. Although immigration increased substantially since the 1970s, 94.2 percent of the population of England between the ages of 3 and 15 speak English as their main language.

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### Support for Children and Families

The National Health Service (NHS) provides free health care at hospitals and community health centers for all residents of England. Each child receives a unique NHS number at birth that entitles him or her to all NHS services. A broad set of health services are provided for pregnant mothers and young children, as well as 39 weeks of statutory pay for expectant parents and parents with newborns, and a further 13 weeks of statutory employment leave that guarantees the job remains available.

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### Enrollment in ECEC

Between 96.5 and 99 percent of children attend some form of formal ECEC provision before age 5, and all attend at age 5, when preschool, known as Reception class, is compulsory.

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### Service Providers

Most ECEC provision for children under 3 is privately run and paid for by parents; after children turn 3 there is a mix of public and private provision. However, every child over the age of 3 is entitled to free ECEC in a public or private setting because 'the government money follows the child'. In the private or charitable sector there are several types of center-based provision. Private day nurseries, which can take children from a few months of age to the age of compulsory schooling, are the most common form of provision for children under 3. Preschools are often run by parents and cater to children from age 2 to 4 in part-time sessions up to four hours a day. Public provision is school-based. In the public sector, nursery schools are local authority schools. Children in the nursery class are aged 2-4 years old, and sessions normally run for 2.5 to three hours in the morning and/or afternoon with staff to student ratios of 1:8. Reception class provides full-time early childhood education during normal school hours, for children aged 4-5+ years. All children are entitled to public ECEC in the Reception class.

## **Governance**

The English early childhood system is highly centralized, with one ministry, the Department for Education (DfE), in charge of all ECEC services for children and families. This centralization took place in the 1990s; previously, while early education in nursery classes in primary schools fell under the DfE, voluntary and charitable preschools and private day nurseries were considered “care” and fell under the Department of Health. The DfE is also responsible for the social welfare of children. The Department of Health is responsible for health services. In 2016, an interministerial task force, known as the Child Care Implementation Task Force, was established to “drive delivery of a coherent and effective government-wide child care entitlement to support parents to work.” The Task Force has been responsible for the delivery of a new extension, from 15 to 30 government-funded hours, of ECEC services for children of working parents.

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## **Finance**

In 2017-18, the government provided £3.4 billion (US\$4.4 billion), for ECEC. As a percentage of GDP, its spending is about at the OECD average. Most of this funding is transferred to local municipalities through the Dedicated Schools Grant, which provides funding for schools (Reception class, primary, and secondary), early years settings, and support for high-needs children. As of 2017, 3- and 4-year-old children of working parents are entitled to 30 hours of free (government-funded) child care per week, double the previous entitlement. All 3- and 4-year-olds whose parents are not in work, and 40 percent of the most disadvantaged 2-year-olds, receive 15 hours of free (government-funded) child care per week. Private day nurseries and charitable preschools also receive funds from parent fees. Parents pay for services for children under the age of three. They do not pay for services over age of 3 unless they wish to pay for 'extra hours' beyond the national entitlement.

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## **Regulation of ECEC**

England’s ECEC services are highly regulated. All formal providers must register with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and meet all the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum framework. Providers are inspected by Ofsted on the extent to which they meet the statutory learning, assessment, qualification, staff:child ratios, and other requirements that are outlined in the EYFS. Inspections take place at least once every four years. Providers are graded on a four-point scale, from 1 (outstanding) to 4 (inadequate). Those rated 4 can be closed or receive immediate intervention from the municipality. Inspection reports are public and are read avidly by parents, and centers use them for self-improvement.

The government also assesses children at age 2 and 5, not with formal tests but with a combination of observed tasks and interview data from parents and ECEC providers. The 5-year-old developmental “profile” is included in the national pupil database, which contains children’s scores on subsequent national tests. From this database, anonymized data sets of children’s 5-year-old profiles allow local municipalities to target resources to those settings or neighborhoods where children’s scores are lowest.

In addition, an annual national census is used to identify groups that might not take advantage of free ECEC and encourage enrollment, especially of vulnerable groups.

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### **Teacher Quality**

Staff qualifications for ECEC educators and caregivers are detailed in a national framework across diverse occupations in England, ranging from Level 1 (lowest) to Level 8 (highest). These are defined and regulated by the National College for Teaching and Leadership, an executive agency for the Department of Education that sets the content standards for teacher training courses. ECEC teachers in the public sector are at Level 6, which requires a bachelor's degree or postgraduate coursework. In the private sector, there is usually at least one Level 6 staff member to lead/manage the setting, but the majority of the staff members are at Levels 2 and 3, which can be obtained in secondary vocational schools. There are national pay scales in the state sector; ECEC teachers with "qualified teacher" status get the same salary and benefits as teachers in primary schools. Wages are usually higher in public settings than in private or charitable ones.