Early learning and childcare statistics 2024

A statistical bulletin

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Executive summary

This report is the latest in our annual series of statistics about the use and provision of early learning and childcare in Scotland. All daycare of children, childminding services, and childcare agencies which make up the early learning and childcare (ELC) sector must be registered with the Care Inspectorate in order to operate in Scotland. Excluding childcare agencies, this report is based on ELC services on our register and incorporates our evaluations of the quality of these services, as well as additional information from annual returns completed by service providers. The statistics include longer-term trends as well as a focus on changes in the most recent year to 31 December 2024.

Children registered with early learning and childcare services

- Overall, there were 214,070 children registered with an early learning and childcare service on 31 December 2024. This is a decrease of 2.3% from the 219,130 children registered in 2023.

- In 2024, there were 193,120 children registered with daycare of children services, which is a decrease from 197,000 children registered in 2023. For childminding services there were 22,950 children registered in December 2024; this is a decrease from 22,130 children registered in 2023.

- There was an increase of 510 children registered with school-aged childcare services, a 1.1% increase compared to 2023, while all other daycare of children service types had decreases in the number of children registered.

The longer-term trends show an overall decrease in the number of children registered between 2014 and 2024. However, these are not like-for-like comparisons. In 2014, children were more likely to be registered in more than one service and therefore be counted in each service they were registered with. In addition, the population of children has been changing over time: for example, the NRS mid-year population estimates show a 7.4% (19,705) drop in the population of children aged under 5 between 2019 and 2023.

The rates per 100 population of children registered with daycare of children services show that apart from the children aged under 1 or over12, most age groups have maintained or increased their levels since 2014.

The rates per 100 population of children registered with childminders have fallen for most age groups, except for 2-year olds, which is the same in 2024 as it was in 2014.

Number of registered services and service capacity (places)

• There were 3,414 daycare of children services as of 31 December 2024, 30 fewer compared to 2023. However, the average size of daycare of children services continued to increase, rising from 51.9 places in 2023 to 52.6 in 2024.

• The number of childminding services registered continued to decrease, falling by 5.7% in 2024 to 3,040 compared to 3,225 in 2023.

• The capacity in early learning and childcare (including childminding services) decreased by 0.2%, from 199,050 in 2023 to 198,600 registered places at 31 December 2024.

• The decrease of places in all early learning settings in 2024 was driven primarily by childminding services, where capacity decreased by 1,170 places to 19,000 places in 2024.

• Capacity in daycare of children services increased by 720 places (0.4%) overall in 2024. This was driven by an increase of 1,660 places (1.2%) in early learning and childcare settings.

Quality of services

• The quality of services remains high, based on the evaluations held by services at 31 December 2024, with 92.2% of childminding and 87.8% of daycare of children services holding evaluations of good or better for all assessed themes or key questions.

• Only 0.2% of services had evaluations of weak or unsatisfactory for all assessed themes or key questions at 31 December 2024.

• Overall, 89.3% of daycare of children services offering funded ELC places held evaluations of good or better in all assessed themes or key questions at 31 December 2024.

Funded places and service availability

• At 31 December 2024, 97.1% (2,644) of daycare of children services provided funded early learning and childcare (ELC), this is an increase compared to 96.7% (2,649) last year. The proportion of playgroups, children and family centres and ELC services offering funded places increased in 2024.

• The proportion of registered childminding services approved to deliver funded places at 31 December 2024 was 35.9%, an increase from 34.9% in 2023.

• The rate of daycare of children services that offer whole-day sessions has continued to increase year on year: 87.6% offered this as an option in 2024.

• 97.6% of ELC services now offer whole-day sessions.

Geographical variation in service provision

• The areas with the highest rate of funded daycare of children services holding evaluations of good or better in all assessed themes or key questions were accessible rural areas (94.5%), accessible small towns (90.0%), and other urban areas (89.7%), while the areas with the lowest proportion of high-quality funded services were remote rural (88.0%), remote small towns (87.9%), and large urban areas (86.9%).

• There is no relationship between the prevalence of good quality funded services (those evaluated as good or better in all assessed themes or key questions) and levels of SIMD, indicating that a consistent level of good quality funded provision is available in all areas.

Supporting data tables

This publication is produced together with a suite of data tables in Excel format. Throughout this report, these are referred to as 'supporting data tables'. These tables are presented in a file called 'Early Learning and Childcare Statistics 2024–Supporting data tables' and can be downloaded from:

http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/statistics-and-analysis

Definitions of the terms we use

The Care Inspectorate registers daycare of children services and childminding services, which this report will collectively refer to as early learning and childcare services[1]. For the purposes of this report, this includes daycare services provided for school-aged children, such as holiday playschemes and school-aged childcare services.

The report also includes, but is not restricted to, information on early learning and childcare for three and four-year-olds (and eligible two-year-olds) funded by local authorities under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Further detailed definitions are in Appendix 1.

New name for out-of-school club services

Services that were called "out-of-school clubs" or "out-of-school care" in older editions of this publication have been re-named "school-aged childcare", starting from the 2023 edition. The definition of the new name remains the same as before and is counted the same way across all years.

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[1] When reporting on the number of children registered with early learning and childcare services, we exclude crèche services, as they predominantly provide a drop-in service.

Children registered with early learning and childcare services in Scotland

Overall, there were 214,070 children registered with an early learning and childcare service on 31 December 2024. This is a decrease of 2.3% from the 219,130 children registered in December 2023 (Figure 1).

Of the 214,070 children registered with a service, 193,120 (90.2%) were registered with daycare of children services, and 20,950 (9.8%) were registered with childminding services. Compared to 2023, this is a decrease in both the number of children registered with daycare services and childminding services (Figure 3).

For daycare of children service types, the number of children registered in children and family centres, holiday playschemes, nurseries, children and family centres, and playgroups decreased at 31 December 2024 compared to 2023, at 20.4%, 0.4%, 1.8%, and 7.8% respectively. For playgroups, the decrease in registered children has been a long-term trend. The decrease this year for children and family centres has been influenced by a drop in registered places in a small number of large services, and the cancellation of 10 large services. For school-aged childcare services, the number of children registered at 31 December 2023 was 1.1% higher compared to 31 December 2023. See Figure 1.

When looking at the long-term trend, the number of children registered with daycare of children services (Figure 1) increased between 2014 and 2019, dropped in 2020, increased in 2021 and 2022, and decreased in 2023 and 2024. The drop in 2020 coincided with the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, and this will have contributed to the drop in children registered that year.

In August 2021, the Scottish Government expanded funding for early learning and childcare from 600 to 1,140 hours per year (30 hours per week if taken during school term time). Prior to the implementation, children may have attended more than one service, as many services offering the funded 600 hours only offered part-time sessions. In preparation for the implementation of this expansion, more services began to offer full-time places and as a result, children may need to be registered in fewer services. Our statistics count each child more than once if they use more than one service. We expect that our statistics now include less double counting than before, and this may account for at least part of the drop observed between 2019 and 2024.

Additionally, when comparing the National Records of Scotland mid-year population estimates, the number of children under the age of 5 has fallen from 266,793 in 2019 to 247,268 in 2023, a 7.4% drop. We expect this has also contributed to the fall in registered places from 2019 to 2024 (Figure 2).

For further detailed information, please see supporting table 1.

Figure 1: Number of children registered with early learning and childcare services by service type in 2014, 2021 to 2024.

Care service main type	December 2014	December 2021	December 2022	December 2023	December 2024	Change in number of children registered - 2023 vs 2024
Childminding	34,680	24,880	23,410	22,130	20,950	-1,180
Daycare of children services	211,430	196,320	197,880	197,000	193,120	-3,880
Daycare of children by main type of service:						
Children and Family Centre	10,100	8,160	8,260	8,120	6,460	-1,660
Holiday Playscheme	4,460	3,780	4,170	2,500	2,490	-10
Nursery	142,790	140,420	139,020	138,460	135,950	-2,510
School aged childcare	46,080	40,480	43,340	45,230	45,740	510
Playgroup	8,000	3,480	3,090	2,690	2,480	-210
All care service types	**246,110**	**221,200**	**221,290**	**219,130**	**214,070**	**-5,060**

Note: All figures in the table are rounded to the nearest 10, therefore totals may not equal the sum of their parts.

Figure 2: Registered children in Care Inspectorate (CI) ELC services and National Records of Scotland (NRS) population estimates[2], 2019 and 2024.

Age	2019		2024		2024 vs 2019	
	NRS population estimate 0-4 (mid-2019)	Children registered CI services	NRS population estimate 0-4 (mid-2023)	Children registered CI services	Population changes	Registered places changes
under 1	50,666	3,350	46,197	2,130	-8.8%	-36.4%
1 year	51,823	18,990	48,475	16,190	-6.5%	-14.7%
2 years	53,002	31,600	48,960	28,030	-7.6%	-11.3%
3 years	55,479	63,840	50,349	48,700	-9.2%	-23.7%
4 years	56,003	69,700	53,287	52,900	-4.8%	-24.1%
Children under 5	**266,973**	**187,480**	**247,268**	**147,950**	**-7.4%**	**-21.1%**

Source for population estimates: https://www.opendata.nhs.scot/dataset/population-estimates/resource/27a72cc8-d6d8-430c-8b4f-3109a9ceadb1

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[2] At the point of release of this publication the most recent population data for 2024 are the National Records of Scotland Mid-2023 estimates.

Figure 3: Share of the number of children registered with early learning and childcare services on 31 December 2014, and 2021 to 2024.

| Dataset Year	December 2014	December 2021	December 2022	December 2023	December 2024
Childminding	14.1%	11.2%	10.6%	10.1%	9.8%
Daycare of children services	85.9%	88.8%	89.4%	89.9%	90.2%
Daycare of children by main type of service:					
Children and Family Centre	4.1%	3.7%	3.7%	3.7%	3.0%
Holiday Playscheme	1.8%	1.7%	1.9%	1.1%	1.2%
Nursery	58.0%	63.5%	62.8%	63.2%	63.5%
School aged Childcare	18.7%	18.3%	19.6%	20.6%	21.4%
Playgroup	3.3%	1.6%	1.4%	1.2%	1.2%

Number of children registered with childminding services

In this section we present statistics on the number of children registered with and using childminding services, which is different to the capacity measure in Chapter 2, which focuses on registered places.

There was a 5.3% decrease in the number of children registered with childminding services between 2023 and 2024 (Figure 1).The average number of children registered per childminding setting on 31 December 2024 was 6.9 children per service, similar to 2023.

When looking at the long-term trends for children registered with childminding services (per 100 population), the 1-year-old and 2-year-old age groups have largely maintained their levels since 2014. The rates for children under 1 year, 4-year-olds, and 5 to 11-year-olds age groups have all been decreasing for several years. Children in the 3-year-old category has decreased long-term as well, though this year the rate has increased from 4.7 in 2023 to 4.9 in 2024 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Rate per 100 population children registered in childminding services split by age group
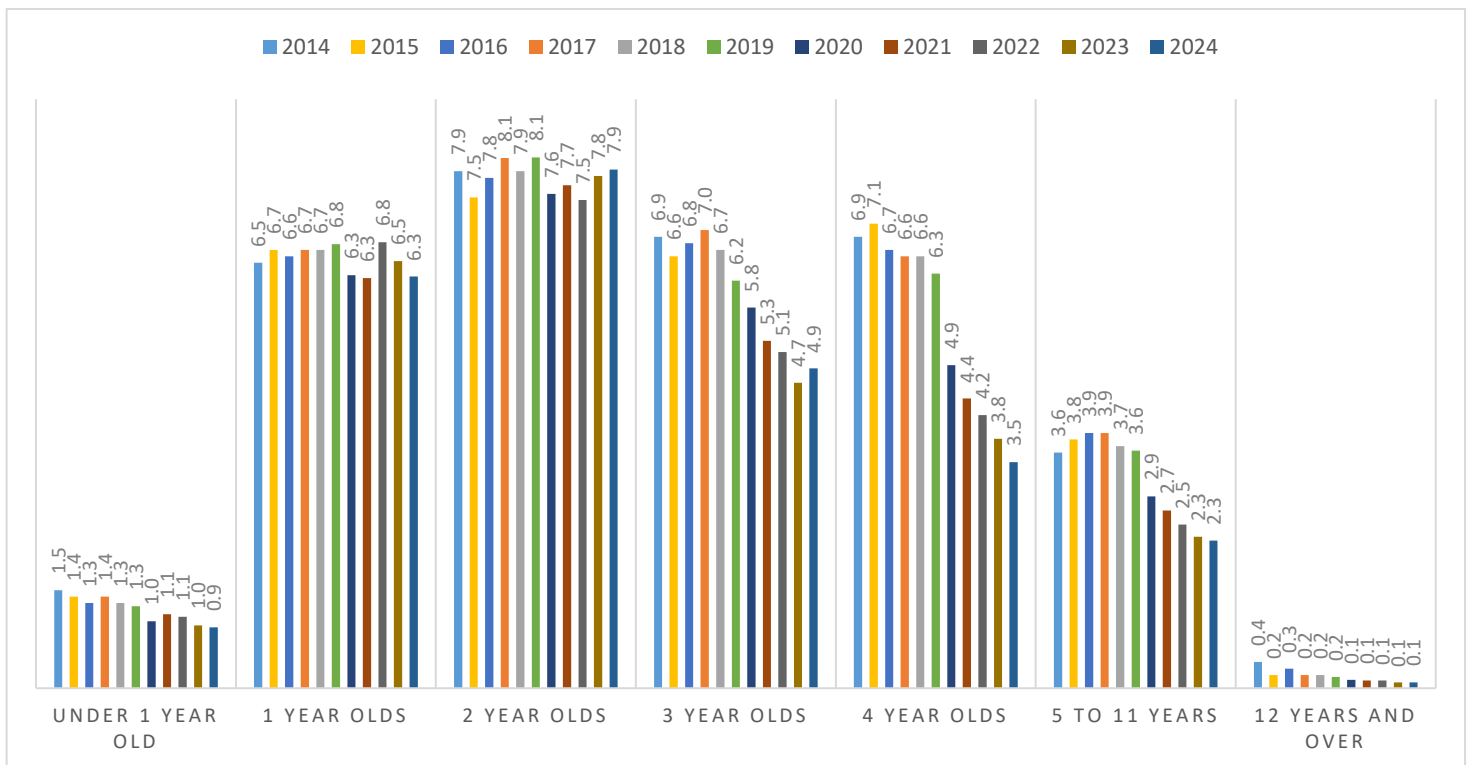
Number of children registered with daycare of children services

Overall, there was a decrease of 2.0% in the number of children registered with daycare of children services (193,120 children registered in 2024 compared to 197,000 in 2023, as set out in Figure 1 above).

When comparing the rate of children registered per 100 population from 2023 to 2024 there were increases in the 3-year-old and 5-to-11-year old age groups, and decreases in the rest of the age groups. When looking at the long-term trend for the rate of children registered per 100 population, apart the children aged under 1 or over 12, most age groups have maintained or increased their levels since 2014. There was a very slight decrease (of 0.5) in the 4-year old age group, although the number of registered children in 2014 was likely to double count children, given the use of more part-time places prior to the increase in funded ELC provision in 2021 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Rate per 100 population children registered in daycare of children services split by age group
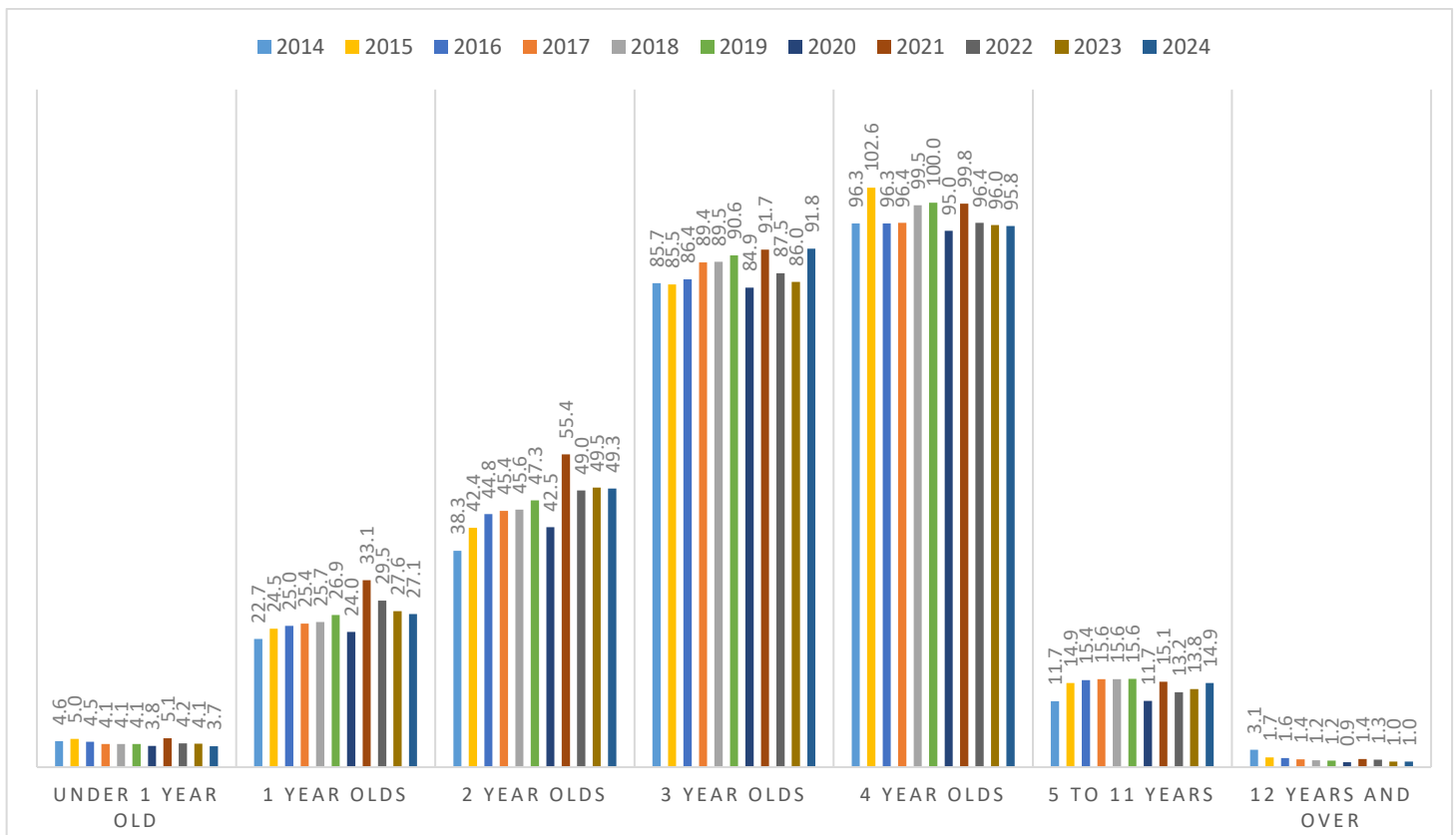
Number and capacity of early learning and childcare services in Scotland

On 31 December 2024 there were 6,454 early learning and childcare services in Scotland with a combined capacity of 198,580 places (Figure 6), which is a decrease of 215 registered services (3.2%) and 470 places (0.2%) compared to 2023. Compared to 2014, there were 3,405 fewer services and 3,300 more places available, which is a 34.5% decrease in services and a 1.7% increase in places.

Daycare of children

Daycare of children services cover a wide range of different types of care provision, the largest of which is nurseries, followed by school-aged childcare services and playgroups. It is possible that a service may offer several different types of care and learning. For example, a nursery may also provide school-aged childcare provision in the form of a breakfast club, or a children and family centre may also offer a holiday playscheme. In this report, we have categorised services according to what they reported to be their main area of care provision. Figure 6 gives a summary of the number of services operating between 2014 and 2024 by service type.

Of the 6,454 early learning and childcare services in Scotland, 3,414 were daycare of children services providing a total of 179,580 places. Compared to 2023, the number of daycare services has decreased by 30 services, and the available capacity has increased by 700 places (capacity is defined as the maximum potential attendance at any one time, measured by the number of registered places available according to each service's conditions of registration). The decrease in voluntary and not-for-profit capacity is the main factor behind the decrease in registered services in daycare of children services. See supporting table 2.

Since December 2023, the capacity (total registered places) in children and family centres, creches, school-aged childcare services and playgroups has decreased, while in nurseries it has increased. This reflects the longer-term trend over the past ten years as well, with nursery capacity increasing and other types of provision falling, except school-aged childcare services, which have increased over the past ten years overall.

Daycare of children - nursery services

Overall, capacity in nursery services increased by 1,660 places to 138,050 in 2024. Compared to 2023, capacity in public, private, and voluntary sectors increased by 1,010, 640, and 10 places respectively (see Figure 7 below).

Over the longer term, compared to 2014, the number of places available in nursery services increased by 27.3%, from 108,440 to 138,050 places. The number of places available in public sector nursery services increased by 42.1% between 2014 and 2024. Over the same period, places in private sector nurseries rose by 10.4% and by 14.0% in the voluntary and not-for-profit sector.

Childminding services

There were 3,040 childminding services operating at 31 December 2024, providing a total of 19,000 places. The number of childminding services continued to decrease in 2024 (see Figure 6), with a 5.7% decrease in the number of services and a 5.8% decrease in the number of places available compared to 2023.

This reflects the longer-term trend: compared to 2014, there were 3,062 fewer childminding services operating, which is a 50.2% decrease in the number of services and a 49.4% drop in the number of places.

Average places per service

Most childminding services are registered for a maximum of six children, which is the most they can care for at any one time while working on their own, including the childminder's own children. A small number of childminding services are registered for more than six children. The average number of places in childminding services has remained consistent with previous years at 6.3 places per service. The average number of places in daycare of children's services has continued to increase year on year from 42.0 in 2014 to 52.6 in 2024 (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Number of services and total capacity, 2014, 2023 and 2024, broken down by service type.

High level service type	2014			2023			2024		
	Total services	Total capacity	Avg places per service	Total services	Total capacity	Avg places per service	Total services	Total capacity	Avg places per service
Childminding	6,102	37,540	6.2	3,225	20,170	6.3	3,040	19,000	6.3
Daycare of children services	3,757	157,760	42.0	3,444	178,880	51.9	3,414	179,580	52.6
Daycare of children by main type of service:									
Children & Family Centre	139	7,380	53.1	104	7,130	68.6	92	6,490	70.5
Creche	83	3,100	37.3	29	930	32.1	27	890	33.0
Holiday Playscheme	50	2,030	40.6	25	940	37.6	25	960	38.4
Nursery	2,443	108,440	44.4	2,527	136,390	54.0	2,534	138,050	54.5
Other services	48	1,500	31.3						
School-aged childcare	703	28,510	40.6	652	30,900	47.4	640	30,850	48.2
Playgroup	291	6,800	23.4	107	2,590	24.2	96	2,340	24.4
All service types	**9,859**	**195,300**	**19.8**	**6,669**	**199,050**	**29.8**	**6,454**	**198,580**	**30.8**

**Figure 7: Year-on-year change in service counts and capacity for nursery services only, broken down by sector.**

Sector	2014		2023		2024		2014 vs 2024 change	
	Total services	Total capacity	Total services	Total capacity	Total services	Total capacity	Change in services	Change in capacity
Public	1,494	57,060	1,601	80,060	1,604	81,070	110	24,010
Private	768	44,070	732	48,010	737	48,650	-31	4,580
Voluntary or Not-for-Profit	181	7,310	194	8,320	193	8,330	12	1,020
Total	2,443	108,440	2,527	136,390	2,534	138,050	91	29,610

Services by provider sector

All childminding services are privately operated, while daycare of children services are operated by a range of private, public sector (mainly local authority, with a small number provided by health boards) and voluntary or not-for-profit sector service providers.

The percentage of all registered daycare of children services provided by the public sector has increased over the longer term, but with a slight decrease from 51.8% in 2023 to 51.7% in 2024. The percentage of services provided by the voluntary or not-for-profit sector continued the long-term decreasing trend and has now fallen to 18.1% in 2024. There has been a small increase (0.9 percentage points) in the percentage of services provided by the private sector since 2014 (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage of registered daycare of children services by provider sector on 31 December 2014 to 2024
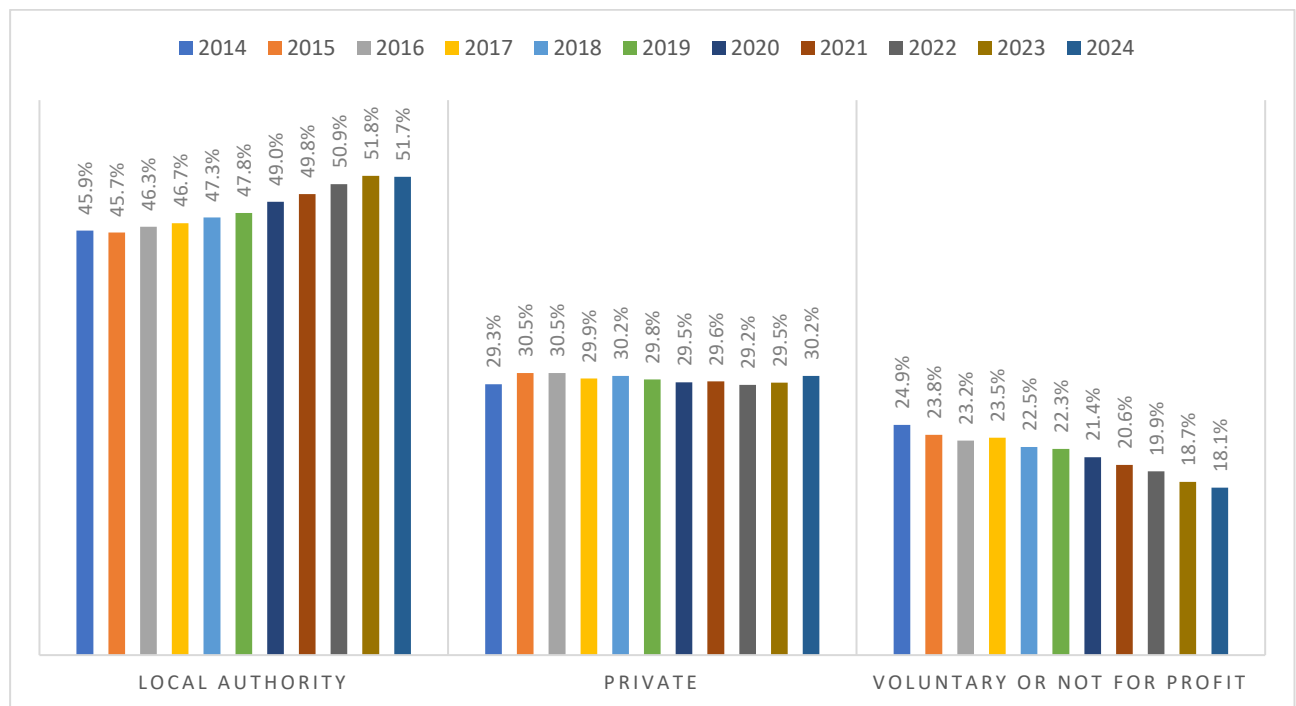
Cancellations and registrations

This section covers cancellations and registrations that took place from 1 January to 31 December 2014 to 2024. The figures used in this section are derived from our monthly and annual Service List datasets, as well as our registration database. Please note that it can take several months for a service to go through the process of registering and cancelling, and due to those lagging effects, a small number of services are not counted during the year they cancel or register. As such, when registered and cancelled services are factored in against the number of active services at 31 December, the totals vary slightly.

For the period 1 January to 31 December 2024, there were 180 childminding services that registered, and 362 that cancelled. For daycare of children services, there were 83 new services that registered, and 110 that cancelled (Figure 9).

Since 2021, when services are in the process of cancelling, they have the option to provide the Care Inspectorate with the reasons why they are doing so.

When looking at all childminding services that provided a reason for cancelling, from when we started collecting this data in 2021 up to 31 December 2024, the reasons relate more personally to the childminder. The most common reasons they gave were because they were either leaving the profession/sector, or because of personal circumstances (Figure 10).

For daycare of children services, the reasons relate more to the organisation, rather

than a specific person. From when we started collecting this data in 2021 up to 31 December 2024, the second most common reason they provided was because their service was not financially viable, and the third most common reason was because of recruitment difficulties (Figure 10).

For more information on cancellation reasons and how they're abbreviated into the broader categories listed in Figure 10, please refer to Appendix 4.

Figure 9: Number of services that cancelled, registered, and were active at 31 December, from 2014 to 2024.

Year	Childminding services			Daycare of children services		
	Services that registered during year	Services that cancelled during year	Active services at 31 December	Services that registered during year	Services that cancelled during year	Active services at 31 December
2014	627	717	6,102	126	150	3,757
2015	592	737	5,954	151	135	3,772
2016	592	879	5,669	135	177	3,733
2017	477	721	5,426	105	138	3,701
2018	406	722	5,105	104	156	3,646
2019	312	668	4,752	141	145	3,643
2020	221	635	4,395	83	136	3,588
2021	151	483	3,998	107	123	3,573
2022	164	637	3,530	70	127	3,514
2023	178	481	3,225	68	142	3,444
2024	180	362	3,040	83	110	3,414

Figure 10: Reason for cancellation as a percentage of all cancelled services from 2021 up to 31 December 2024, by care service type.
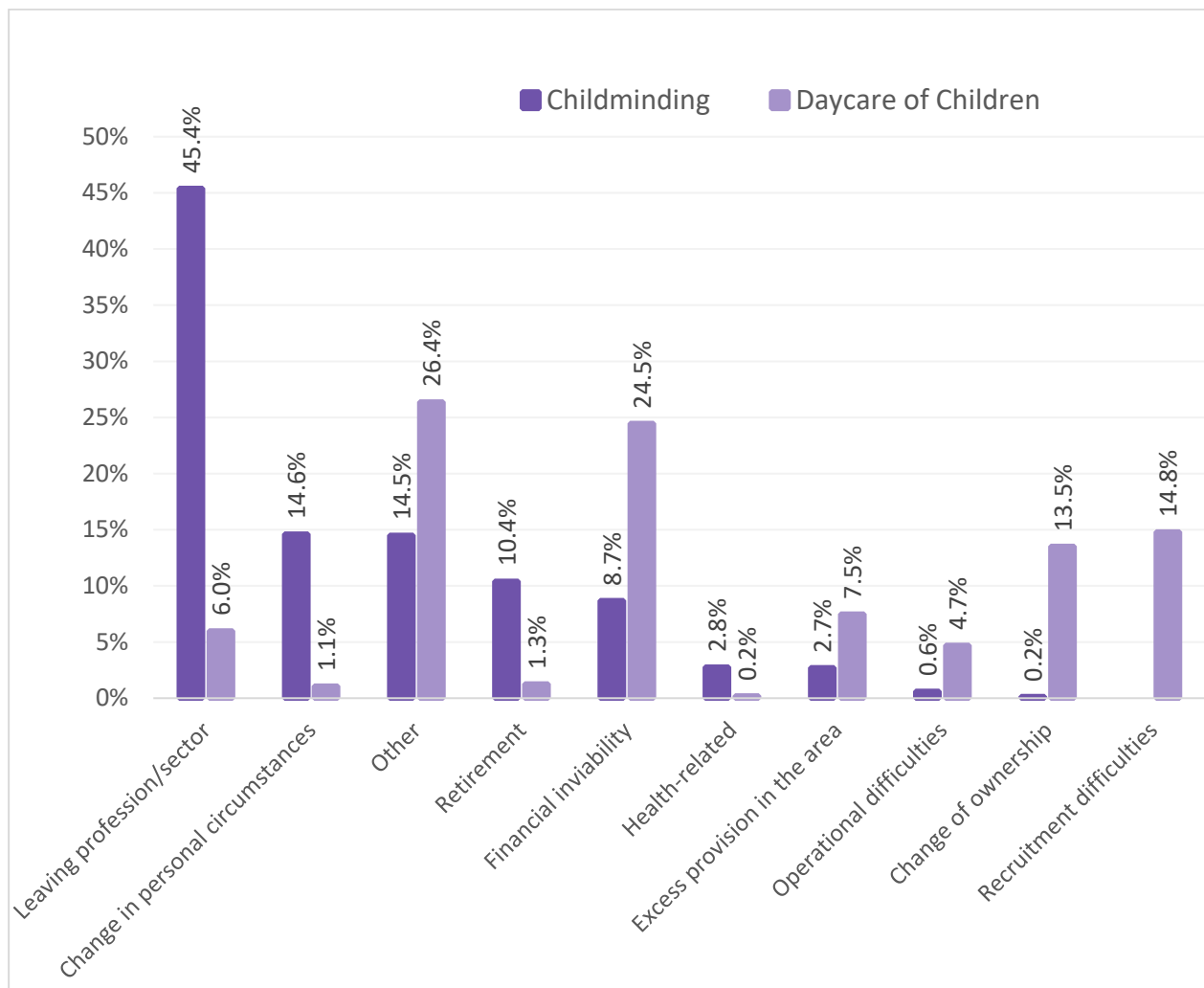
Note: The above figure only includes cancelled services that provided a reason why they cancelled. Double counting can occur when a service chooses more than one cancellation reason.

The quality of early learning and childcare services

In June 2022, the quality framework used to evaluate ELC services changed. The new methodology evaluates services based on key questions rather than the old method of quality themes. Similar to the older grading methodology, services are evaluated on each of these key questions on a scale from one to six, one being unsatisfactory and six being excellent.

There will be some ELC services that still have the quality themes framework evaluations. Some ELC services, whose most recent inspection took place on or after 1 June 2022, are therefore evaluated using the new quality framework and key questions.

The figures provided in this chapter are based on the evaluations held by services at 31 December 2024, and contain grading data derived from the old and new quality frameworks. For more information on the grading frameworks see Appendix 6.

The quality of early learning and childcare services continued to be very high overall at 31 December 2024 (Figures 11 and 12).

The proportion of childminding services holding evaluations of good, very good or excellent in all assessed themes or key questions remained very high at 92.2%, which was similar to the levels reported since 2020.

The proportion of daycare of children services holding evaluations of good, very good or excellent in all assessed themes or key questions remained high at 87.8%. This is similar to the 88.3% reported in 2023, but has fallen from 90.3% in 2014.

Nursery services continue to provide a high standard of care, with 88.9% holding evaluations of good, very good or excellent in all assessed themes or key questions, which was similar to the 89.2% reported in 2023 (Figure 12).

Services found to be weak or unsatisfactory in all assessed key questions continue to be rare, with 0.4% of daycare of children services and 0.1% of childminding services at this level (Figure 15).

Although most early learning and childcare services operate at a high standard across all sectors, a larger proportion of public sector services were of a high quality (holding evaluations of good or better in all assessed themes or key questions) compared to other sectors. (Figures 13 and 14).

Figure 11: Percentage of services holding evaluations of good or better, and very good or excellent in all assessed themes or key questions, 2014 to 2024

Year	All evaluations Good, Very Good or Excellent		All evaluations Very Good or Excellent	
	Childminding	Daycare of Children	Childminding	Daycare of Children
2014	91.0%	90.3%	49.6%	42.2%
2015	91.8%	88.4%	48.8%	41.5%
2016	91.8%	87.6%	48.7%	40.3%
2017	92.1%	88.3%	47.6%	37.8%
2018	91.9%	88.0%	45.2%	35.7%
2019	91.7%	87.7%	44.0%	33.7%
2020	92.6%	88.7%	44.2%	33.0%
2021	92.8%	87.7%	43.9%	31.7%
2022	92.0%	88.5%	41.7%	31.5%
2023	92.6%	88.3%	39.6%	30.0%
2024	92.2%	87.8%	37.6%	28.9%

Note: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

Figure 12: Number of ELC services broken down by the quality evaluation held at 31 December 2024

High level service type	All evaluations Adequate, Weak or Unsatisfactory (grades 1,2 or 3)		All evaluations Good, Very Good or Excellent (grades 4,5 or 6)		All evaluations Very Good or Excellent (grades 5 or 6)	
	Number of services	% of services	Number of services	% of services	Number of services	% of services
Childminding	212	7.8%	2,503	92.2%	1,022	37.6%
Daycare of children services	398	12.2%	2,877	87.8%	945	28.9%
Daycare of children by main type of service:						
Children and Family Centre	6	6.6%	85	93.4%	48	52.7%
Creche	5	21.7%	18	78.3%	5	21.7%
Holiday Playscheme	1	4.5%	21	95.5%	7	31.8%
Nursery	274	11.1%	2191	88.9%	767	31.1%
School aged childcare	100	17.2%	480	82.8%	101	17.4%
Playgroup	12	12.8%	82	87.2%	17	18.1%
All service types	**610**	**10.2%**	**5,380**	**89.8%**	**1,967**	**32.8%**

Note: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

Figure 13: Percentage of services holding evaluations of good, very good or excellent in all assessed themes or key questions, by sector at 31 December 2024

High level service type	Public Sector		Private		Voluntary or not for profit	
	Number of services	% of services	Number of services	% of services	Number of services	% of services
Childminding			2,503	92.2%		
Daycare of children services	1,605	92.4%	767	81.4%	505	84.7%
Daycare of children by main type of service:						
Children and Family Centre	65	97.0%			20	83.3%
Creche	2	100.0%	8	72.7%	8	80.0%
Holiday Playscheme	6	100.0%	1	100.0%	14	93.3%
Nursery	1466	92.7%	562	80.6%	163	87.2%
School aged childcare	66	81.5%	189	84.0%	225	82.1%
Playgroup			7	87.5%	75	87.2%
All service types	**1,605**	**92.4%**	**3,270**	**89.4%**	**505**	**84.7%**

Note: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

Figure 14: Percentage of services holding evaluations of very good or excellent in all assessed themes or key questions, by sector at 31 December 2024

High level service type	Public Sector		Private		Voluntary or Not for Profit	
	Number of services	% of services	Number of services	% of services	Number of services	% of services
Childminding			1,022	37.6%		
Daycare of children services	651	37.5%	152	16.1%	142	23.8%
Daycare of children by main type of service:						
Children and Family Centre	38	56.7%			10	41.7%
Creche	1	50.0%	1	9.1%	3	30.0%
Holiday Playscheme	2	33.3%			5	33.3%
Nursery	599	37.9%	114	16.4%	54	28.9%
School aged childcare	11	13.6%	34	15.1%	56	20.4%
Playgroup			3	37.5%	14	16.3%
All service types	**651**	**37.5%**	**1,174**	**32.1%**	**142**	**23.8%**

Note: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

Services where improvement is needed

Early learning and childcare services where all evaluations held were weak or unsatisfactory continue to be rare. In 2024, two childminding services had evaluations of weak or unsatisfactory across all key questions, a decrease from three in 2023. And 12 daycare of children services had weak and unsatisfactory evaluations across all key questions in 2023, a decrease from 23 in 2023 (Figure 15).

In addition to these services, some services have evaluations of adequate or poorer, but also have one or more evaluations of good or better. Around one in eight daycare of children services and one in thirteen childminding services were adequate or poorer in at least one assessed key question at 31 December 2024 (Figure 13).

Figure 15: Number and percentage of services holding evaluations of weak or unsatisfactory in all assessed key questions or quality themes by service type, at 31 December 2022, 2023 and 2024

High level service type	2022		2023		2024	
	Number of services	% of services	Number of services	% of services	Number of services	% of services
Childminding	6	0.2%	3	0.1%	2	0.1%
Daycare of children services	23	0.7%	23	0.7%	12	0.4%
Daycare of children by main type of service:						
Children and Family Centre	1	1.0%				
Creche	0	0.0%				
Holiday Playscheme	0	0.0%	1	4.2%		
Nursery	16	0.7%	17	0.7%	10	0.4%
School aged childcare	6	1.0%	5	0.8%	2	0.3%
Playgroup	0	0.0%				
All service types	**29**	**0.4%**	**26**	**0.4%**	**14**	**0.2%**

Note: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

Early learning and childcare funding in Scotland

Funded early learning and childcare (ELC) is available to all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds in Scotland. In 2021, the entitlement increased to 1,140 hours per year for each child.

Most funded places are offered through nurseries, and almost all nurseries offer funded places (97.9%). In addition, the public sector can offer funded places through other services like playgroups or children and family centres. Overall, in 2024, there were 2,644 (97.1%) daycare of children services providing funded ELC, this is similar to the 2,649 (96.7%) reported in 2023. See Supporting Table 4a and 4b for further information.

The proportion of nurseries offering funded places in 2024 was similar to that in 2023. For playgroups and children and family centres there was an increase from 89.4% and 78.5% in 2023 to 91.3% and 81.3% in 2024 respectively. The proportion of services providing funded places between 2014 and 2024 is presented in Figure 16 below.

Figure 16: Proportion of children and family centres, nurseries and playgroups providing funded ELC on 31 December 2014-2024

Care service type	Children and Family Centre	Nursery	Playgroup
2014	76.0%	92.0%	69.0%
2015	84.0%	92.6%	72.0%
2016	72.0%	93.9%	75.4%
2018	84.6%	94.5%	75.7%
2019	86.3%	96.1%	75.6%
2020	86.6%	97.5%	78.7%
2021	88.8%	98.0%	75.0%
2022	89.8%	97.5%	76.7%
2023	89.4%	97.8%	78.5%
2024	91.3%	97.9%	81.3%

In 2024, 46.6% of ELC services offering funded places provided these for children aged three years and older only, a decrease from 47.7%[3] in 2023. 52.3% of ELC services offered funded places for 2-year-olds and older, which is an increase from 51.0 in 2023. 1.0% of services offering funded places did so exclusively for two-year-olds, this is a decrease from 1.3% in 2023 (Figure 17).

In 2024, 51.5% of nurseries offered funded places for two-year-olds. This is an increase from 50.2%[4] in 2023.

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[3] Due to a counting error, the total of 47.6% published last year was adjusted this year to 47.7%.
[4] Due to a counting error, the total of 50.3% published last year was adjusted this year to 50.2%.

Figure 17: Proportion of children and family centres, nurseries and playgroups offering funded places by age groups at December 2024

Main type of provision	Funded places for two-year-olds only		Funded places for two-year-olds and 3 and older		Funded places for three years and older only	
	Number of services	% of funded services	Number of services	% of funded services	Number of services	% of funded services
Children and Family Centre	6	7.1%	72	85.7%	6	7.1%
Nursery	19	0.8%	1,259	50.7%	1,204	48.5%
Playgroup	2	2.6%	53	67.9%	23	29.5%
Total	27	1.0%	1,384	52.3%	1,233	46.6%

Quality of services offering funded places

A snapshot of evaluations at 31 December 2024 shows that in 89.3% of nursery, children and family centre and playgroup services offering funded places, the quality was good or better in all assessed themes or key questions compared to 75.0% of services delivering the same type of provision but not offering funded places. See supporting table 4 for further information.

Figure 18 below shows the comparison by sector between nurseries offering funded places and those that do not. It shows that a higher proportion of public sector services offering funded places had all evaluations of good or better than those services provided by the voluntary or private sectors.

Figure 18: Quality evaluations of nursery services by sector and ELC-funded places, at 31 December 2024

Nursery offers funded places?	Sector	Any evaluation of adequate or lower		All evaluations of good or better	
		Number of Services	% of services	Number of Services	% of services
No	Public Sector*				
	Private	11	37.9%	18	62.1%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	1	9.1%	10	90.9%
	Total	12	30.0%	28	70.0%
Yes	Public Sector	115	7.3%	1,466	92.7%
	Private	124	18.6%	544	81.4%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	23	13.1%	153	86.9%
	Total	262	10.8%	2,163	89.2%
Total		274	11.1%	2,191	88.9%

Note 1: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

Note 2: All public sector nurseries provide funded places

Quality evaluations between 2014 and 2024

Since 2014, around nine out of 10 funded services have been found to be good or better in all key questions, although the percentage has fallen by 3.9 percentage points over time from 93.2% in 2014 to 89.3% in 2024.

There has, however, been a more marked fall in the percentage of services with the highest evaluations (very good and excellent) for every key question. At 31 December 2024, 31.5% of funded services held evaluations of very good or excellent in all assessed themes or key questions, a decrease from 49.1% in 2014.

Figure 19: Proportion of daycare of children services offering funded places holding evaluations of good or better and very good or excellent in all assessed themes or key questions on 31 December, 2014 to 2024

Year	% of services found to be Good or better in all quality themes	% of services found to be very good or excellent in all quality themes
2014	93.2%	49.1%
2015	91.9%	48.1%
2016	91.4%	45.8%
2018	90.6%	40.5%
2019	90.2%	38.1%
2020	90.8%	36.9%
2021	89.4%	34.9%
2022	90.1%	34.6%
2023	89.8%	32.9%
2024	89.3%	31.5%

Note: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

Quality evaluations by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and Urban Rural Classification

In 2023, when looking at the most recent evaluations for funded services by SIMD ranking, services in the fourth quintile (2nd least deprived 20% of services), as well as the first quintile (most deprived 20% of services) had the highest proportion of services that had evaluations of adequate or lower, and had the lowest proportion of services that had evaluations of good and better. Services in the second quintile (2nd most deprived 20% of areas) had the lowest proportion of services that had evaluations of adequate or lower, and the highest proportion of services that had evaluations of good and better.

Overall, the quality of funded services is high across the SIMD quintiles, although there is some variation. When comparing the least and most deprived areas in 2024, there was a difference of 2.6 percentage points, with the most deprived areas having the lowest proportion of good quality services (88.1%) compared with the least deprived areas (90.7%) (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Quality of funded daycare of children services by SIMD (mid-2021) quintile, at 31 December 2024

SIMD mid-2021 quintile	Any evaluation of adequate or lower		All evaluations of good or better	
	Number of Services	% of services	Number of Services	% of services
1 (most deprived)	58	11.9%	431	88.1%
2	50	9.2%	493	90.8%
3	68	10.7%	565	89.3%
4	66	11.9%	487	88.1%
5 (least deprived)	35	9.3%	341	90.7%
Total	277	10.7%	2,317	89.3%

Note: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

When looking at the services with evaluations of good or better in all key questions by sector and SIMD quintiles, public sector services were consistently high, with the total proportion of these services not dipping below 90% across all SIMD quintiles (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Quality of funded daycare of children services by SIMD (mid-2021) quintile and sector, at 31 December 2024

SIMD mid-2021 Quintile	Sector	Any evaluation of adequate or lower		All evaluations of good or better	
		Number of Services	% of services	Number of Services	% of services
1 (most deprived)	Public Sector	28	8.0%	322	92.0%
	Private	26	26.3%	73	73.7%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	4	10.0%	36	90.0%
	Total	58	11.9%	431	88.1%
2	Public Sector	21	5.5%	359	94.5%
	Private	20	18.3%	89	81.7%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	9	16.7%	45	83.3%
	Total	50	9.2%	493	90.8%
3	Public Sector	32	7.5%	393	92.5%
	Private	28	18.9%	120	81.1%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	8	13.3%	52	86.7%
	Total	68	10.7%	565	89.3%
4	Public Sector	26	8.2%	291	91.8%
	Private	31	18.7%	135	81.3%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	9	12.9%	61	87.1%
	Total	66	11.9%	487	88.1%
5 (least deprived)	Public Sector	10	5.7%	165	94.3%
	Private	20	13.2%	131	86.8%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	5	10.0%	45	90.0%
	Total	35	9.3%	341	90.7%
All services offering funded places		277	10.7%	2,317	89.3%

Note: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

Quality of funded services by urban rural classification

There was variation in the proportion of high quality services between the urban rural areas: the difference between the lowest (large urban areas – 86.9%), and highest (accessible rural areas – 94.5%), was 7.6 percentage points in 2024 (Figure 22). This was an increase in variation compared to 2023 (6.3 percentage points).

The areas with the highest rates were accessible rural areas, accessible small towns and other urban areas, while the areas with the lowest proportion of high-quality funded services were large urban areas and remote small towns. This is consistent with the situation since 2021, before the introduction of the new inspection framework.

There was variation by sector with public sector services generally the best performing within each urban rural category. The private sector had the most variation between urban rural categories, with the highest being accessible rural at 92.2% and the lowest being in remote rural areas with 58.3% (although there were only 13 services that fall under this category).

Figure 22: Quality of funded daycare of children services by urban rural classification, at 31 December 2024

Urban-Rural category	Sector	Any evaluation of adequate or lower		All evaluations of good or better	
		Number of services	% of services	% of services	% of services
Large Urban Areas	Public Sector	36	7.5%	441	92.5%
	Private	68	21.9%	243	78.1%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	10	12.7%	69	87.3%
	Total	114	13.1%	753	86.9%
Other Urban Areas	Public Sector	33	6.9%	442	93.1%
	Private	36	18.2%	162	81.8%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	8	11.3%	63	88.7%
	Total	77	10.3%	667	89.7%
Accessible Small Towns	Public Sector	8	5.3%	144	94.7%
	Private	9	13.6%	57	86.4%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	9	21.4%	33	78.6%
	Total	26	10.0%	234	90.0%
Remote Small Towns	Public Sector	5	12.2%	36	87.8%
	Private	1	11.1%	8	88.9%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	1	12.5%	7	87.5%
	Total	7	12.1%	51	87.9%
Accessible Rural	Public Sector	13	4.6%	270	95.4%
	Private	6	7.8%	71	92.2%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	4	7.3%	51	92.7%
	Total	23	5.5%	392	94.5%
Remote Rural	Public Sector	22	10.0%	197	90.0%
	Private	5	41.7%	7	58.3%
	Voluntary or Not-for-profit	3	15.8%	16	84.2%
	Total	30	12.0%	220	88.0%
Total		277	10.7%	2,317	89.3%

Note: Any services that have not yet been inspected are not included in the above table.

Childminding services offering funded ELC places

This is the fifth year that we have collected data from childminding services on the provision of funded places. The information below is based on the data collected from the annual returns from 2020 to 2024. Where data is unavailable (i.e. non-submissions) we impute data from a previous year.

At 31 December 2024, there were 1,084 childminding services approved to deliver funded ELC places in Scotland, 43 fewer than last year (Figure 23). Of these, 759 (70.0%) were delivering funded places at 31 December 2024 (Figure 24).
The proportion of childminding services approved to deliver funded ELC in 2024 was 35.7%, which is an increase from the 34.9% reported in 2023.

At 31 December 2024, there were 1,769 childminding services not approved to deliver funded ELC. Most of these said they had chosen not to apply to become a funded provider (79.3%), and around a sixth (17.0%) said that they had not applied but would consider doing so in the future (Figure 25).

Figure 23: Breakdown of childminding services and the type of funding provision offered at 31 December 2023 and 2024

Funding Provision	2023		2024	
	Number of Services	% of services	Number of Services	% of services
Approved for funding	1,127	34.9%	1,084	35.7%
Not approved for funding	1,907	59.1%	1,769	58.2%
Not Specified	191	5.9%	187	6.2%
Total Services		3,225		3,040

Figure 24: Childminding services approved to deliver funded ELC places at the 31 December 2021-2024

	December 2021	December 2022	December 2023	December 2024
Number of childminders approved to deliver funded ELC at 31 December	1,319	1,220	1,127	1,084
% of childminders operating at 31 December that were approved to deliver funded ELC	33.0%	34.6%	34.9%	35.7%
1Number of childminders delivering funded ELC places at 31 December	837	808	750	759
% of all childminders operating at 31 December that were approved to deliver and were delivering funded places	20.9%	22.9%	23.3%	25.0%
% of childminders approved to deliver that were delivering funded places at 31 December	63.5%	66.2%	66.5%	70.0%

Figure 25: Childminding services not approved to deliver funded ELC places, at 31 December 2021-2024

Reason for no funding	December 2021	December 2022	December 2023	December 2024
I have applied but was not successful in my application to become a funded ELC provider	22 (1.0%)	10 (0.5%)	9 (0.5%)	12 (0.7%)
I have not applied to become a funded ELC provider	1,740 (76.0%)	1,562 (76.7%)	1,392 (73.0%)	1,218 (68.9%)
I have not applied to become a funded ELC provider but would consider applying in the future	449 (19.6%)	315 (15.5%)	335 (17.6%)	261 (14.8%)
I was in the process of applying to become a funded ELC provider	79 (3.4%)	38 (1.9%)	36 (1.9%)	35 (2.0%)
No answer provided		112 (5.5%)	135 (7.1%)	243 (13.7%)
Grand Total	2,290	2,037	1,907	1,769

Service Provision

Provision for different age groups

Childminding services, nursery and children and family centres services continued to be the main service types that offer places for children under two years old.

Childminding services typically cared for the widest range of age groups. Around four in every five childminding services (78.8%) offered a service for children of all ages between two and 11 years old and 57.8% of childminding services also offered a service for children aged 12 and over.

Within daycare of children services, nurseries and playgroups offered the most provision to children between the ages of two and five years old. School-aged childcare and holiday playscheme services offered provision the most to children between the ages of four years and over, and five years and over respectively. Children and family centres offered the most provision to children under the age of five, while creches offer the most provision to children under the age of 12.

For further detailed information, please see tables 5a – 5b in the Supporting Tables spreadsheet.

Languages and service philosophies

The majority of ELC services (99.5%) provided a service in English. In 1.5%, the service was delivered using either a mix of English and Gaelic or in Gaelic only. 2.0% of ELC services could offer British Sign Language and 5.3% could deliver the service in another language (Figure 25

Figure 25: Count of all services, broken down by language provision and service type, at 31 December 2024

Main type of provision	English		Gaelic		Sign Language		Other Language	
	No services	% services	No services	% services	No services	% services	No services	% services
Childminding services	3,034	99.8%	17	0.6%	45	1.5%	110	3.6%
Daycare of children services	3,387	99.2%	78	2.3%	81	2.4%	234	6.9%
Daycare of children by main type of service:								
Children and family centres	92	100.0%	0	0.0%	11	12.0%	14	15.2%
Creche	27	100.0%	0	0.0%	3	11.1%	6	22.2%
Holiday Playscheme	25	100.0%	0	0.0%	2	8.0%	6	24.0%
Nursery	2,509	99.0%	75	3.0%	54	2.1%	176	6.9%
School-aged childcare	638	99.7%	3	0.5%	11	1.7%	22	3.4%
Playgroup	96	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	10	10.4%
All ELC Services	6,421	99.5%	95	1.5%	126	2.0%	344	5.3%

Figure 25: Count of all daycare of children services, broken down by setting format and service type, at 31 December 2024

	Montessori		Other format		Outdoor		Steiner	
Service type	**No services**	**% services**	**No services**	**% services**	**No services**	**% services**	**No services**	**% services**
Children and Family Centre	2	2.2%	90	97.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Creche	1	3.7%	26	96.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Holiday Playscheme	0	0.0%	25	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Nursery	45	1.8%	2,435	96.1%	48	1.9%	11	0.4%
School-aged childcare	11	1.7%	613	95.8%	6	0.9%	4	0.6%
Playgroup	3	3.1%	93	96.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
All daycare of children services	62	1.8%	3,282	96.1%	54	1.6%	15	0.4%

Extended day and school holiday availability

Overall, 72.1% of early years services offered care before school hours and 79.9% offered care after school hours. Compared to 2023, this was a decrease from 72.8% for before school hours, and 80.6% for after school hours.

For childminding services, 91.2% offer a service before school hours, and 95.7% an after school service. 55.2% of daycare of children services offer their service before school, and 65.1% after school hours (Figure 26).

For further detailed information, please see tables 7a to 7d in the supporting tables spreadsheet in the provision tab.

Figure 26: Percentage of all registered services that are available during the school term, broken down by high level service type, at 31 December 2024

High level service type	Before School	School hours	After school	Evenings	Overnight	Weekends	Non-operational
Childminding	91.2%	91.6%	95.7%	8.9%	1.0%	5.2%	0.4%
Daycare of children services	55.2%	80.9%	65.9%	1.1%	0.0%	1.3%	0.8%
Daycare of children by main type of service:							
Children and Family Centre	76.1%	97.8%	80.4%	2.2%	0.0%	3.3%	0.0%
Creche	14.8%	96.3%	74.1%	55.6%	0.0%	63.0%	0.0%
Holiday Playscheme	0.0%	4.0%	8.0%	12.0%	4.0%	20.0%	76.0%
Nursery	58.1%	99.8%	59.8%	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%
School-aged childcare	51.1%	3.4%	98.8%	1.4%	0.0%	2.7%	0.8%
Playgroup	10.4%	100.0%	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
All ELC Services	72.1%	86.0%	79.9%	4.8%	0.5%	3.1%	0.6%

During school holidays

Overall, at 31 December 2024, 54.8% of daycare of children services and 92.4% of childminding services operated at some point during the holidays. This was a decrease from 2023 (55.7% for daycare of children services, and 92.8% for childminding services) (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Count of all registered services that are available during the holidays, broken down by service type, at 31 December 2024

Main type of provision	All registered services at 31 December 2024	Number of services that do operate during holidays	Number of services that don't operate during holidays	% of total services that operate during holidays
Childminding services	3,040	2,809	231	92.4%
Daycare of children services	3,414	1,870	1,544	54.8%
Daycare of children by main type of service:				
Children and Family Centre	92	90	2	97.8%
Creche	27	26	1	96.3%
Holiday Playscheme	25	25	0	100.0%
Nursery	2,534	1,309	1,225	51.7%
School-aged childcare	640	415	225	64.8%
Playgroup	96	5	91	5.2%
All service types	6,454	4,679	1,775	72.5%

For further detailed information, please see tables 7a to 7d in the supporting tables spreadsheet in the provision tab.

Whole-day and part-day sessions

At 31 December 2024, 87.6% of daycare services overall and 97.6% of nurseries offered whole-day sessions or the choice of whole or part-day sessions.

Figure 28 shows the percentage of services offering whole and part-day sessions between 2014 and 2024. The increase in full-day sessions available means that children are less likely to attend multiple services part-time and therefore less likely to be counted more than once in our statistics about the numbers of children registered with early learning and childcare services.

Figure 28- Sessions available between 2014 and 2024 in daycare of children services or nursery services

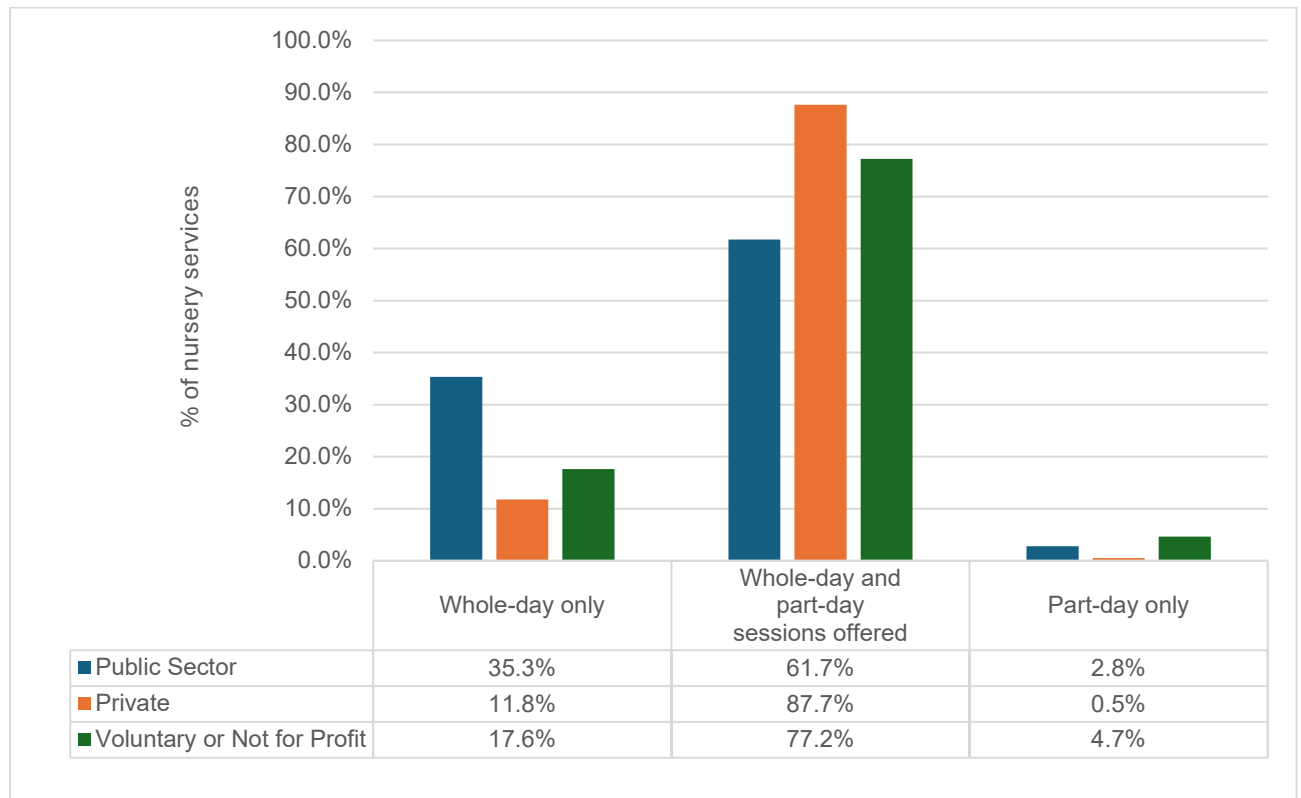### 28a- All daycare of children services

Year	Whole-day only	Whole-day and part-day sessions offered	Part-day only
2014	3.0%	45.7%	50.8%
2015	3.1%	47.7%	48.6%
2016	3.2%	51.4%	44.5%
2017	3.5%	54.7%	40.8%
2018	4.4%	58.3%	37.3%
2019	6.2%	64.1%	29.7%
2020	16.0%	63.4%	20.6%
2021	19.8%	65.0%	15.2%
2022	20.5%	66.2%	13.4%
2023	21.5%	66.5%	11.9%
2024	22.1%	65.5%	11.5%

28b- Only nursery services

Year	Whole-day only	Whole-day and part-day sessions offered	Part-day only
2014	1.4%	46.4%	51.7%
2015	1.6%	49.5%	48.9%
2016	1.6%	54.3%	43.8%
2017	2.4%	58.6%	39.2%
2018	3.7%	63.8%	32.5%
2019	6.4%	71.9%	21.7%
2020	19.8%	69.2%	11.0%
2021	24.2%	71.0%	4.8%
2022	25.1%	71.5%	3.4%
2023	26.2%	70.6%	3.2%
2024	27.2%	70.4%	2.3%

The sessions offered in nurseries varied depending on the sector providing the service (Figure 29).

Almost all private nurseries (99.5%) and the majority of public-sector nurseries (97.1%) and voluntary sector nurseries (94.8%) offered whole day only or a choice of part days or whole days.

Figure 29: Sessions available in nurseries by sector, on 31 December 2024

	Whole-day only	Whole-day and part-day sessions offered	Part-day only
■ Public Sector	35.3%	61.7%	2.8%
■ Private	11.8%	87.7%	0.5%
■ Voluntary or Not for Profit	17.6%	77.2%	4.7%

Some services also offer flexible sessions in addition to the full or part-day provision. In 2024, 26.0% of all daycare of children services offered short flexible care, an increase from 25.5% in 2023.

For further detailed information, please see tables 8a – 8b in the supporting tables spreadsheet in the provision tab.

Provision of meals and snacks

In 2024, most childminding services (92.6%) continued to provide meals in their service, similar to 92.7% in 2023. For daycare of children services, 81.9% provided meals in the service (whether by the service only, by parents only or both). This is a continued increase compared to the 81.1% reported in 2023 (Figure 30).

Nearly all early learning and childcare services (99.5%) offered some form of snack provision in 2024, this is similar to the 99.4% reported in 2023 (Figure 31).

Figure 30: Percentage of all registered services that offer meal provision, broken down by service type, at 31 December 2024

Main type of provision	Service only	Parents only	Service and parents	None	% of total services that have some form of meal provision
Childminding	18.7%	48.9%	25.1%	7.4%	92.6%
Daycare of children services	46.7%	3.2%	32.0%	18.1%	81.9%
Daycare of children by main type of service:					
Children and Family Centre	59.8%	3.3%	31.5%	5.4%	94.6%
Creche	7.4%	22.2%	7.4%	63.0%	37.0%
Holiday Playscheme	0.0%	48.0%	12.0%	40.0%	60.0%
Nursery	57.7%	1.3%	40.0%	1.0%	99.0%
School-aged childcare	4.8%	7.8%	3.4%	83.9%	16.1%
Playgroup	45.8%	7.3%	24.0%	22.9%	77.1%
All service types	33.5%	24.7%	28.7%	13.0%	87.0%

Figure 31: Percentage of all registered services that offer snack provision, broken down by service type, at 31 December 2024

Main type of provision	Service only	Parents only	Service and parents	None	% of total services that have some form of snack provision
Childminding	39.7%	19.2%	40.3%	0.8%	99.2%
Daycare of children services	86.2%	1.6%	11.8%	0.3%	99.7%
Daycare of children by main type of service:					
Children and Family Centre	82.6%	1.1%	14.1%	2.2%	97.8%
Creche	29.6%	37.0%	18.5%	14.8%	85.2%
Holiday Playscheme	0.0%	56.0%	40.0%	4.0%	96.0%
Nursery	90.9%	0.5%	8.5%	0.1%	99.9%
School-aged childcare	73.4%	2.5%	23.9%	0.2%	99.8%
Playgroup	89.6%	3.1%	7.3%	0.0%	100.0%
All service types	64.3%	9.9%	25.3%	0.5%	99.5%

For further detailed information, please see tables 9a – 9b in the supporting tables spreadsheet in the provision tab.

Appendix 1: Definitions and what's covered in this report

In this report, we present information on early learning and childcare services, including the following information listed below.

• The number of daycare of children services and childminding services registered with the Care Inspectorate on 31 December 2024, including comparisons over time and number by provider sector and type of care service.

• Children registered with early learning and childcare services, calculated as the number of children registered with services on 31 December 2024. This means the number of children enrolled with a service, even though they may not attend every day or only for part-day sessions. There is some element of double counting in the number of registered children, as children can be registered with more than one service, for example a child attending a morning nursery session and then a childminding service in the afternoon. It is possible that the number of children enrolled can be larger than the service's registered capacity, due to all children not attending at the same time, for example where services offer part-time or part-week sessions.

• Capacity, which is the maximum possible attendance in a service at any one time, measured by number of available registered places.

• Information on the quality of early learning and childcare services through analysis of a snapshot of grading data on 31 December 2024.

• Information on the number of services providing funded places under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 on 31 December 2024.

• Up until the 2021 edition of this report we provided statistics on complaints related to childminding services and day care of children services in this report. Statistics on complaints can instead be found in our published complaints report.

A **childminding service** is defined by the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 as someone looking after one or more children on domestic premises for reward for a period of more than two hours in any day.

However, this does not include:

• where children are related to the carer

• the fostering of children or kinship care

• someone caring for their own children in their own home.

By law, all childminding services must be registered with the Care Inspectorate. The service is usually provided from the childminder's home for a small number of children and often includes the childminder's own children.

Childminders are self-employed and can operate in several ways:

• An individual may operate a childminding service alone.

• A partnership of two or more people may operate a single registered childminding service.

• Childminders who are separately registered may work together in the home of another registered childminder.

• A childminding service may have paid or unpaid assistants to help provide the service.

Daycare of children is defined by the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 as a service that provides care for children on non-domestic premises for a total of more than two hours a day and on at least six days per year. This includes nurseries, family centres, crèches, school-aged childcare services, and playgroups. These services can be run by the public, private or voluntary sector and require to be registered with the Care Inspectorate whether or not parents pay for the service.

The definition does not include services for school-aged children provided by schools where the provision is part of an educational activity. Nor does it include supervised activities where care is not provided, including sports clubs and uniformed activities such as the Scouts or Guides.

For the purposes of this statistical report, each of the registered daycare of children services has been assigned to one of the following categories of main service provision. This main service category is based on information supplied by the services in their annual returns. If a service did not respond to an annual return in a given year, then their main category of service has been estimated by using annual return information submitted in a previous year, or from information about the service, for example, their conditions of registration.

Service categories

Here is a summary of the main service categories featured in this report with a brief description of each.

Children and family centre

Sometimes called community nurseries, children and family centres usually provide a full-day service for children aged zero-five years. The majority are provided by the public sector. They usually prioritise children with the greatest needs, together with a range of support services for families. This also includes specialised services, such as women's aid, housing support-related services or respite care and support.

Crèche

Crèches provide drop-in care for children to enable adults to engage in activities such as education or training, shopping or attending a meeting.

Holiday playscheme

Holiday playschemes provide care for school-aged children during the school holidays (this does not include activity-based clubs).

Nursery

Nurseries typically provide daycare facilities for children aged under five years. Nurseries are normally used by parents and carers on a regular basis rather than a drop-in basis and the service is provided as a minimum during the school term. Nurseries can take several forms, such as a private nursery, a public sector nursery class or nursery school or a nursery that is part of an independent school.

Nursery providing additional childcare

These are nurseries that offer additional types of childcare provision, for example, breakfast club or school-aged childcare services.

School-aged childcare services (previously referred to as out-of-school clubs)

This service provides care for mainly primary-school-aged children after the end of the school day and sometimes also before school starts. Many also provide a full-day service during school holidays and in-service days.

School-aged childcare services providing additional childcare

These are school-aged childcare services that offer additional types of provision, for example, breakfast clubs or holiday playschemes.

Playgroup

Mostly voluntary sector services run by a parents' committee, often with parents taking part in a rota to assist paid staff.

Sector provider types in early learning and childcare services

Public sector providers

This includes services run by local authorities and a small number of services run by health boards.

Private providers

These are private businesses run by a sole trader, a partnership or a limited company. Some offer funded places funded by a local authority. All childminding services operate as a private business.

Voluntary or not-for-profit providers

Also known as the third sector, voluntary and not-for-profit providers include charities.

Funded early learning and childcare

Under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, the Scottish Government has significantly increased the amount of early learning and childcare provided through the public sector. The funding for all three and four-year-old children initially increased from 475 to 600 hours per year and some eligible two-

year-olds also receive this level of funding. This increased to 1140 hours per year in August 2021 (although some public sector implemented this increase during 2020, meaning that some children received increased funded hours before 2021).

Other types of funding for children to attend early learning and childcare services can be made by the public sector. However, most funding of the 1140 hours is under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014) and therefore this publication only covers this type of funding, described as 'funded early learning and childcare' or 'funded places'.

Appendix 2: Background and methodology

The Care Inspectorate is the scrutiny body for all care services for children and adults in Scotland. This includes a wide range of services for children and young people, such as fostering, adoption and residential care. This report focuses on childminding and daycare of children services, collectively known as early learning and childcare services in this report. Statistics on, for example, looked after children are published by the Scottish Government and can be found at:

http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children

This report is about the provision and use of daycare of children and childminding registered with the Care Inspectorate on 31 December 2024. Each daycare of children service can provide a range of different types of provision, for example a nursery can also provide a breakfast club and school-aged childcare provision. In this report, we have only used the main type of provision, so a service that provides a nursery as the main provision but also provides school-aged childcare provision will only be recorded as a nursery. This may lead to under reporting of the availability of some types of provision.

The statistics in this report are produced using information from the latest Care Inspectorate annual returns which asked for information about the previous calendar year (1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024) and the Care Inspectorate service list (as at 31 December 2024).

Previous versions of this report, which were published to cover the years 2010 to 2023 are available on the Care Inspectorate website:

http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/statistics-and-analysis

Our inspectors use the annual returns when planning care service inspections and carrying out risk assessments. Some of the information in the annual return is also aggregated and used by the Care Inspectorate to inform wider statistical analysis and comparisons across, for example, care service providers and geographical areas.

The Care Inspectorate requires (under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, section 53(6) all providers that are registered with the Care Inspectorate to complete and submit an annual return in order to provide us with the information needed to help plan and carry out inspections effectively. Although services registered after 1 October 2024 did not have to submit an annual return for December 2024, we encouraged them to do so.

Of the 6,451 childcare services registered with the Care Inspectorate on 31 December 2024, 5,707 (88.4%) submitted an annual return, similar to last year. The annual return data has been imputed for those services that did not submit an annual return (see below). For this reason, some of the supporting tables contain figures that have been rounded to the nearest 10. Therefore, rounded figures may differ slightly from the overall totals.

Appendix 3: Data sources

The Care Inspectorate service list (on 31 December 2024) has been used to provide figures on:

• the total number of registered daycare of children and childminding services

• whether services were run by public, private or voluntary/not-for-profit providers

• the registered capacity of each service (that is the total number of children that can be cared for at any one time)

• the postcode of the service, from which we have derived the public sector, deprivation category and urban-rural category of the service.

• the number of services that cancelled and registered

We have used Care Inspectorate annual returns (on 31 December 2024) to provide estimates for:

• the main service type (such as nursery, playgroup and, holiday playschemes)

• the number of children registered with the service

• whether childminding and daycare of children services provided funded places

• the number of children registered with school-aged childcare services

• the age groups catered for and term-time/holiday-time availability of the service

• whether the service was available for full-day or part-day sessions

• whether meals or snacks were provided by the service or by the parents

• the languages and service philosophies used by services.

The Care Inspectorate registration database has been used to provide figures on:

• the reasons provided by services why they decide to cancel

The 2020 mid-year Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) has been used to identify deprivation levels based on the postcode location of each childcare service. The SIMD does not reflect the locations where children using services live. Further information about the SIMD is available here:

https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/

Scottish Government urban/rural categories have been used to assign an urban/rural urban/rural category to the postcode location of each childcare service. The urban/rural categories do not reflect the locations where children using the services live.

Further information about the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification is available here:

https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-urban-rural-classification-2020/

The National Records of Scotland mid-year population estimates (mid-2023) have been used to calculate rates for 2024. Further information about the population estimates is available here:

https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/mid-2023-population-estimates-outdated/

Appendix 4: Data cleaning and dealing with missing data

Data input errors or incomplete responses identified in relation to specific questions have been corrected where possible before any analysis has taken place. Not all childcare services submitted an annual return. This means that there are some gaps in the data that we need to take into account . The percentage of services that submitted their annual return is summarised in the table below.

Summary of annual return response rates, December 2024

Main type of provision	Number of services who submitted annual return	Response rate
Childminding	2,446	80.5%
Daycare of children services	3,261	95.5%
Daycare of children by main type of service:		
Children and Family Centre	89	96.7%
Creche	23	85.2%
Holiday Playscheme	24	96.0%
Nursery	2,443	96.4%
School-aged childcare	593	92.7%
Playgroup	89	92.7%
All care service types	5,707	88.4%

We took the following approach to handling missing data:

A. Imputation of missing data using historical data

Where a daycare of children service did not submit an annual return for 2024, but submitted a return in the prior three years' annual returns, the information submitted in the most recent historic annual return was used to impute the missing data for 2024. Where a service re-registered (for example, due to a change in ownership or service provider) and information was missing for 2024, the most recent historic information from the previously registered service was used. For childminding, the information from previous annual returns was used in the same way.

B. Imputation of missing data where no historical data is available

Where a service has not provided any information in the last three years, or where a service was newly registered in 2024 (and not a re-registration) missing data has been estimated. To estimate missing data, we have taken into account the following variables: service size; service location (public sector area and level of deprivation) and service category (nursery, playgroup etc.). We estimated the missing data using average values from services based on the above criteria.

Rounding of children registered with services

Where a service doesn't provide figures related to the number of children registered at their service, we impute these figures instead, and round it to the nearest 10. As such, rounded figures may differ slightly from the overall totals.

Grouping of cancellation reasons

Starting from the 2023 publication of the early learning and childcare statistics publication, we've included figures related to the reasons why services chose to cancel. We capture this information through the Care Inspectorate registration app at the time the service is going through the cancellation process.

The reasons below are the options that services can choose from, and they're also grouped into the categories that we use for this publication.

Cancellation reason/s services can choose	Cancellation category
Leaving the care sector	Leaving profession/sector
Financial inviability	Financial inviability
Sale of business as a going concern	Change of ownership
Other	Other
Change of legal owner	Change of ownership
Change of career	Leaving profession/sector
Change in personal circumstances	Change in personal circumstances
Retirement	Retirement
Service no longer viable due to other Early Learning and Childcare provision in the area	Excess provision in the area
Problems around recruiting suitable staff	Recruitment difficulties
Premises no longer fit for purpose	Operational difficulties
Unable to maintain required standards of care	Operational difficulties
Serious illness or death of provider	Health-related
Service to be merged with another care service under the same provider	Change of ownership
Service moving to another registered company under the same ownership	Change of ownership

Appendix 5: Changes to data items collected in 2024

There were no changes in the questions asked in the December 2024 annual return compared to December 2023.

Appendix 6: How the Care Inspectorate assesses quality during inspection

During inspections, we assessed quality themes and now key questions, which cover the main areas of a service's work. How well the service performed in these areas indicated how good the service is.

Quality themes – Framework used up to June 2022

• Quality of Care and Support: how well the service meets the needs of each child attending the service.
• Quality of Environment: how the service supports appropriate care and learning opportunities for children, environmental factors for example, how clean, well maintained and accessible it is, the atmosphere of the service and how welcoming it is.
• Quality of Staffing: the quality of the staff including how staff work together to support children, safer recruitment, ongoing professional development and learning, qualifications and training.
• Quality of Management and Leadership: how the service is managed and led and how it develops through a robust quality assurance process to meet the needs of the children who use it.

Each theme is evaluated using a six-point scale.

6 – Excellent
5 – Very Good
4 – Good
3 – Adequate
2 – Weak
1 – Unsatisfactory

Key questions – Framework used from June 2022

- How good is our care, play and learning?
- How good is our setting?
- How good is our leadership?
- How good is our staff team?

Each key question is evaluated using a six-point scale.

6 – Excellent
5 – Very Good
4 – Good
3 – Adequate
2 – Weak
1 – Unsatisfactory

Matching new key question framework to the old quality theme framework

New key questions	Previous quality themes
1: How good is our care, play and learning?	Quality of care and support
2: How good is our setting?	Quality of environment
3: How good is our leadership?	Quality of management and leadership
4: How good is our staff team?	Quality of staffing

For more information on the new key question inspection framework please see **Quality framework for ELC services (careinspectorate.com)** on our website.