

Petitions Committee: The impact of covid-19 on new parents – one year on

Activity

The Petitions Committee ran an online survey to ask petitioners for their experiences of becoming new parents during the covid-19 pandemic.

This survey was conducted to inform an evidence session on 14 July 2021 with petitioners, campaigners and experts on how the pandemic has impacted new parents, one year on from its report on the [Impact of covid-19 on maternity and parental leave](#), published in July 2020. It will also inform any future work the Committee does on related petitions.

The survey was sent to people who signed the following petitions:

[Extend maternity leave by 3 months with pay in light of COVID-19](#)

[Extend paid maternity leave by at least four months](#)

[Commission an independent review of childcare funding and affordability](#)

New parents were also encouraged to share their experiences by commenting on a post on online forum Mumsnet.

We have summarised the key themes below and illustrated them with quotes from respondents.

Response

There were **8,730** complete responses to the Committee's survey

There were **9** comments on the Mumsnet post

Methodology

NVivo Pro 12 (a data analysis software) was used to identify and contextualise the most common words and phrases in responses to open questions in the survey. This allowed us to group and summarise recurring themes which were threaded throughout much of the responses.

In addition to this analysis of the data, Committee staff manually reviewed hundreds of individual comments and answers, using both subject searches and randomised selection.

Survey questions which produced statistical results have been included in the summaries of key themes.

The survey included two sets of questions – one for new parents, and the other for those who run, or work for, childcare settings. The results for these two sets of questions are summarised separately.

Key findings

Expectant and new parents

- [The pandemic has affected the support available to expectant parents](#)
- [For new parents, access to baby and toddler groups, and the developmental and socialising benefits they provide, has been significantly affected](#)
- [Despite reassurances from Government and the sector early in the pandemic, parents have lacked vital support, particularly health visits](#)
- [Many new parents have had to reduce their working hours, or quit their job entirely, in order to look after their child or children](#)
- [Many new parents who have returned, or plan to return, to work have not been offered the necessary support by their employer, despite updated Government guidance for employees](#)
- [Where the option of flexible working has been offered, this has helped many parents balance their work and childcare commitments, but some employers are not supporting flexible working](#)
- [Existing Government support schemes do not do enough to improve access to affordable childcare for people returning to work](#)
- [Most new parents who need childcare to allow them to return to work rely heavily on private nurseries, however the associated cost is often prohibitive](#)
- [Even though most settings remain open, many parents are finding that reduced capacity and opening hours at their preferred setting are preventing them from returning to work as they would like](#)

Childcare settings

- [While the majority of childcare setting providers remain open, most have had to change how they operate due to covid-19 restrictions and the wider impact of the pandemic on parents](#)
 - [As a result of the pandemic, many providers have increased hours to their contracted staff, however many have also had to increase the fees they charge parents](#)
 - [Meeting covid-19 requirements has put further operational and financial pressures on childcare providers, with changes at short-notice proving particularly challenging](#)
 - [The long-term financial sustainability of childcare settings has been significantly affected by the pandemic, and there are concerns the impending withdrawal of Government support will make matters worse](#)
 - [To protect the sector's viability, more funding is urgently needed](#)
 - [Other Government actions, including a permanent reduction in business rates and a formal recognition of the educational role of the early years sector, would also be welcome](#)
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Expectant and new parents

About the respondents

- 8,202 respondents told us they are a **'parent who has been on parental leave or accessed childcare in the last 12 months'**
- The vast majority (92%) of parents who responded told us they were on a **permanent contract** prior to taking maternity, adoptive or shared parental leave, with 77% telling us they worked **full-time**. For comparison, in the period April to June 2019, where the youngest dependent child was aged 0-2, 46% had both parents in full-time work, and for children aged 3-4, the figure was 39%. For children aged 0 to 2 years, 35.4% of lone parents were in full-time employment. This increased to 66.0% of lone parents of 16- to 18-year-olds.
- 239 respondents (3%) told us they **'are, or work for, a childcare provider, such as a nursery'**
- The remaining 289 respondents (3%) were predominantly parents who returned to work more than 12 months ago, those currently on maternity or parental leave, and grandparents

Key themes:

The pandemic has affected the support available to expectant parents

- A number of respondents told us how antenatal classes had been impacted by covid-19 restrictions
- The shift to providing antenatal classes online, or the loss of them altogether, has meant that parents have missed out on the opportunity to form vital support networks with other parents

Quotes

Survey respondents:

"I should have attended an antenatal baby group with my husband where we could have been supported & prepared for the birth of our first child, it should have helped build my support network through meeting other first time mums but we had one class and no offer even of zoom classes."

"COVID restrictions meant I could not attend antenatal classes, many midwife appointments were over the phone along with breastfeeding support which meant a long delay in getting medical issues diagnosed and resolved. I am now attending 2 baby classes with my son as restrictions have eased and I feel this will benefit him massively."

For new parents, access to baby and toddler groups, and the developmental and socialising benefits they provide, has been significantly affected

- 68% of respondents 'strongly disagreed' with the statement that they had **'been able to access baby and toddler groups over the past 12 months'**
- Since some restrictions were eased in May 2021, respondents told us that some but not all baby and toddler groups have resumed
- Pent-up demand appears to have led to lengthy waiting lists in some instances

Quotes

Survey respondents:

"Baby and [toddler] groups being severely affected by restrictions (I could go to the pub

but not a baby group) meant I was stranded at home with a newborn, suffering from postnatal depression and anxiety, making recovery extremely difficult.”

“Our child spent the first year of her life not attending any baby groups not seeing family, she now is delayed in her speech, she is shy when ever we now take her to see family, because she’s spent most of her life with only her mother and father.”

“Even when baby groups could start up again when the restrictions eased the waiting lists are that long I haven't actually attended any groups yet and my daughter is 8 months old.”

“My third child was born December before lockdown. I have a history of suffering from post natal depression and I heavily rely on mum-n-baby groups and exercise such as swimming as a method of managing it. No social contact, no regular exercise, 3 children under 5 at home for 6 months I was a screaming wreck and had to receive CBT for severe depression. My relationship with my newest was deeply affected as the 1-1 bonding time was severely impacted and the quality of interactions greatly reduced. Recent easing has had little impact as my maternity leave has ended, and I could not afford financially to take further time off to help undo the damage actively.”

Despite reassurances from Government and the sector early in the pandemic, parents have lacked vital support, particularly health visits

- While a minority of respondents had received in-person health visits, far more said their contact with health visitors had been limited to video calls.
- Many petitioners said they had no contact at all with health visitors

during the early months of their child’s life

- The lack of health visits is a source of great concern for parents, with many missing out not only on advice on how to meet their baby’s needs but also much-needed support for their own mental health
- Several expressed concern that their child’s emerging medical or developmental needs could have been identified earlier if health visits had been provided as normal
- Despite the recent easing of restrictions, respondents reported that any noticeable improvement in access to health visits has been limited

Quotes

Survey respondents:

“[I have been] unable to get him weighed or seen by a health visitor or gp face to face all done over telephone. Have had health concerns and has been difficult to be seen by the right people due to restrictions and lack of staff back in work properly. Only one parent allowed with child at appointments, had recently started having seizures and only I was able to go to a&e and ward with him leaving his dad worried at home.”

“My son is waiting for speech and language therapy, and neurodevelopment assessment. We have been told waits have increased (ie years rather than months) and we are desperate for support.”

“Me and my baby have basically been alone for the entirety of her life (she was born September 2020), I’ve struggled massively with feelings of loneliness and being overwhelmed, because there’s not been any baby groups to connect with others in the same situation, my family haven’t been able



to come over to help with baby so I could have a shower or eat or nap. She's been seen by a health professional only to have injections, no one has checked my body physically or asked how I am mentally. I've never seen a health visitor. My child has only just started hitting milestones she should have reached 2/3 months ago because of nursery she is very wary of other people."

Many new parents have had to reduce their working hours, or quit their job entirely, in order to look after their child or children

- 339 (4% of the parents who responded) told us they were not intending to return to work in the next 12 months. Of these parents, 103 (30%) told us they had to **quit their job** as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. 53 (15%) had been **made redundant**
- Many respondents told us that the cost of childcare is so high that it is not financially viable to return to work

Quotes

Survey respondents:

"I returned to work for 9 weeks. I had to hand in my notice as it was apparent I couldn't rely on my mother (my child's grandmother) to look after her on the days I work - due to her own age and health problems and having no one else to help I have no way of having any childcare. If I was to place my 1 year old into childcare at a nursery or childminder setting whilst I worked then I would have no wage left each month as I would be paying out on childcare fees."

"When I returned to work my employer change my contract from full time to zero hours as I couldn't fit the shifts being a single parent. During the pandemic they made me

redundant and I lost the job. I change to another employee thinking that working for a childcare nursery company things might be easier and I ended having a nervous break down after the company chooses to stop my son from going to the nursery after 7 weeks attending as against the company policy. I have no nursery and I can't go back to work"

"My daily nursery fee for my baby is £48.50. I earn £80 a day pre tax. It is barely worth me returning to work until I get the 30 hours free, which because me and my partner work we will not receive until September 2023. That is over 2 years of paying £150 a week so I can work. I could have less hassle and more time with my children if I signed on the [dole]. Your system is backward."

Many new parents who have returned, or plan to return, to work have not been offered the necessary support by their employer, despite updated Government guidance for employees

- In its report on the [Impact of covid-19 on maternity and parental leave](#), the Petitions Committee recommended that the Government publish clear new guidance for employees and employers on how employers can support employees returning from parental leave, and what employers' responsibilities are. While the Government did subsequently publish such [guidance for employees](#), it has not published the same for employers
- 7,817 (92% of the parents who responded) told us they have already returned to work or will be returning within the next 12 months
- We asked these new parents whether their employer had offered them the following forms of support:

- Additional period of unpaid leave
 - Furlough pay
 - Other financial support
 - Other non-financial support
- Of the 5,205 respondents who chose to answer the question, 79% told us their employer had offered them **'none of the above'**. Just 10% had been offered **'furlough pay'**.
 - Just 28% of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the statement that they had been given **'the appropriate support and guidance for my return to work'**
 - However, two-thirds of respondents (68%) 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the statement that **'My workplace takes covid safety precautions seriously and I feel I am, or will be, safe'**

Quotes

Mumsnet users:

"We've had no wrap around care for my eldest (6) and youngest wasn't allowed to start nursery until October (was due to start July) due to covid bubbles, so I had to work full time with a 10 month old for months. Employer couldn't care less about how stressful that was. Homeschooling through the year and working full time broke me and I quit my job. The lack of support or acknowledgement for the silent work we (women) were/are doing during the pandemic is atrocious."

"The second lockdown almost cost me my job and sanity. Employer refused me furlough. Leaving me burning the candle at both ends, between work and schooling. My preschooler ended up completely neglected."

Where the option of flexible working has been offered, this has helped many parents balance their work and childcare commitments, but some employers are not supporting flexible working

- Several respondents told us how their employer's support for flexible working, both in terms of working time patterns and location, had helped them to work around the childcare they had secured
- Other respondents told us how flexible working arrangements were either not supported by their employer, or were simply not appropriate to their role or line of work
- This lack of support for flexible working is one way in which the impact of the pandemic falls disproportionately on women

Quotes

Survey respondents:

"Flexible working should be encouraged as much as possible. I will be proposing working from home for all or part of a working day, changing working hours to flex around travel and childcare commitments. Covid-19 has shown that this flexibility can work for parents and employers. Government should do more to require employers to support flexible working. Government should also review childcare funding and affordability to support return to work."

"Working remotely has proven to be successful. The local economies, eg coffee shops/pubs near workplaces should not drive the decisions to return to work if employees prefer not to. Staying at home and working flexibly allows for a better work/life balance

especially when you live with children. The government should support parents financially for childcare to allow both parents to work or be able to take paid time off eg when isolating.”

“Until businesses agree to continue a level of flexible working- as proved during the pandemic, mums will continue to be unsupported in the workplace. On return to work after my 1st child I had to take a 20% pay cut to work less hours to allow me to work around childcare arrangements. I was also manoeuvred into a disposable role on my return, and was subsequently made redundant at 4 months pregnant last year. A few weeks later, me and a lot of other women with children was made redundant. There is no protection for women returning from maternity leave. Flexible working needs to be looked into as well as rights for returning to work after having children.”

Existing Government support schemes do not do enough to improve access to affordable childcare for people returning to work

- Many respondents shared their frustration at the fact that there is no Government-funded childcare for children under 2 years old
- 3,538 respondents told us they have received support for childcare costs from the Government’s [tax-free childcare scheme](#):
 - Of these, 65% told us they ‘strongly disagree’ or ‘disagree’ that they had ‘**more childcare choices because of this financial support**’.
 - Just 42% said they ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ that this

scheme ‘**makes a big difference to how affordable childcare is for my family**’

- 566 respondents told us they have received support for childcare costs from **Universal Credit or tax credits**
 - Of these, 62% told us they ‘strongly disagree’ or ‘disagree’ that they had ‘**more childcare choices because of this financial support**’.
 - Just 36% said they ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ that this scheme ‘**makes a big difference to how affordable childcare is for my family**’

Quotes

Survey respondents:

“Funding of 15 or 30 hours from the age of 2 or 3 does not help working parents immediately following maternity or paternity leave. Why do families who do not work or who work reduced hours receive 15 hours childcare from age 2 where working parents do not get this, but they need it the most? This is a disincentive to return to work full time!”

“I don’t understand why free hours are given for over 3s but there is no support for younger babies. It works out cheaper for many people to quit work and parent full time. I’d like to see more funding for nurseries. It’s such an important job but the staff are often paid very low wages. I feel we should place much more importance on the early years than we do.”

“I’m also pregnant and about to go on maternity leave again. Covid has affected this in that I got made redundant and missed out on Statutory Maternity Pay and enhanced

maternity pay. [...] The government could help by paying SMP-level pay to those of us who missed out on it because we lost jobs in this mess. The date my job went was because the Government said furlough was to be ended on that date, and then a day later it was extended. For me there is a big difference between Maternity Allowance and SMP.”

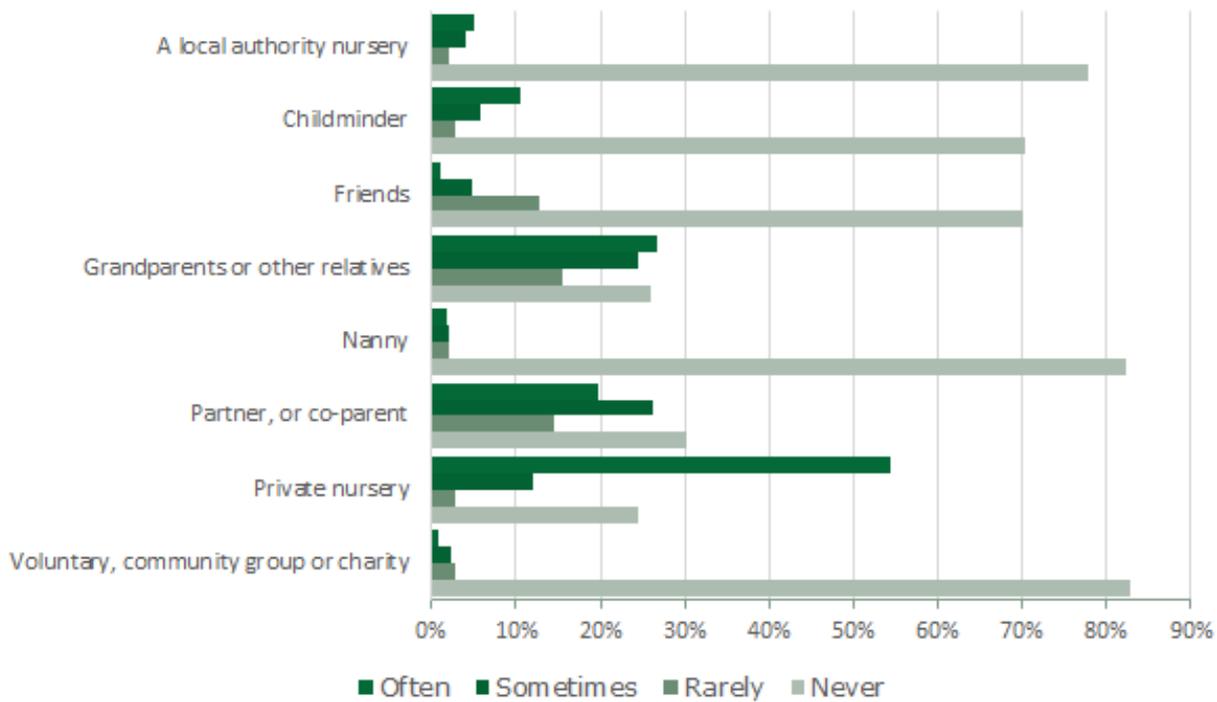
Most new parents who need childcare to allow them to return to work rely heavily on private nurseries, however the associated cost is often prohibitive

- 58% of those who have returned, or are planning to return, to work told us that their childcare would ‘often’ be provided by a **‘private nursery’**, with 29% telling us that **‘grandparents or other relatives’** would ‘often’ provide childcare (see Figure 1)
- 77% told us they ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement that **‘The cost of childcare has prevented me from getting the kind of childcare I need’**

- 62% told us they ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ that **‘A shortage of affordable or available childcare has made it harder (or impossible) for me to go back to work’**
- While 40% told us they ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ there was **‘a range of choice for childcare where I live’**, 58% told us they ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ that they **‘have had difficulty finding the childcare [they] need’**
- Despite this, 54% told us they were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the childcare arrangements they’ve made for their return to work
- Some respondents told us how increased demand and/or a reduction in spaces at their preferred setting had led to increased waiting times for places
- Some parents were concerned about the impact of the pandemic on childcare settings’ financial circumstances, which could in turn affect their child’s care



Figure 1: If you've returned to work, or are planning to return to work, how frequently is, or will, your childcare be provided by the following?



Quotes

Survey respondents:

"I do not have the option to have family or friends look after my child when I return to work and I can't afford to not be in work, but childcare costs more than my mortgage for full time hours."

"My wages will just about cover our childcare costs, therefore I am basically working only to 'hold my place' until my baby is old enough not to need childcare i.e. once she starts school. The fundamental problem in the uk is unaffordable, inflexible childcare. Not just access to affordable nurseries but flexible options like nannies/au pairs etc. My husband died recently from cancer and I am now a single parent. I work 60+ hours a week in middle management in an international pharmaceutical company. Even so, my pay

doesn't cover rent/mortgage plus childcare. Rigid nursery drop off/pickup are also very difficult to manage."

"Just because I do not qualify for benefits, why do I have to pay over a £1000 a month for my child to go to nursery. I am being punished for having a child and a full time job."

"[Childcare is] so expensive compared to Europe. And it's not adequate for the providers. Knowing the staff providing your childcare are adequately paid and have secure, fairly paid employment matters."

Even though most settings remain open, many parents are finding that reduced capacity and opening hours at their preferred setting are preventing them

from returning to work as they would like

- Several respondents told us about lengthy waiting lists at their preferred childcare setting as a result of reduced capacity amid social distancing requirements
- Some respondents told us how the number or timing of the hours their preferred setting could offer did not align with their work commitments, meaning they could not return to work as they would like, if at all

Quotes

Survey respondents:

“Bring in a busy military location where majority do not have friend or family for childcare there is a shortage of childcare spaces and they are expensive. Have just put

my unborn child on a waiting list to attend nursery in June 2022.”

“My son goes to a private nursery 1 day and grandparents 3 days. Part time childcare places difficult to find (the closest private nursery to me has a waiting list of 8 months for a part time place and minimum of 2 days when I only need one day). Found a place elsewhere but have to travel to it and waited for 4 months. Private part time nursery much more expensive (discounts applied if full time).”

“Due to having a zero hour contract my children are only entitled to 15 hours of childcare per week which then leaves me extremely limited on what hours I can do in my job. This leads to a vicious cycle of not being able to get or afford childcare and not being able to cover hours at work or take new work opportunities.”



Childcare settings

While the majority of childcare setting providers remain open, most have had to change how they operate due to covid-19 restrictions and the wider impact of the pandemic on parents

- 95% of those who said they run, or work for, a childcare setting, told us **their setting remains open**
- However, most settings have had to change how they operate, including changes to opening hours and fees charged to parents due to the pandemic
- Of those who told us their childcare setting had reduced its opening hours:
 - 37% cited a **'lack of demand from parents for the days/hours'** they could offer
 - 30% said that it was **'not financially sustainable to open for more days/hours'**
 - 22% said that they could not **'adhere to covid-19-related infection and prevention control measures if open for more days/hours'**
- As a result, 57% told us that **'fewer children are attending'** in a typical week as a result of covid-19

Quotes

Survey respondents:

"Parents have been keeping children at home for more hours and attendance at nursery has reduced. They are also starting slightly later in the baby room as parents continue to work from home and share care more than pre pandemic."

"The hours we open has been impacted as more parents are working from home, hence

we have had to shorten our opening hours as it's not feasible to keep the setting open until 6pm when we have one or two children. Staffing at the moment is one of our biggest challenges especially we have had the combine effect of Brexit as it has become difficult to recruit specialised staff with the UK. Before our staffing demand would be met from European graduates and we didn't have to go through expensive route of sponsoring non-UK staff."

As a result of the pandemic, many providers have increased hours to their contracted staff, however many have also had to increase the fees they charge parents

- When asked how their approach to staffing had been affected by the pandemic, 21% told us they had **increased the hourly pay rate to contracted staff**, with 70% saying it had stayed the same.
- 37% told us they had had to increase the hours of non-contracted staff to cover absences
- A number of respondents told us how their childcare setting had increased its prices, and raised concerns about the impact of perceived under-funding on the sector

Quote

Survey respondent: "The government also cut funding to early years settings after the first lockdown which has had a massive effect on all childcare settings. As a parent accessing childcare for my son and an early years Practitioner working in a childcare setting this is incredibly worrying. This has also led to an increase in fees for my sons nursery which I totally understand the setting need to do. I see this not as their fault but

completely due to lack of funding by the government.”

Meeting covid-19 requirements has put further operational and financial pressures on childcare providers, with changes at short-notice proving particularly challenging

- Covid-19 requirements such as the creation of ‘bubbles’ and additional cleaning meant that most settings reduced their capacity and opening hours, and lost income
- Obtaining the additional PPE and cleaning supplies added further financial pressure, where PPE was available at all
- Covering staff who have become ill with covid-19, are self-isolating, or are shielding has caused further strain

Quotes

Survey respondents:

“[Covid-19 has led to] increased stress levels and [affected the] mental health of staff due to additional measures to ensure sustainability, staff retention (long service & high level skills), and infection control. Significant stress relating to changes to “bubbles” and specifically when [Early Years] settings remained open when schools were closed in lockdowns. Logging and reporting of Covid and maintaining information links with families [has been a challenge] as guidance has been updated, often last minute and out of normal working hours.”

“Parents demanded refunds during times of closure and when isolating and this has had a massive impact on the setting. Additional control measures has increased everyone’s working day as rigorous toy cleaning

regimes have been implemented. Massive increase in costs associated with gloves and aprons as suppliers have more than doubled their prices.”

“The Government claimed the early years sector was ‘essential’, yet we haven’t received any financial support to buy the enormous amount of PPE we require to be safe around our children. We were also told we should stay open but not given vaccines when other key works were given access to them. The Government has not made us feel ‘essential’. Shame on them!”

“We have 2 members of staff off on long term sick with long covid and we’ve had to pay them and cover their hours all without financial support or any understanding that we legally can’t not pay them or not have enough staff in with the children to cover the sick staff. It’s costing us £1600 extra per month with no extra income. We will lose every penny of the reserves we’ve scraped by over the past 15 years but don’t have many more months of this left.”

The long-term financial sustainability of childcare settings has been significantly affected by the pandemic, and there are concerns the impending withdrawal of Government support will make matters worse

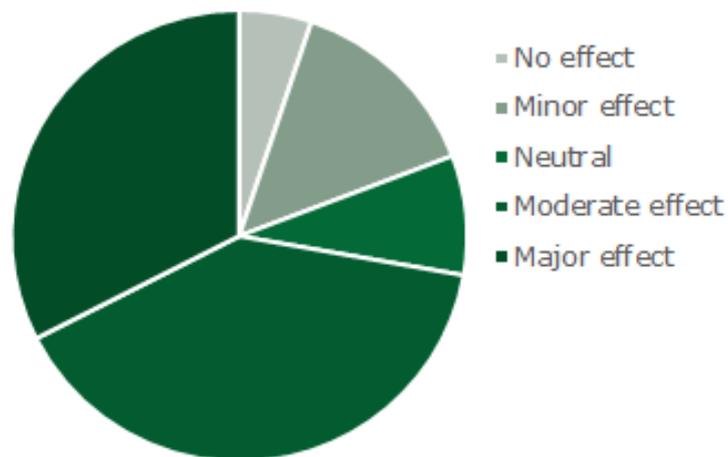
- 72% told us they expected the pandemic to have a ‘major effect’ or ‘moderate effect’ on their setting’s **long-term financial sustainability** (see Figure 2)
- 59% told us their setting has received Government financial support, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (the ‘furlough scheme’) and business rates holiday, during the pandemic



- Nearly half (46%) told us they were 'extremely' or 'moderately' concerned about the impact of the **withdrawal**

of this support on their setting's financial sustainability

Figure 2: What overall effect do you expect the pandemic to have on your setting's long-term financial sustainability?



Quotes

Survey respondents:

"With more nurseries closing down due to the financial burden caused by the pandemic, the demand for places is rising, and the fact that early years practitioners are actually leaving the sector rather than joining it, we are struggling to employ staff to cover the demand for places. Something has got to give."

"Uncertainty has meant minders I know have quit. We won't carry on long term now either. We have been forgotten and out on our own with a mass of legislation flung at us at the last minute while providing happy homes to children to thrive in. I'd love to see [MPs] being happy with a £4.26 wage."

"The poor employees have to work even harder to receive their small salary... my previous provider had to close earlier (2h) to meet safety measures but we [parents] were still asked to pay full price whilst making arrangements with work."

"The risk of burnout for these key workers is huge, and the pressure now to 'close the gap' for missed learning opportunities is an unreasonable expectation and will lead to good quality workers leaving the sector."

To protect the sector's viability, more funding is urgently needed

- When asked what one action the Government could take that would have the biggest positive impact on their sector's sustainability, the overwhelming majority called for increased funding
- Many respondents highlighted how current funding levels meant that settings were unable to pay more than the minimum wage, making it incredibly difficult to attract and retain highly skilled and qualified staff
- Many who offer free places under the 30 hour scheme called for improved

funding towards this provision to ensure parity with private providers

- Providers also called for the scheme to be rebranded so parents understand the scheme effectively 'subsidises' childcare places, making it easier for settings to charge top-up fees to cover the shortfall

Quotes

Survey respondents:

"[The Government should] undertake a full review of Early Years Funding, involving Early Years providers and their representatives. Listen to childcare providers regarding the pre-existing impact of long term under funding which has already hit childcare providers hard even before the pandemic, resulting in little to no contingency funding being retained. Recognise the impact of increasing living wage, introducing compulsory pensions and business rates increases coupled with general inflation whilst Early Years funding remained static, resulting in a real term decrease in funding."

"[The Government should] increase the funding hourly rate. This would ensure that providers have enough money to cover running costs and pay staff a fair salary in line with the living wage. The first 5 years are so important and early years staff are not respected enough and are seen different to teachers, when actually early years prepare children for school and teach the basic and fundamental skills required to learn."

"[The Government should set] a higher base rate of universal and extended hours funding. We receive £4.33 per hr and it is simply not enough to provide a quality provision and pay staff above minimum wage. We have to cap 30 hrs funding

places as we make a financial loss on each child."

"The Government's free education entitlement funding for 2, 3 and 4 year-olds must represent the true cost of educating early years children as has been recommended by all enquiries. It's shocking that the government skimps on the education of its most vulnerable and most valuable commodity, the very children who are our future. Without proper funding, there cannot be proper remuneration of early years professionals and the sector will not be able to attract high [calibre] staff."

Other Government actions, including a permanent reduction in business rates and a formal recognition of the educational role of the early years sector, would also be welcome

- Several respondents highlighted how the business rates [Nursery \(Childcare\) Discount](#) first introduced in March 2020 had helped them to remain viable during the pandemic, and called for the discount to be made permanent, or for rates for childcare settings to be removed entirely
- Several respondents expressed concern that the sector is not recognised for its role in delivering vital education for young children, and called for parity of esteem with the formal education sector
- Many respondents highlighted the challenge of recruiting and retaining staff, as low rates of pay had driven some staff away and covid-19 isolation requirements had led to periodic shortages.

Respondents welcomed the Government's [coronavirus disapplications](#) with regard to the qualifications required to work in the sector

Quotes

Survey respondents:

"[The Government should] permanently remove business rates for nurseries in England - in line with Scotland and Wales. The impact of this will be huge on the sector as the rates review more than doubled [most] providers rates and tripled it in some areas. The removal of rates has been a big factor in our remaining sustainable during the pandemic."

"Dis-applications should continue to be applied with regard to qualifications as there is a staff shortage at the moment and COVID has had a direct impact on this."

"A support package would have been gratefully received. Parents were pulling their children out and ignoring the notice period, we were told we couldn't charge fees if they weren't attending, but then parents also wanted the staff paid in full. We couldn't win."

"Our inability to charge parents wrap around fees last summer, together with the confusing information from government on whether or not we could furlough staff (we couldn't!), cost us over £16,000 and used a large part of our contingency fund. We are now working term to term and fear for our future after 50 years of serving our community."

