



2016 CHILDCARE

RAF FF SURVEY REPORT





“We have an amazing RAF child care centre, which allows me to be able to work... I could not work the hours I do without it. Open all year round, which is amazing.”

“In all the places I have served we have been expected to adapt to what the nursery can provide, rather than them assisting us with what we require to enable my wife to return to work. Ultimately, she has been forced to spend most of her time at home and I am now leaving the RAF as a result.”

“I’m taking my option next year. The expense of childcare, the guilt you can be made to feel about putting your children first (self-induced and from command chain “work all hours” types) and 6-9 month deployments - outside of Sqn deployments - make the RAF unfeasible as a career for me anymore. I’m wing commander aircrew.”

“I’m paying out more than my wage in childcare. The better option would be to leave the RAF ... but I keep telling myself the RAF will look at the situation and see that it’s not fair.”

“I think the RAF is losing good people who just can’t make the work - life balance add up.”

We conducted a childcare survey in 2015 and were disappointed by the response we received – just 137 replies. Perhaps not surprisingly, the report we produced was largely ignored because “137 responses are not enough to take seriously.” However, at every unit we visit, the issue of childcare is raised with us. At the same time, our work on spouse employment indicates that the biggest barrier to spouses seeking, achieving and then retaining suitable employment, is childcare.

We also took note of the number of serving personnel and families who said that, having read the 2015 report, they wished they had participated in the survey!

For these reasons, we decided to run the survey again in 2016 and this time we’ve had over 1400 replies.

Childcare General Data

A total of 1417 participants took part in the 2016 survey.

- 50% of which were serving regular
- 48% were non-serving
- 2% were reservists

76% of those participating were females.

72% of participants were from non-commissioned families, whilst 24% came from commissioned families

76% of respondents lived in Service Families Accommodation (SFA), whilst 17% lived in their own house

79% of participants were in the 30 and over age group, and 92% were either married or in a civil partnership

We had 97 indicated participants from overseas, 71 from Scotland and 27 from Wales

The top five participating units/locations were:

Brize Norton 176 participants (12% of the total)
Odiham 148 participants (10% of the total)
Overseas 97 participants (7% of the total)
High Wycombe 81 participants (6% of the total)
Cranwell 70 participants (5% of the total)



In terms of survey results, not a lot has changed from last year, which suggests that not a lot has been done in the interim. What is clear from the responses we received is that childcare remains a significant driver in dictating how many RAF families live: Whether or not a non-serving spouse is able to work; how families cope with childcare during deployments; how dual-serving families cope with the particular challenges of managing two Service careers and the need for often extensive childcare as a result.

Cost remains a real issue for many, especially in the south and south east. Given a rough estimate that around 70% of the RAF is based in the southern half of the UK, this is significant. Childcare by its very nature will always be expensive and it is not always fair simply to blame high prices on the providers. The reality is more complex and the critical need to provide appropriate safeguarding, while delivering high quality childcare, quite rightly means that it should never be provided 'on the cheap'. We would also acknowledge that, in general, RAF Families are not disadvantaged when compared to the civilian community on a pure cost comparison basis. The cost of childcare as a proportion of wages, especially in relation to the low paid or the second-income earners is a national problem. There's more of a case to argue that our people are told where to serve and frequently have no choice in the matter; that deployments and the exercises and training that go with them, mean that the serving person is absent from home far more than their civilian counterparts and that dual-serving parents face particular problems with childcare. And yet, in an increasingly mobile society, where business relocations and subsequent "move or be made redundant" scenarios are common, we need to acknowledge that many civilians face similar problems.

It is thus difficult to justify this as purely a Covenant issue – we've tried and failed (so far). Nevertheless, the variability of costs that can occur between on base and off base provision and, especially, by region is quite staggering and many families, who have had no say in where they are assigned, inevitably feel disadvantaged when compared with others accessing the same childcare but at half the cost.

AFCAS 2016 reported that of those RAF families that responded to the survey and require childcare (639 responses), 56% were satisfied with the locally provided facilities, 18% were neutral and 26% were dissatisfied, this latter number an increase of 4% on the 2015 survey.

Our own survey this year suggests that there are two, pretty obvious, ways our people access childcare:

- Provision by the parents and the supporting family network, which can be affected by and impact on:
 - Spouse employment opportunities.
 - Inability of extended family members to assist, due often to location.
 - The lack of a policy that reflects modern lifestyles.
 - Family finances.
- Provision by Nursery/Childcare Centre/Childminder, which can be affected by and impact on:
 - Hugely varying costs – principally by region – impacting affordability and the associated risk of debt.
 - Varying levels of availability – especially 'out of hours' cover.
 - The need to incorporate childcare factors into the Future Engagement Strategy (FES).
 - Spouse employment – full career opportunities, employment that properly reflects qualifications and skills.

Survey responses also show that:

- The biggest challenges to achieving satisfactory childcare are cost and availability – especially ‘out of hours’ care.
- Ideally, 75% want to provide their own childcare but only 23% achieve that.
- Nearly 50% need childcare for the full working day but a significant 10% need it for 10hrs or more a day.
- 75% do not have access to extended family to help with childcare.
- Many have difficulty finding provision for school age children during the school holidays.
- Many serving overseas face similar or greater problems as their UK colleagues.
- Less than half of respondents are making use of the Child Care Voucher Scheme – Why?

We were struck by the number of comments received about:

- What are seen as inflexible arrangements offered by some on-base nurseries.
- How many families are feeling disadvantaged in finding childcare to cover unusual/shift hours, weekend working and for deployed spouses and partners. This is especially true of dual-serving parents.
- The number of families managing a cocktail of childcare arrangements.
- How older children often fall into a ‘childcare gap’.
- The number of comments received about spouses either unable to work because of childcare cost/availability, or having to limit their working arrangements, and the knock on effect on their CVs and careers.
- The inability of many to access a range of childcare options, due to the location of SFA. Many RAF families residing in SFA in a remote location, often with poor transport links, have no choice about the childcare they are able to access.
- Mobility increases the likelihood of families being placed on (often lengthy) waiting lists for childcare.
- Line managers failing to address (or even be seen to care) about basic childcare challenges their staff often face.



The short version is that it's a bit of a mixed bag. From 2008, local authorities (in England) assumed a duty of care to ensure that childcare provision is adequate to meet the requirements of working parents in their area. Local authorities do not have to provide the childcare themselves. Devolved government has led to different arrangements for Scotland, Wales and NI, especially in the number of hours of free childcare on offer. The majority of childcare provision comes from the private and not-for-profit sectors and the market is bound by extensive regulation to ensure quality and, especially, safeguarding. Inevitably, these regulations come at a cost for childcare providers that provide a challenge to maintaining a service. Most operate on low profit margins that are highly sensitive to small changes in income or outgoings. Not-for-profit providers experience similar issues as they need to maintain an operating surplus.

The Public Accounts Committee acknowledges in its June 2016 report on entitlement to free early year education and childcare that:

“The Department for Education (DfE) has made significant progress in providing 15 hours of free childcare to more parents of 3 and 4-year olds and parents of disadvantaged 2-year-olds, according to the National Audit Office (NAO).”

The report also acknowledges that most parents of 3 and 4-year olds take-up free childcare places for their children, and the quality of provision, as measured by Ofsted, has increased in recent years.

“The Department’s measure of children’s outcomes at age 5 has also shown steady improvement. In 2015, 66% of children reached a good level of development compared to 52% in 2013. However, the Department cannot link this data to the quality of individual childcare settings children have attended, and from 2017 the current measure of development is being halted.”

The Early Years sector is facing an extremely challenging future. In 2017, on current plans, the DfE will double the number of hours of free childcare that working families with 3 and 4-year olds are entitled to, from 15 to 30 hours per week. However, the NAO has found that childcare providers are concerned about the levels of funding that will be available and that, although most are keen to offer the new entitlement, some providers may choose not to if the funding is not right. The NAO further acknowledges that:

“Parents who work in shifts, or who start work early or late could be limited by providers’ conditions and patterns of childcare when they try to take-up the 30 hours.”

The 2016 Family and Childcare Trust report supports these issues and concerns, noting that:

“Since last year, the number of English local authorities reporting a shortage of free early education places for three and four year olds has more than doubled. More than a third of councils are now struggling to meet demand.”

The Trust also reports that:

“Private and voluntary providers report that the amount they currently get paid for providing free childcare is not enough to cover their costs and they therefore rely on charging parents for additional hours or other sources of income to meet them.”

The National Day Nurseries Association's (NDNA) survey in 2016 reports the top 5 key challenges for childcare providers are:

- increasing staff wages in line with the New Living Wage.
- achieving a profit or a surplus.
- delivering funded hours sustainably.
- recruiting and retaining staff and
- business costs.

The NDNA states from its survey that with regards to Pre-school funding:

“The funding gap is now the highest ever at £1.68 per hour on average per 3 and 4 year old place. Offering 15 free hours results in an average annual loss of £34,000 per nursery, money that must be made up through paying parents’ fees. Doubling this entitlement to 30 funded hours for working parents of 3 and four year olds is going to increase the shortfall further but leave nurseries with no means of making up that loss.”

Given this scenario, it's essential that the MoD and the RAF put in place clear policies to ensure sufficient childcare is available, that wild variations in cost are moderated and that standards are not compromised. In our modern society, not to do so could have an impact on recruitment and retention, the working effectiveness of the Service person and, ultimately, how valued by the RAF our people feel.



We are pleased to see that childcare has been included in the emerging MoD Families Strategy Action Plan and we look forward to seeing the long-awaited draft policy from the Defence Children & Young People (DCYP) organisation in January 2017. DCYP acknowledges that:

“There is no overarching Departmental policy or strategy relating to how a range of provision should be set or accessed ...resulting in support that has evolved on an ad hoc basis and is not standardised in terms of quality, accessibility, availability or affordability for Service families.”

It also notes that:

“Childcare provision impacts retention, working effectiveness and spousal employment.” However, it also says that *“The perception is there is a widespread problem accessing and/or affording childcare when the evidence suggests difficulty is restricted to particular locations and circumstances. In many cases Service families are not disadvantaged compared to the local civilian population.”*

If the DCYP intent is to develop a draft policy using the AF Covenant principle of no disadvantage as a baseline, we are concerned that such a simplistic view and a straight cost comparison will be used to justify doing the absolute minimum and that a policy that genuinely better supports our people is not needed. This would be a mistake and risks MoD failing to address the unique issues that many RAF families face.

Another area of concern, for many customers and providers alike, is the freedom of action given to local commanders to decide how childcare is provided on-base. This leads to hugely variable outcomes, both in terms of the business arrangements and charges applied to some nurseries and to the level of service a nursery can offer as a result. For example, we understand that rental charges can vary between £1,000 and £25,000 per annum and can “flip flop” year on year. In addition, many nurseries on-base have to conform to local authority demands as well, for example Service/civilian pupil ratios. Combined, these factors present a real challenge to manage and small, independent nurseries are particularly vulnerable as a result.

We are encouraged to learn that MoD DCYP will include in its draft policy, guidelines for station commanders to assess whether they should provide childcare and also provide the authority to create that provision, including the use of on-site facilities and buildings. But we suggest that the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) needs also to improve its relationship directly with Early Years providers and not just through local commanders, due to the wide variation in the local levels of support and consideration, as well as the lack of continuity that commanders give. We also suggest that the MoD use a standard approach to determining criteria for rent charges and statements of requirement. They could be adapted with a clear and transparent ‘index’ link type factor to reflect better issues such as location, company status, business profitability etc.

So, a transparent and consistent approach is needed, with the tendering of business for childcare that is not conducted on the say so of local commanders, nor in the apparent comfort zone of dealing with one company on a repeated basis, unless a multi-location contract is up for tender. Conflict of interest and ethics must be strictly considered. This will help provide greater consistency in the services offered – we hope.

The MoD needs to address the reasons behind the ‘inflexibility’ of some childcare providers. Are providers required to meet 100% of its population needs? No business can do that unless people are willing to pay (which they often aren’t) or additional services (like out of hours) are funded from a separate source. Generally, and not unexpectedly, Service parents seem unaware of the costs and overheads borne by Early Year providers. Some parents seem to expect cheap or free childcare just because they are in the RAF. Pay for employees in the sector is poor with many working for the minimum wage and yet typically represent 80% plus of a business’s total expenditure. More should be done to manage our people’s expectations surrounding the costs and challenges of childcare when serving and raising families.

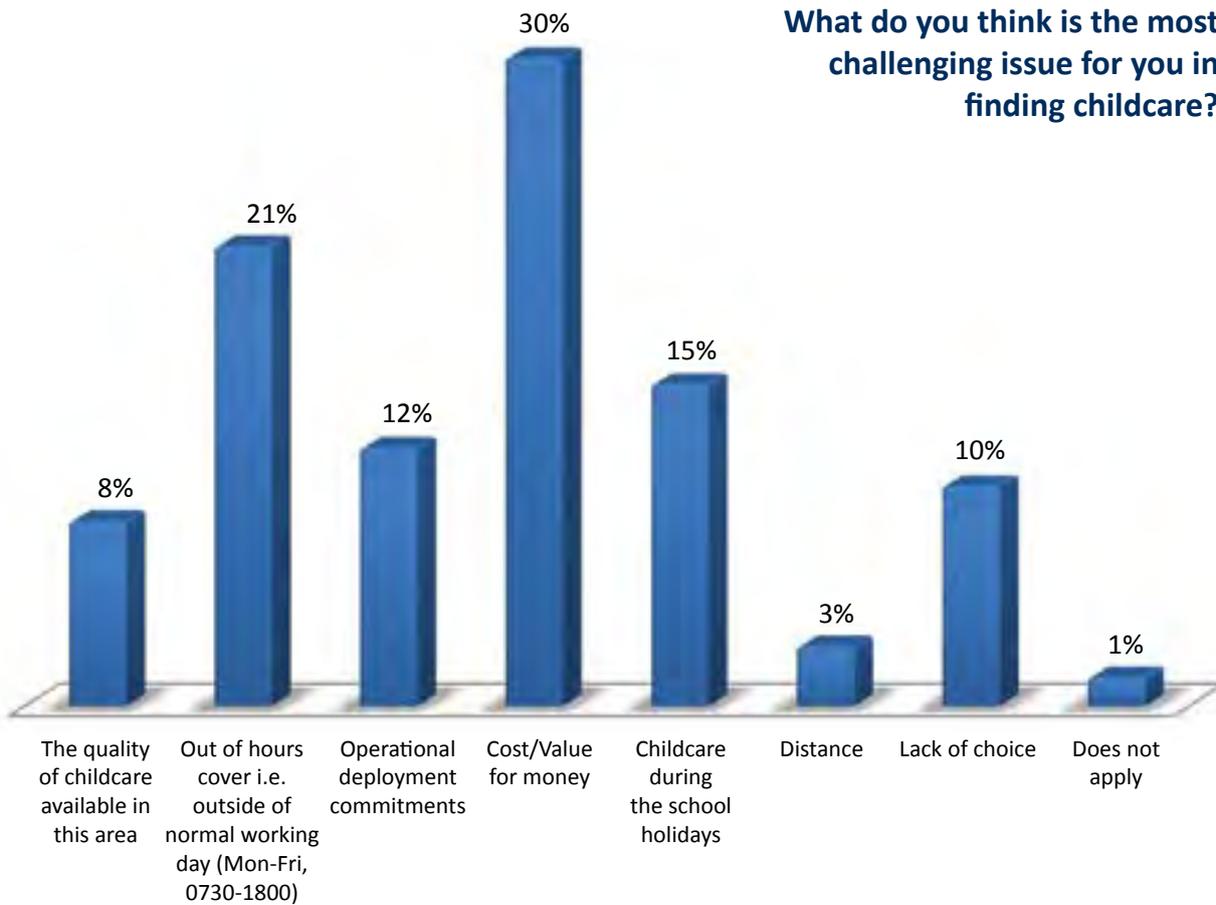
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Our people maintain the security of the nation and a policy that helps and supports them in accessing childcare and enables operational effectiveness, will not be easy to establish. In sum, ‘the system’, be it provided by the government, local authority, MoD and/or local units, needs a radical overhaul to reflect the needs of today’s modern RAF family. And any policy revision needs also to factor in the impact on other MoD initiatives, such as the Future Accommodation Model (FAM), Future Engagement Strategy (FES), New Offer for New Joiners (NO4NJ) and current work to support spouse employment. There also exists a clear link between (and an effect on) childcare provision and the current RAF Human Capability Goals of Full Manning, Resilience and Feeling Valued.

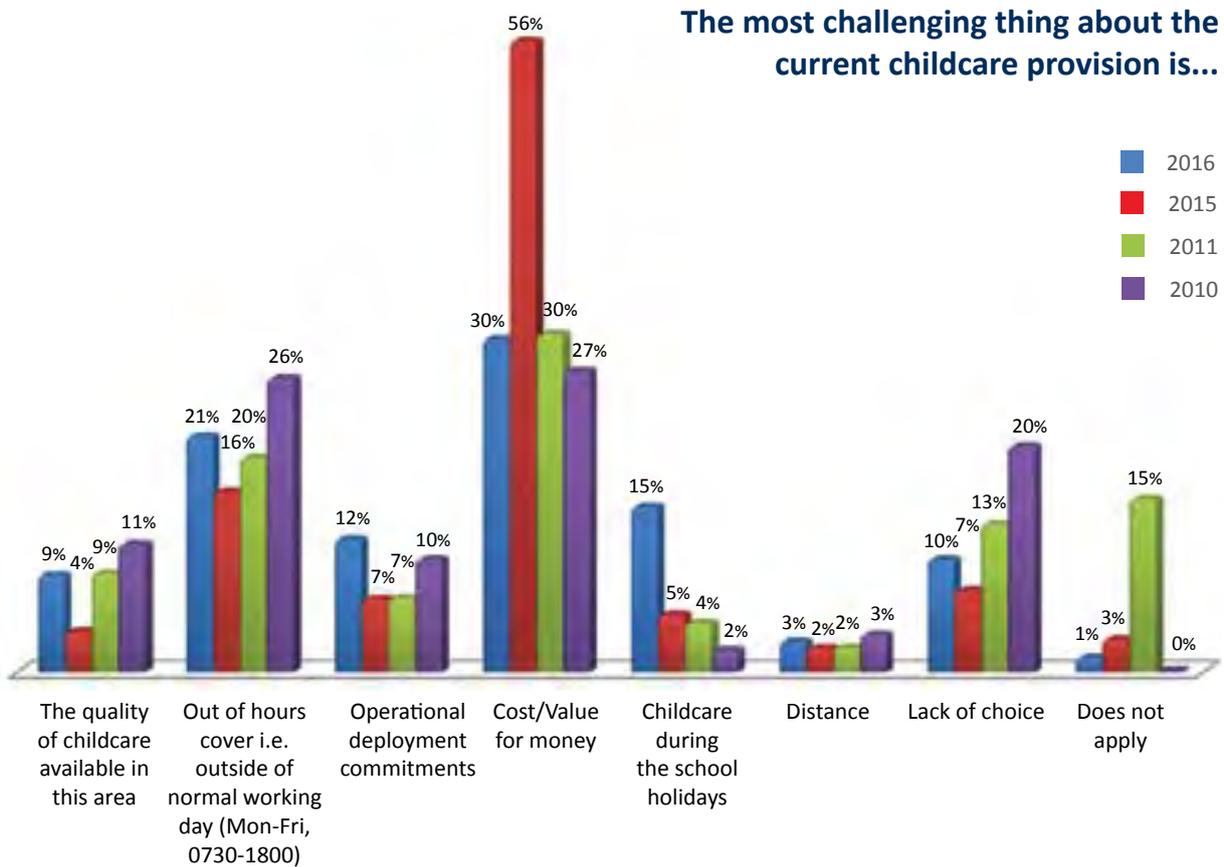


Our survey said...

What do you think is the most challenging issue for you in finding childcare?



The most challenging thing about the current childcare provision is...



Comments from responses received:

There is a nursery on camp but it is full and the others in the area are all too far for me to travel not having a car and with lack of regular buses.

*Holiday clubs are extortionate, if they are run and if you can get in as demand is high. I believe it should be a priority for the station to ensure there are holiday clubs within *close* proximity to every station, especially given how remote some are.*

Not the only trade affected but particularly hard for aircrew with professional spouses... Myself and others have to constantly make ourselves unavailable to the flight planners and often have to turn down last minute requests to go on task, this makes us very unpopular amongst our squadron colleagues and makes those that do not have families feel as though they are constantly covering for those that do.

The childcare provision on camps is often oversubscribed and does not meet the needs of the local community in terms of opening times... The RAF should be supporting families and ensuring minimal disruption for service children. This lack of support is causing people to leave the RAF.

The cost differs from unit to unit so you can be financially worse off when assigned to another unit. Can't the costs be standardised as the SFA is?

I have a decent level of education but end up in dead end, part time employment such as in pubs and call centres working around his commitments; I change employment regularly and am unemployed for most of the year.

Most of our husbands work shifts, yet we are not allowed to put our children in to suit their shift pattern. They either have to be in for a full or half day and this costs a lot of money. The nurseries on camp should allow more flexibility.

There remains pressure in a male environment for women to just "sort it".

The most difficult for 2 serving parents is lack for support to find childcare, mainly for summer holidays. Is there a possibility of taking unpaid leave during part of summer hols eg half the numbers of weeks for each spouse?

The cost of child care is a joke, and despite the fact that most of the nurseries near camps couldn't survive without the service men and women they get literally zero benefits. If a nursery is on MOD property then the service personnel that use it should get a discount.

No facilities to respond to call outs and no support / guidance from the RAF.

We are posted in the south east of England where childcare costs are substantially more expensive However, the military wage does not reflect this, leaving us worse off than we would be if we were posted further north.

Due to a lot of camps being remote, there are not enough practical options for childcare. The station nursery is often the only reasonable option, which means that, even if it is not up to a good standard or is highly priced, we are stuck with no other choice.

Work are sometimes not very understanding of my situation as a single parent. Some of the rules seem out-dated and not centred around retaining people in the RAF.

Shift work can be a massive issue for childcare and bosses seem to not give this any thought. My current unit has even made it a standing order that childcare issues do not fall under their responsibility and the serving person must be on readiness constantly and have things in place ready for last minute tasking.

Even for a standard funded pre-school place, places are booked up by 18 months or more in advance.

We didn't choose to be posted "down south" and compared to serving members "up north" we pay close to double in childcare costs. Fair.....I think not.

Childcare in London is ludicrous, forcing parents to either get into debt or giving up the partner's job to stay at home. Childcare places have a waiting list up to 2 years at the best establishments.

If you get under 90 days' notice for a posting (in 13 years I have never had more than 2 months) you struggle to get childcare full time as you have to go on a waiting list.

If either parent serves or you are a single parent, childcare for temporary detachments (E.g. 8 week courses mandatory for promotion) at course locations needs to be available & a balancing payment made so as not to lose place at regular nursery.

The nursery on base is inflexible in the hours it offers. Overpriced, it does not support spouses when the serving person is deployed. It is also the only nursery for 10-15 miles. So it has a monopoly and is able to charge extortionate prices.

Costs vary wildly depending on location, and many nurseries on joint service units are affiliated but have no discount. Moreover, lots of units end up taking block leave which closes the nursery. Before and after school clubs that also cater for the holiday period (and actually do something fun for the children) are like hen's teeth.

Most people seem to forget about secondary school children.

Here, there is 1 registered childminder and a (poor) Crèche, neither of which are available during the summer holidays. There are 695 under 18s on camp - the childcare simply isn't sufficient.

My childcare facility opens at 0730, but my job often starts at 0700.... In air traffic control this is a real issue, as you can't ask the aircraft to land early so that we can collect our children! There is no other childcare option available to us and this one facility has a several month waiting list. How is this acceptable?

The RAF assumes that the spouse has a less important job and should sacrifice their career. This is out dated and flexible arrangements and (better) understanding need to be adopted.

The only nursery on site shuts at 1300! It's like they've forgotten women serve in the military as well as men.

The Armed Forces need to be more flexible with their working hours. They are becoming a smaller organisation, relying on highly trained personnel who take a long time to train. Partners will ask them to leave the Armed Forces due to the inflexibility of the job and the failure of the organisation to move with the times and offer flexible working hours.

Our on-base nursery is utterly inflexible in its approach to childcare.

The cost of childcare is directly effecting where I can afford to be posted.

Childcare costs should be consistent across the RAF even when in a more expensive area. You have little say in where you live and how expensive your living costs are.

Having a school aged child with additional needs, trying to find holiday clubs that are suitable for my child to use is impossible and I have to pay extra for a childminder with SEND training.

The Stn supported crèche is only run between the hours of 0900-1500 which does not at all support the RAF working family.....The RAF is really letting us working families down here.

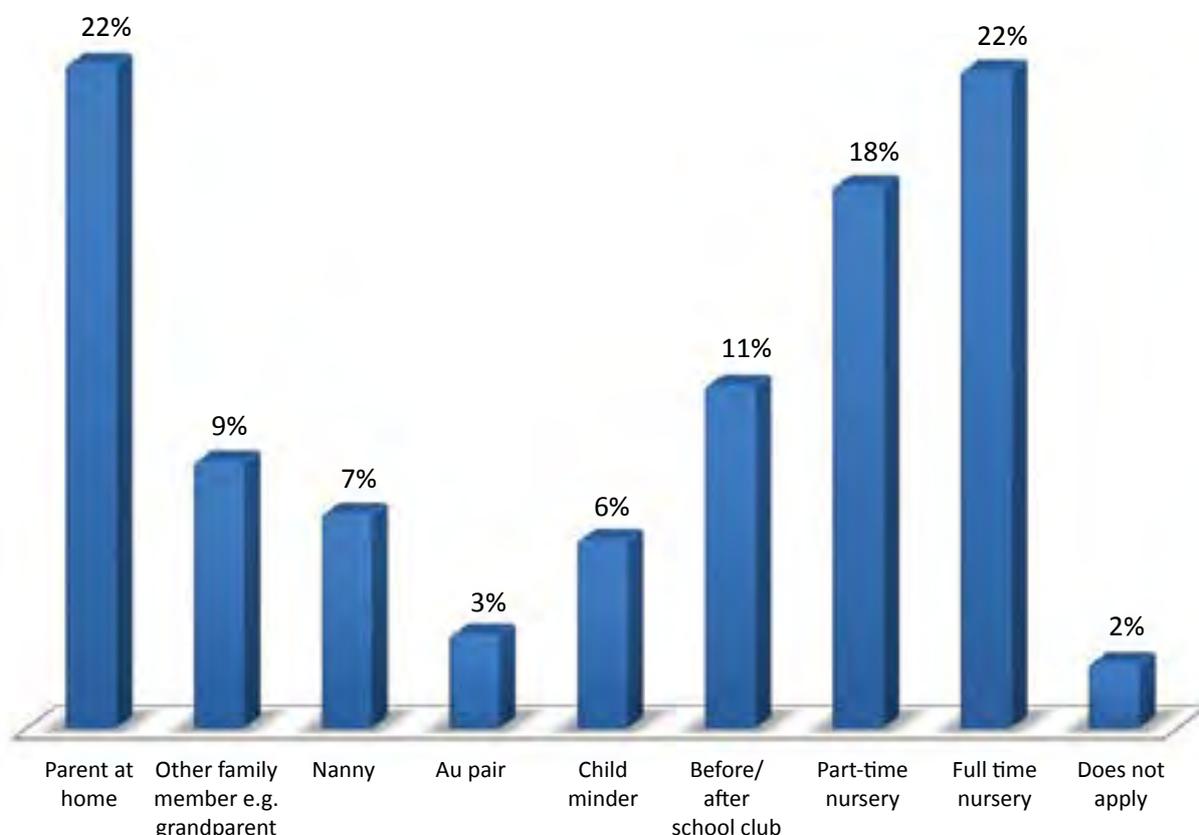
The RAF is not flexible with working hours. My husband gave his employer a flexible working form to be told "you've got 2 hopes of that".

Satellite SFA sites do not get the same level of support or visibility as the main unit.

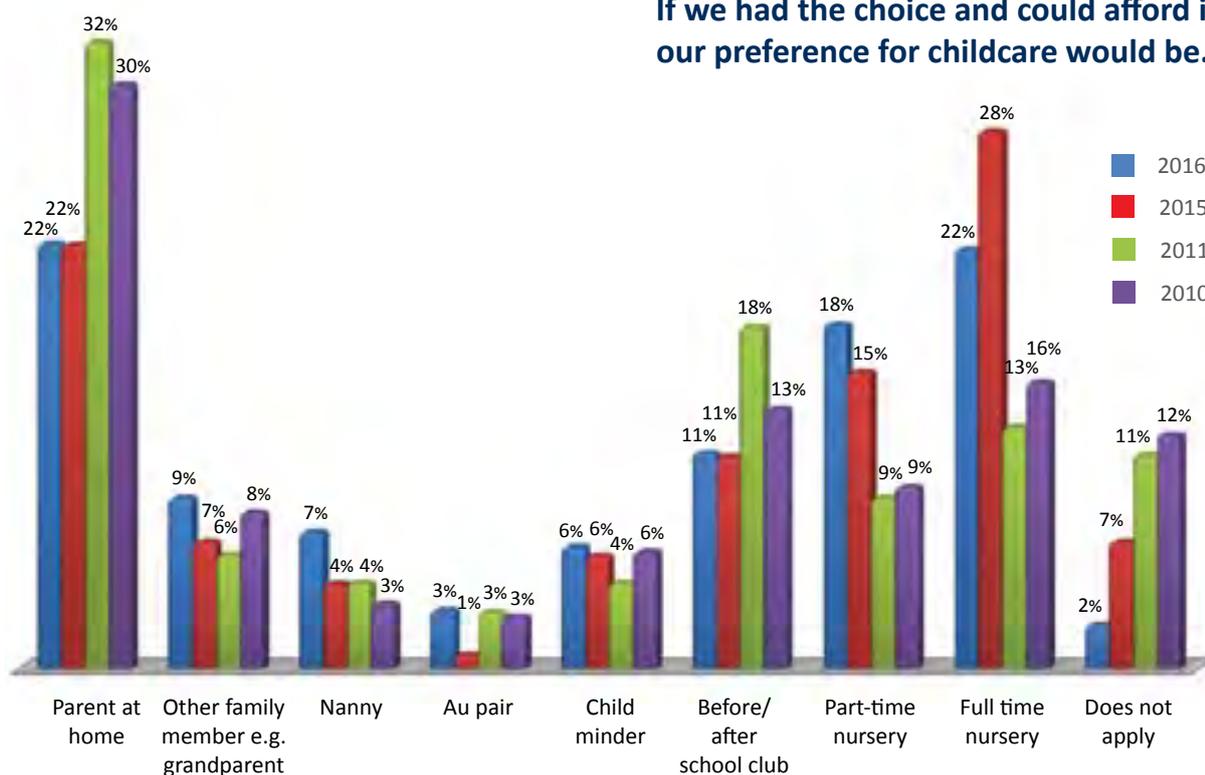
I am amazed at how the quality and cost of childcare provided on RAF camps varies so much camp to camp. Some are outstanding and others dreadful and yet the RAF keeps them as their childcare provider.

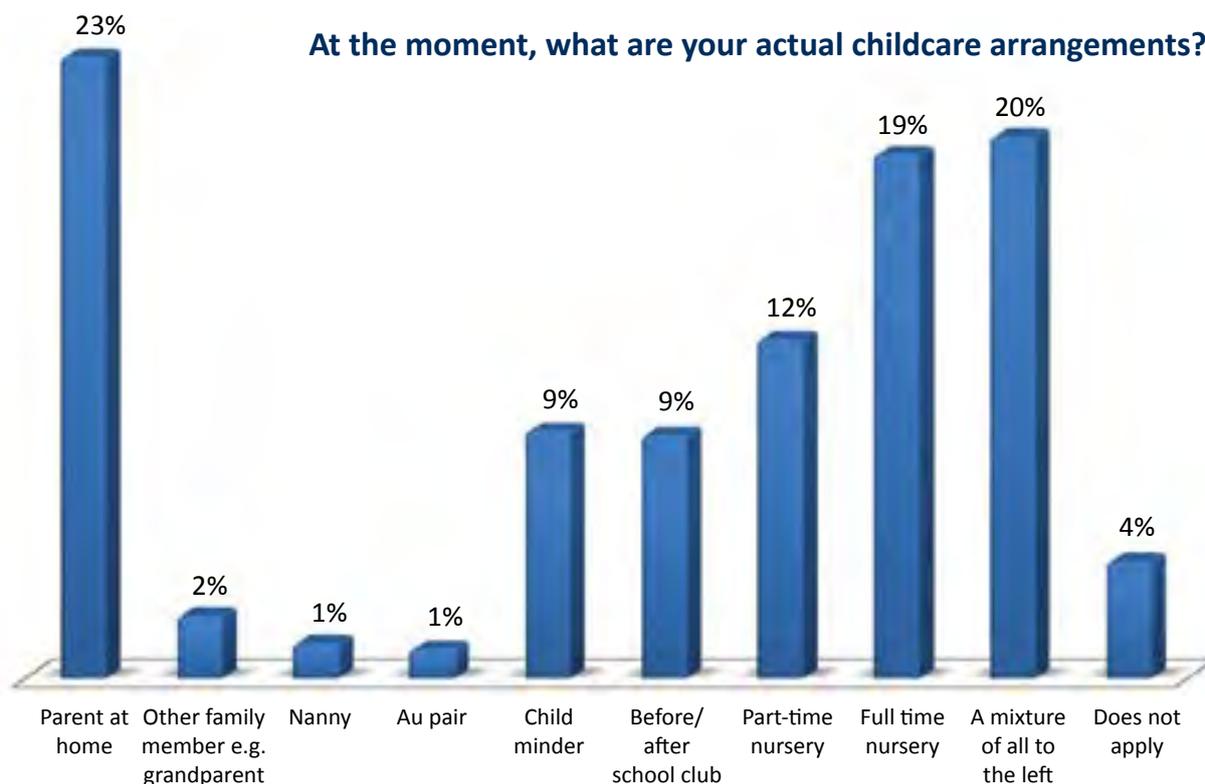


If you had the choice and could afford it, what would be your preference for childcare?



If we had the choice and could afford it, our preference for childcare would be...





I personally pay minimum of £1500 per month in childcare, which is only a few hundred short of my income as a single parent.

Childminder, friends and my sons Nanny all look after my son at times. It's unsettling for him and stressful for me.

Nanny is perfect, dedicated care for my 2 boys but VERY expensive, about half of my take home pay.

We are still not geared up for 2 parents serving.

It is a constant juggling act and stressful - it affects my ability to deliver in work as I am constantly worried about one of them being sick. CarillionAmey would not give us a 4 bed house as they said the children could share and the au pair could have the third bedroom. Despite me sending them the JSP reference they would not budge, which means grandparents cannot come and stay or visit.

We are only entitled to a 2 bed so unable to arrange for an au pair. We have disputed this issue but lost. We both work out of hours and struggle for childcare.

An RAF- aligned nursery should be exemplary at understanding our needs and not charge a penalty fee if we are 15 mins late for a pick up. Once again, the overwhelming impression is that the service still has an attitude that 'dependant' spouses do the child care. Even the word dependant gives away this outmoded view.

Special needs children are harder to find care for locally so having to be in a small quarter due to only having one child makes au pair or nanny impossible.

We have been forced to send our children to a nursery off base at considerable extra cost. This could all be avoided if the on base nursery would be prepared to listen to the needs of the parents on base instead of burying their heads in the sand and taking an intransigent attitude 'this is how it's always been done, this is what works most easily for the management team, and - despite the constant protests of parents on base - we maintain that we are fulfilling our contractual obligations to provide childcare on the base.'

The government should recognise the use of an au pair when used in conjunction with nursery when working out tax credits entitlements.

My son has no stability at the moment and is getting bounced around between childminders. I want stability for him when I deploy for 6 months. This may be a deciding factor in me wanting to leave the forces.

Posted overseas we are having to take our children back to the UK for childcare during the holidays or pay for relative's flights to come and take care of children as we cannot get them into the childcare facility on station as the Americans have priority.

No choice but to give up excellent career and job to provide childcare.

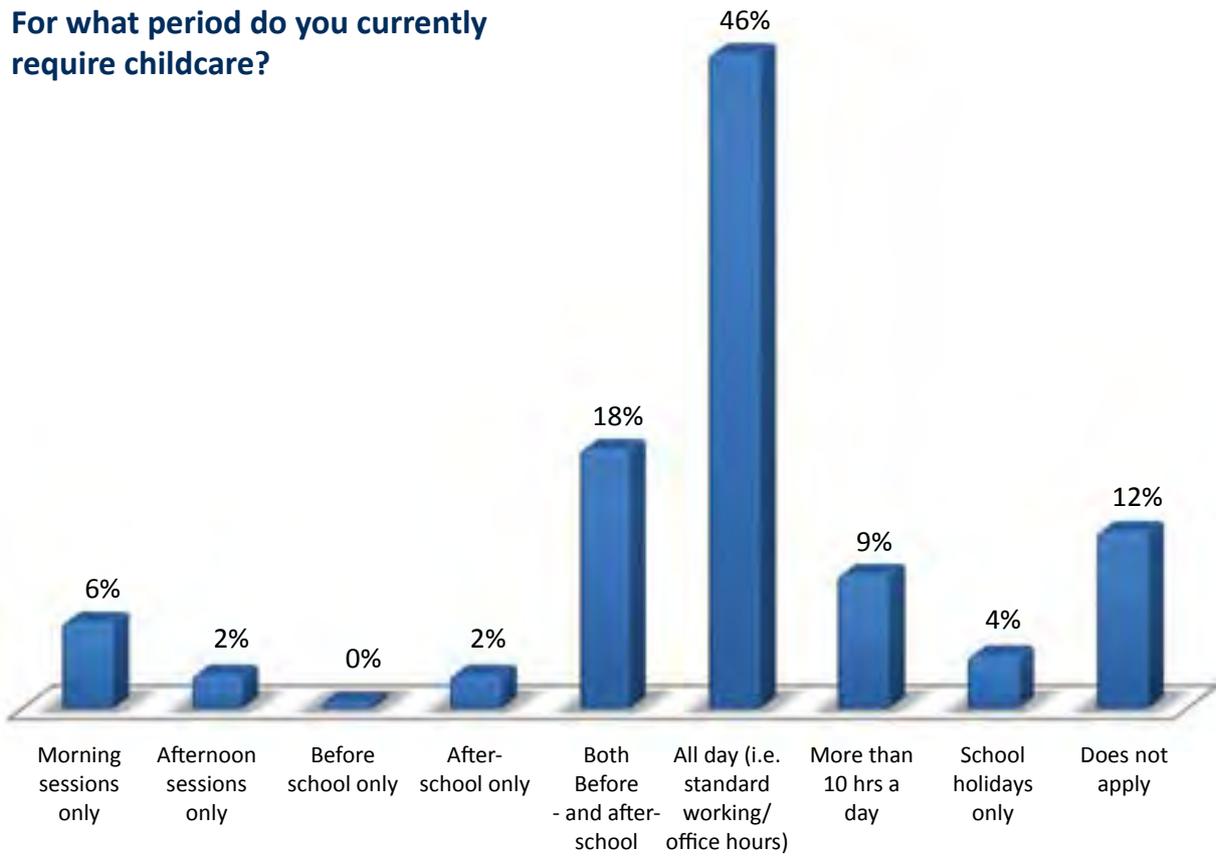
I have had to choose boarding school and I hate being away from him.

I have been through the whole childcare situation in my time with places that don't open enough hours during the day, no school clubs and I have suffered as a consequence. I would not wish this upon anybody else that I am currently managing as the guilt that you feel as a parent not being able to carry out your duties at work is quite detrimental for morale as others take up your slack.

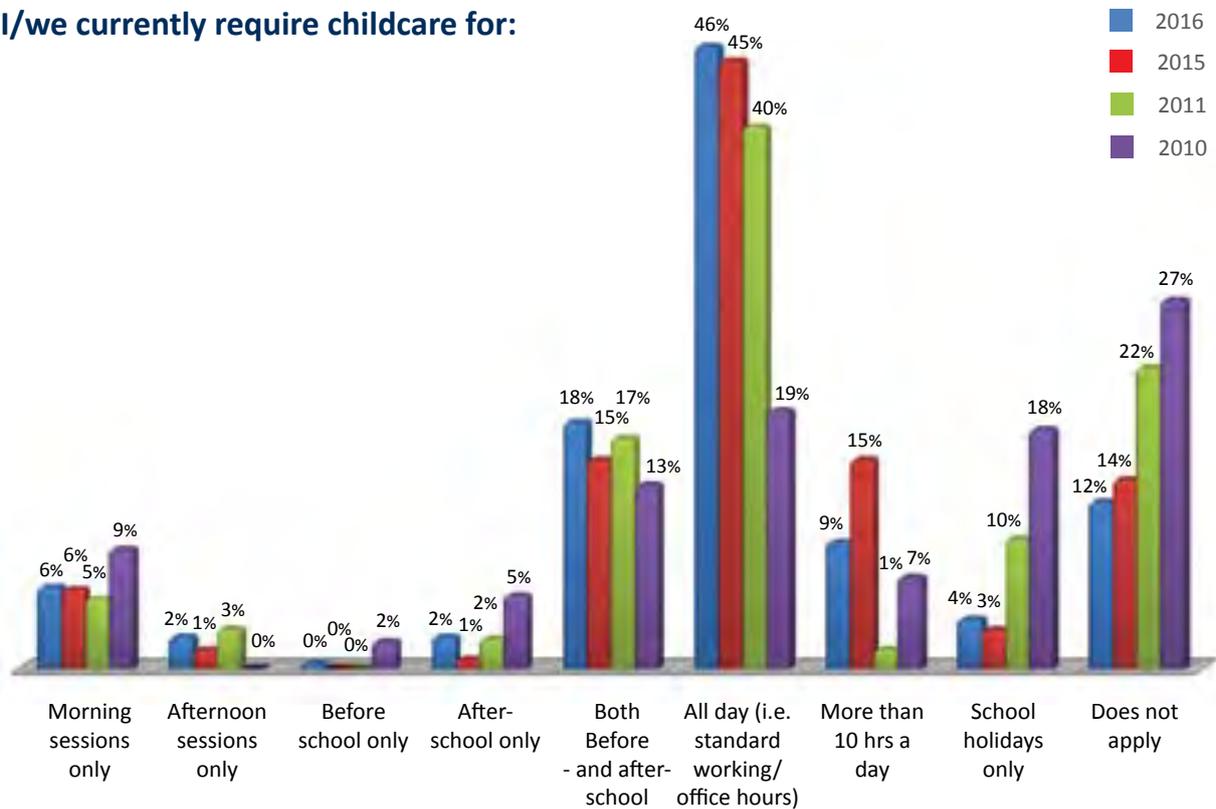
It would be nice to define the part time hours against our requirement, rather than the nursery's.



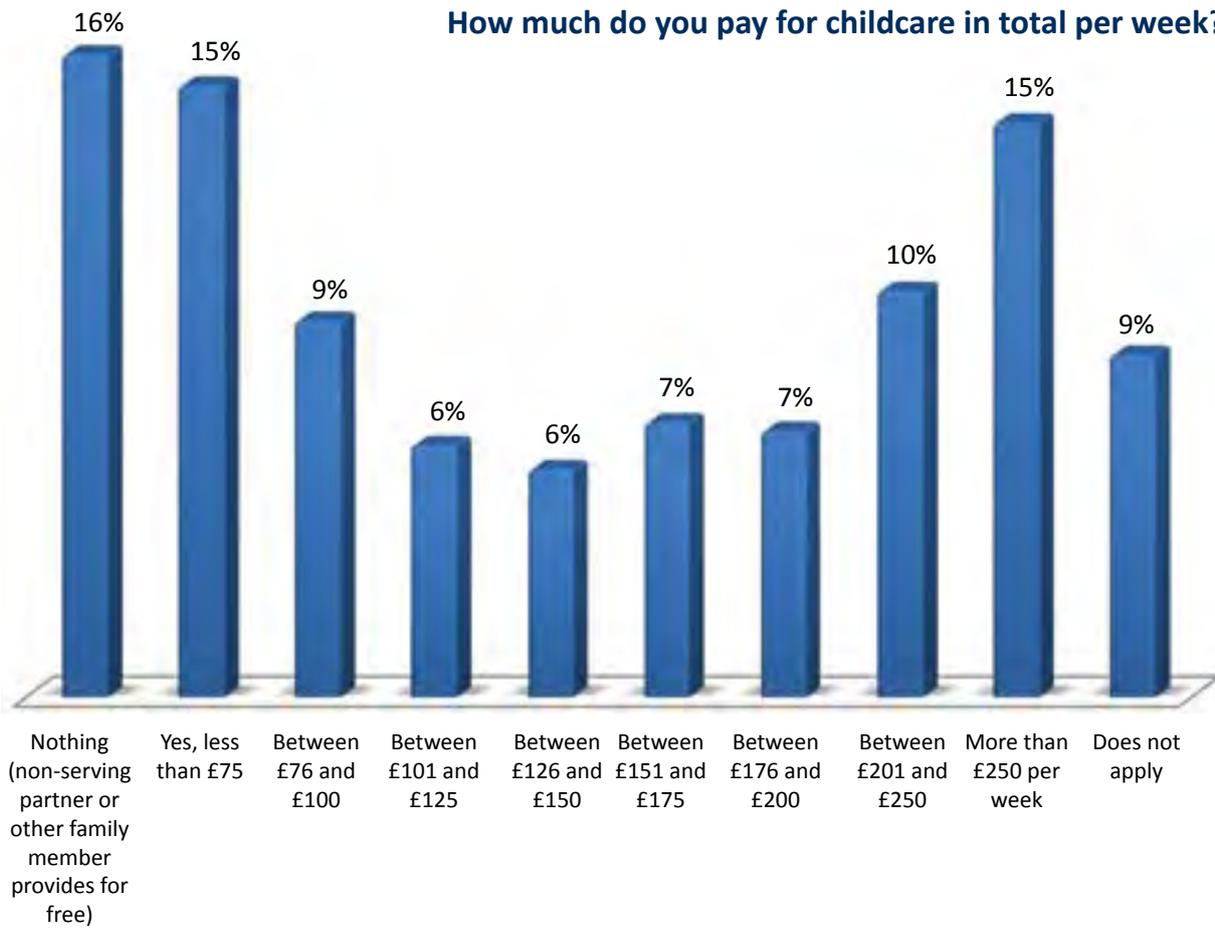
For what period do you currently require childcare?



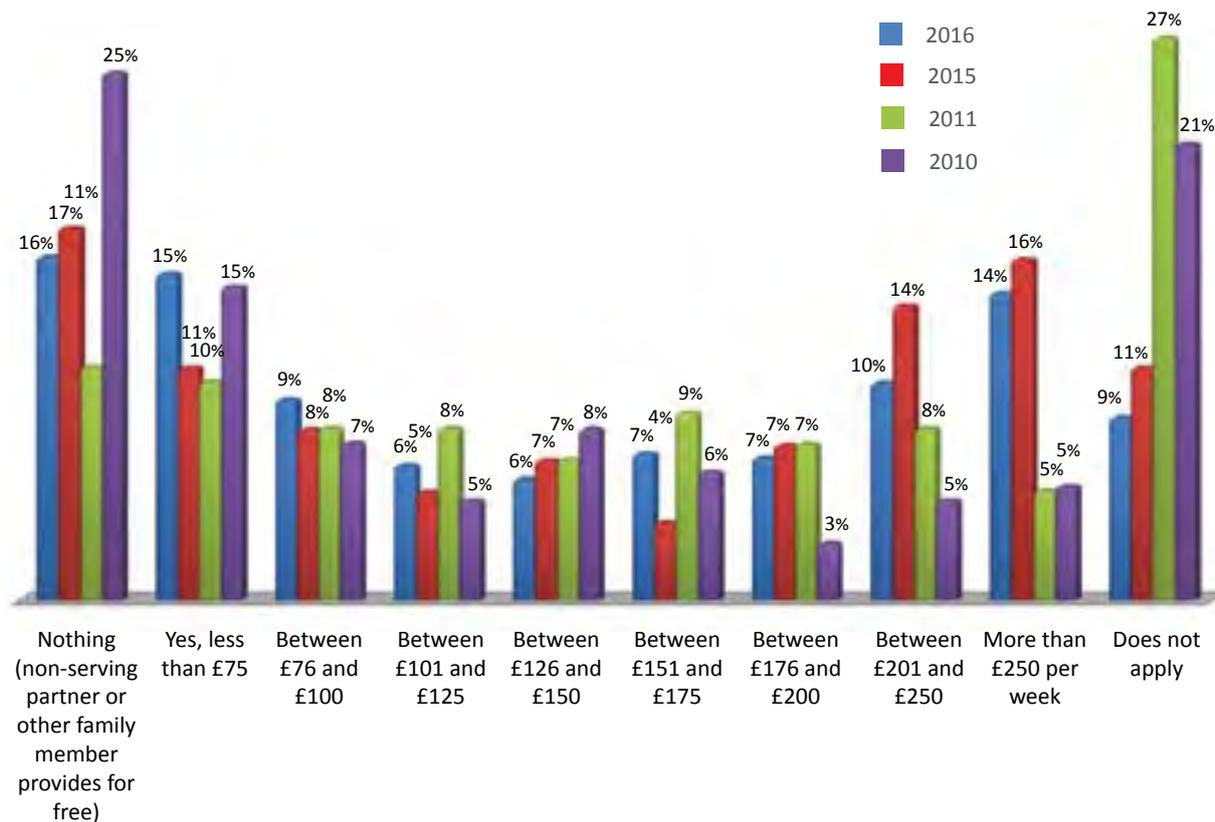
I/we currently require childcare for:



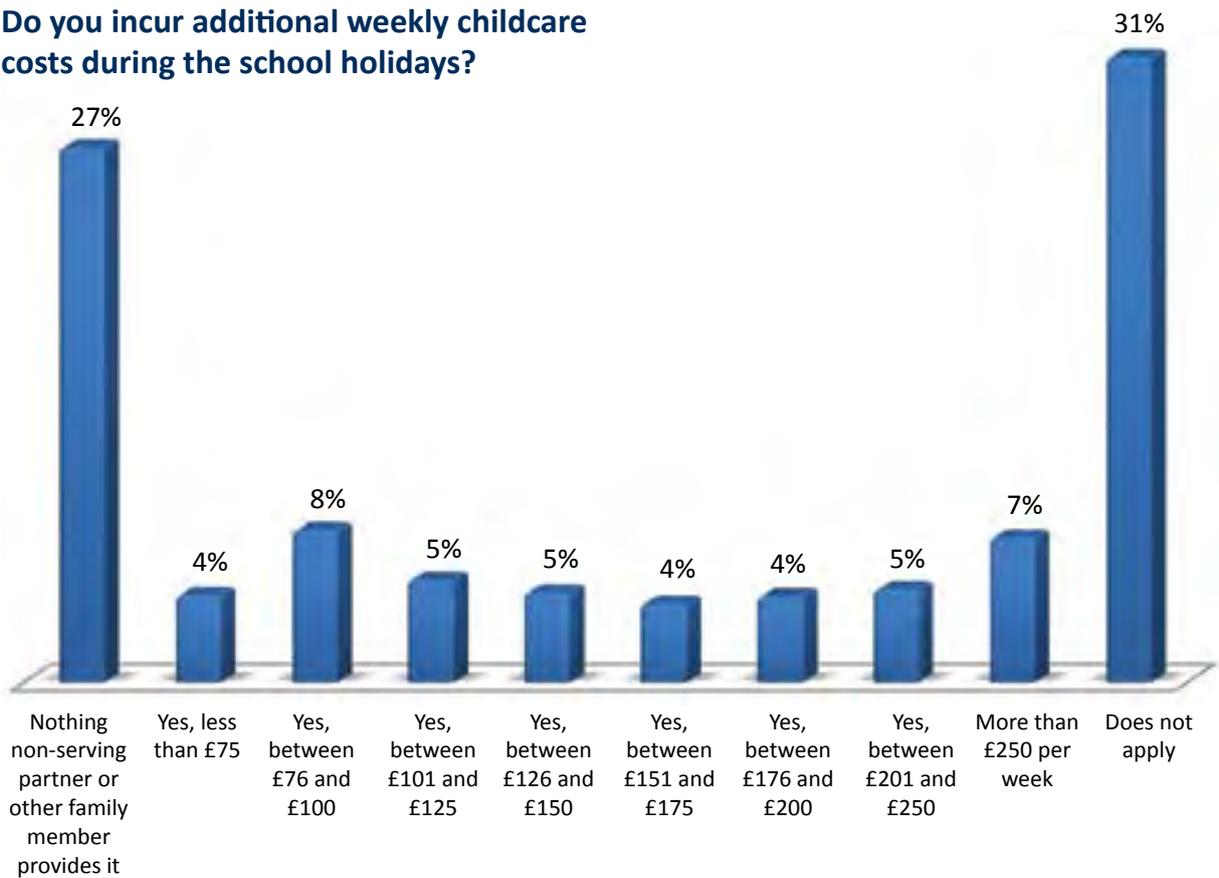
How much do you pay for childcare in total per week?



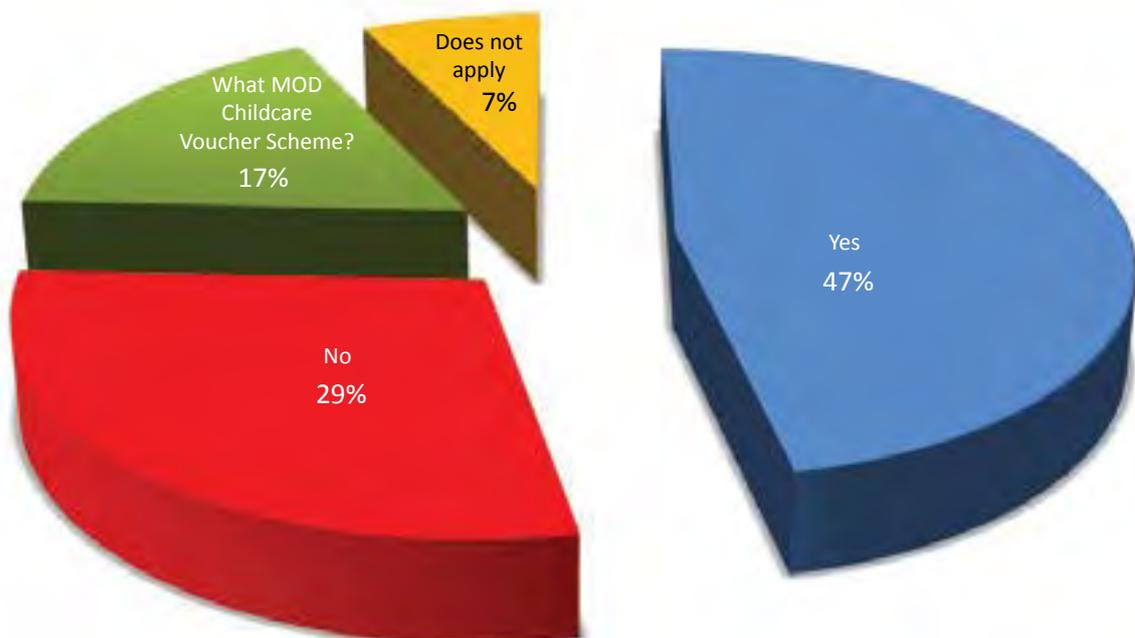
I/We currently pay the following (total) amount per week for childcare provision:



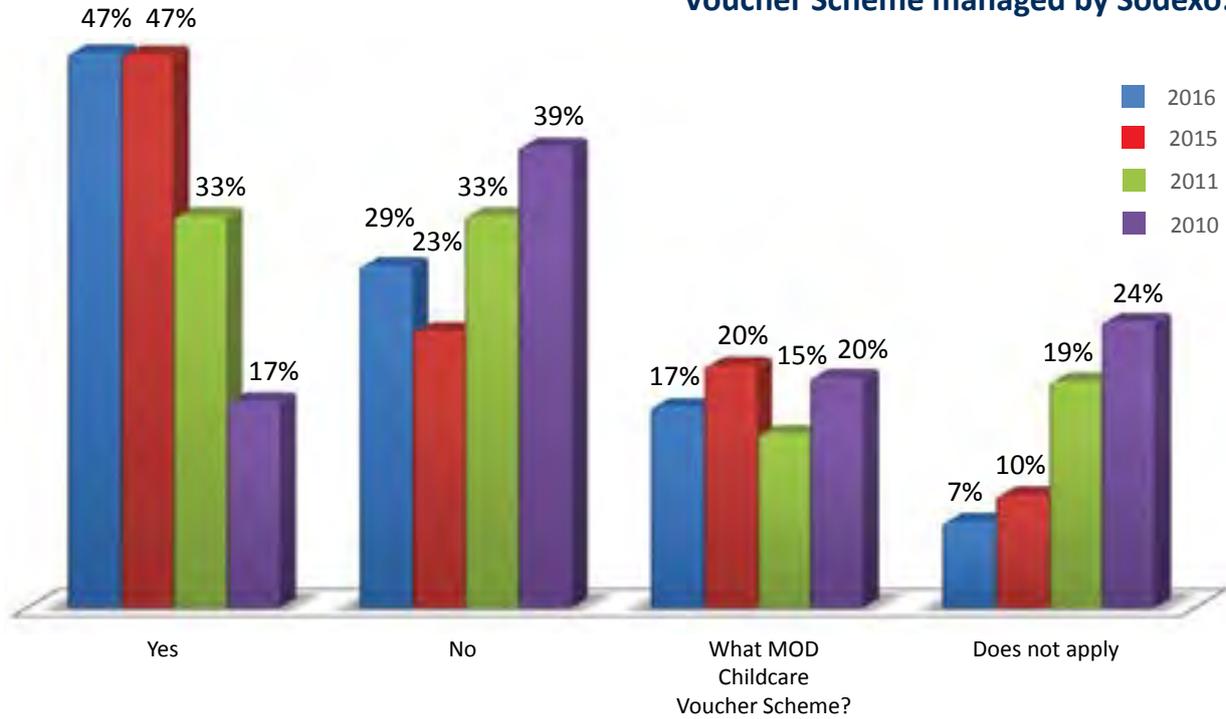
Do you incur additional weekly childcare costs during the school holidays?



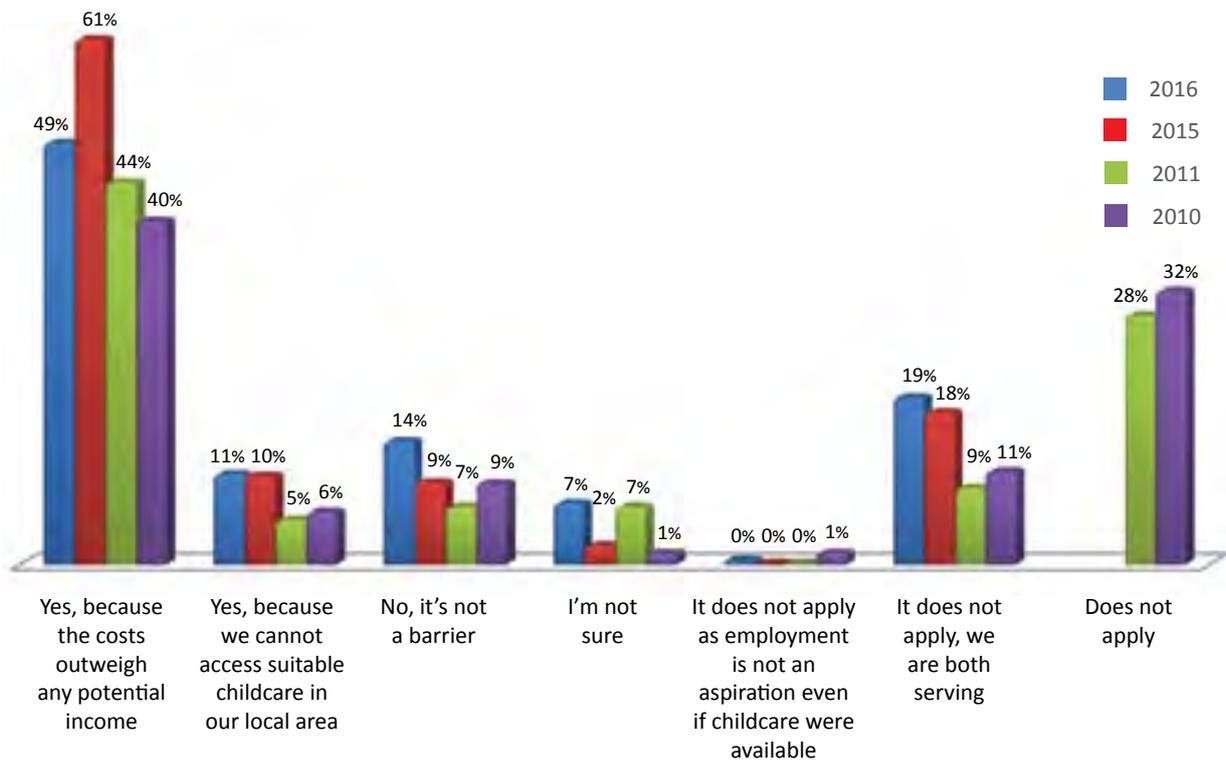
Are you registered for the MOD Childcare Voucher Scheme managed by Sodexo:



I/We are registered for the Childcare Voucher Scheme managed by Sodexo:



Is childcare a barrier to employment for the non-serving parent in your family?



We have to have childcare at all times. However the one nursery we can use also happens to be the only one that is open during half terms and holidays. The 15 hours free does not apply during these periods so the costs go up.

The nursery calculates cost over the year so price doesn't increase in school holidays when funding isn't applicable.

Husband and I take turns to cover holidays so never have time off together.

The local nursery on base has a waiting list of 8 months! We contacted over 15 childcare providers before finding a space further afield and at a higher cost.

Although my wife is a teacher and can provide childcare for our daughter during school holidays, the childcare system requires that we still pay despite the child not attending in order to 'secure' our place. I find this ridiculous.

We have to use our leave separately for childcare, which means we don't ever actually get leave as a family. We have no family to help.

The nursery has a policy that we have to pay even for planned holidays.

Services families do not get a choice about where we are posted and therefore where we live. Posts in very affluent areas, ie Northwood, have a very high childcare cost. This is the reason why we only have one child. We are unable to afford another child due to childcare costs.

Previously full time childcare was costing up to £1300 per month. I have since stopped working to care for my children.

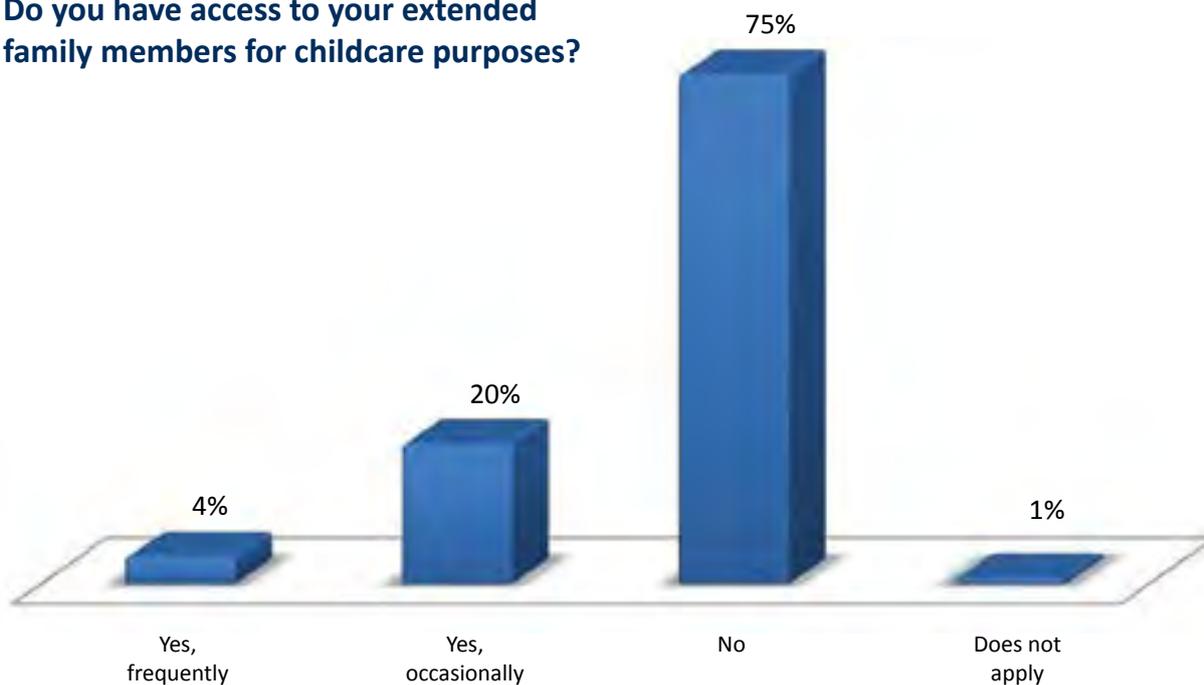
Child care cannot be arranged around shifts so this means that even when my husband is on days off we have to pay for child care or we would not retain a place for the days we do need childcare.

Fortunately as a RAF nursery, it only closes bank holidays and for two weeks at Christmas. It's extremely reassuring that we don't have to source childcare over the holidays.

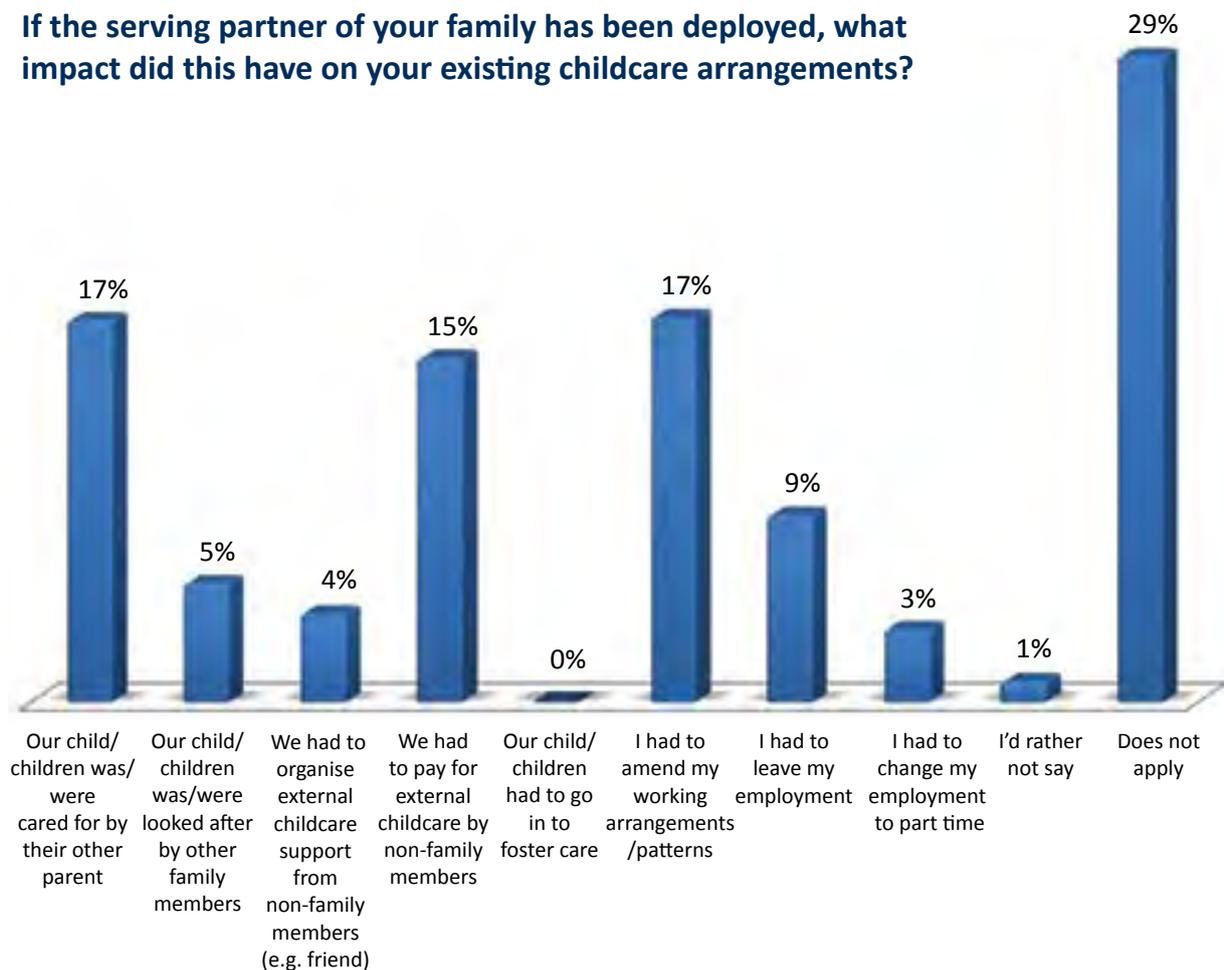
The price of full time child care in our area is one of the highest in the UK. I know I've been given a 1% pay rise but when National Insurance has gone up along with the cost of SFA I'm still losing out.



Do you have access to your extended family members for childcare purposes?



If the serving partner of your family has been deployed, what impact did this have on your existing childcare arrangements?



My wife works as a hospital Nurse and while I'm deployed or away from home she cannot work night shifts as we have no childcare available. This makes her quite inflexible to her colleagues. It also means that when I return from deployment she has to work extra night shifts to make up for those she missed while I was away, meaning we have even more time apart.

I knew my husband deploying would have caused problems with my shift work and therefore left my job before it was an issue as I would need to give 3 months' notice at the position I was, and we don't always get that notice for deployments.

I am a nurse and am required to work weekends and when my husband is deployed it is very hard as we have no family close by and know very few people on camp. There is no childcare available to cover weekend working.

Our extended family live 250 miles away. There is no provision for emergency childcare should something happen preventing me or my husband looking after the children, even in the short term, until extended family could get here.

As a single serving parent I was lucky enough to have my mother come and stay in my quarter and provide consistency for my child. Child still attended nursery normal hours however it was Nanny at home not Mummy to care for him outside these hours.

I and my partner have both been deployed in the last two years, 6 months in between the two. We really struggled as we have no friends or family who can help us so had to juggle that with work. It's added pressure when you have to tell work you can't do a certain shift because you're basically living as a single parent but at the same time you don't want to let work down.

I worked at a loss for 5 months, paying for childcare from my savings so I didn't lose my job. We became very overdrawn at the bank during my husband's deployment... My husband was in the Falklands so we didn't get a huge amount of overseas allowance.

We are still not set up for 2 parents serving and one going OOA while the other stays at home, many sections simply do not have the luxury of putting someone on days as manning is so tight.

I know a few instances where single parents have been tasked with a 4-6 month deployment. HR suggested they look at fostering their children out. In all cases they PVR'd because of it.

Every time my husband has been deployed I've had to leave my job. Deployment means a loss of income for us, alongside a period of upheaval for our entire family unit, not to mention my personal CV is a mess due to this. Potential employers always ask why my employment history is so scrappy and I find many places unwilling to employ military spouses because of this.

Not always possible to arrange the spouses work pattern without risk of repercussions in their work place. Previously the spouse in our household has had to leave high level employment due to the expense of childcare whilst serving person deployed.

My husband and I both serve; we take turns being left behind. It's hard work looking after our kids but we do it. We're a service family.

I was a serving officer but left the RAF on 1 Apr 16 as the Service does not recognise my partner (unmarried parents but both serving and very much in a stable relationship) and now we have a child I no longer wish to deploy and risk my partner being deployed at the same time. It very nearly happened on my return from Maternity Leave in Jun 14 - I am not proud of myself but I got myself medically downgraded as they were trying to deploy me on a 4-week overseas exercise whilst my partner was undertaking his Out of Area prep. There was no other childcare available and at the mention of Social Services and Fostering I ran to the Medical Centre as quick as I could.

I have had to leave job as qualified midwife on two occasions to cover child care when he was deployed. This has had detrimental effect on my own promotion and my pension contributions.

Childcare is the only reason the non-serving parent does not work. Cost and lack of flexibility make being a stay at home parent the better option.

Having just started a new job I've already had to ask for flexibility in the first 8 weeks to cover last minute changes/deployments. I'm on a 12 week probation period and this reflects badly on my reliability.

Having to leave employment due to deployments means future employers have a negative view of military spouses as they don't like employing us knowing we may have to quit at short notice. It makes gaining employment even harder than it already is as a military spouse.

Both parents are serving and we try and work it so we are not deployed at the same time. I am serving and my husband not, his employer was very understanding of my commitment to deployment and were extremely supportive of my husband and son.

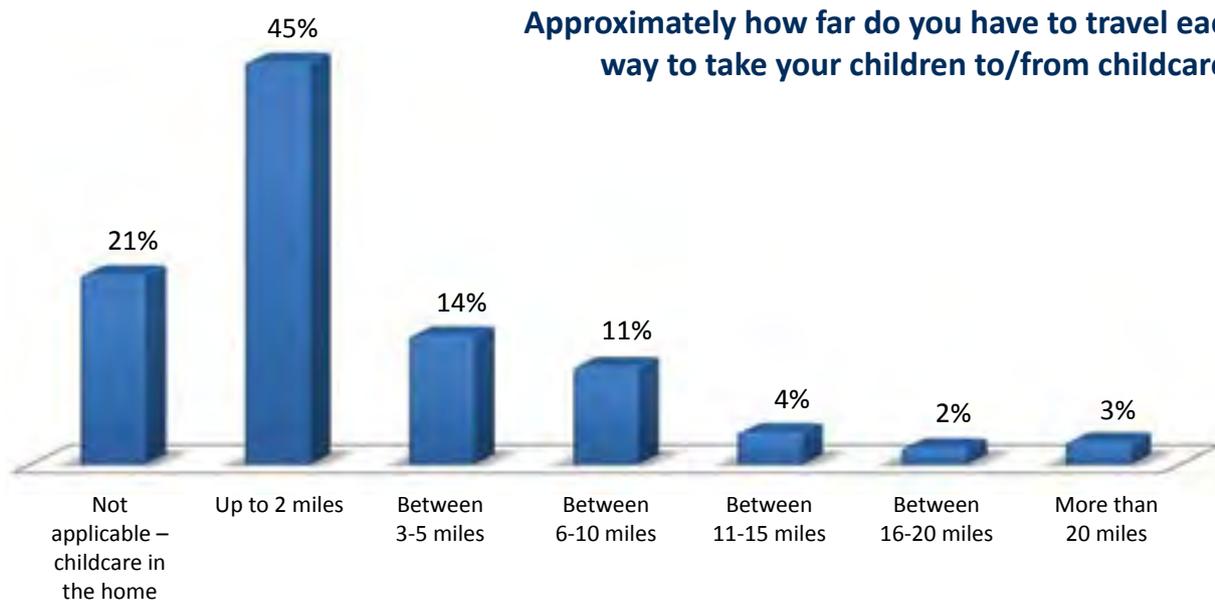
My postings always have an impact on my spouse's career. Thankfully they have a very good employer (not the military!) During my last deployment of 6 months their employer organised for them to work from home. The military would never look after its people like this. The military couldn't even be bothered to check that my family were doing ok while I was away. The military really doesn't look after its people anymore.

The Government/Military/RAF should give additional financial/welfare support when the spouse is deployed overseas on operations.

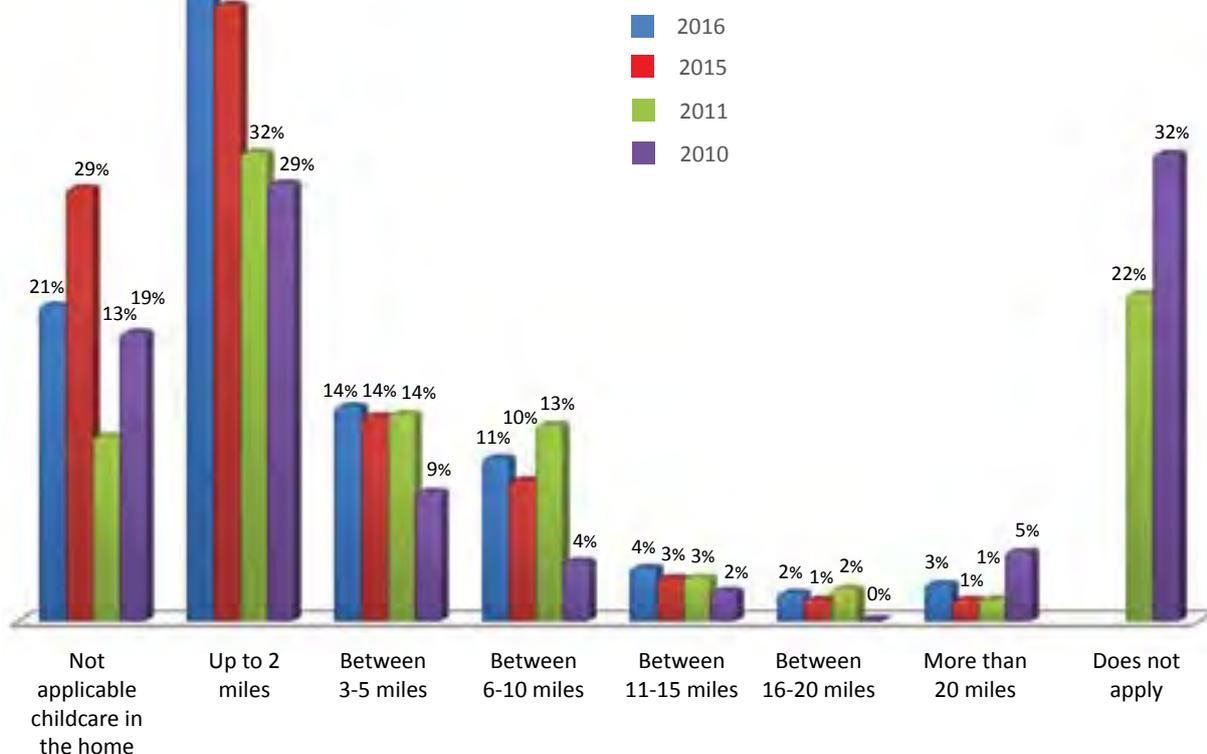
Whilst my wife was deployed I was protected from a DWR but not exercises. As a result my children had to live with a grandparent for 4 months and it felt like I was an absent parent arranging for visiting rights to my own children.



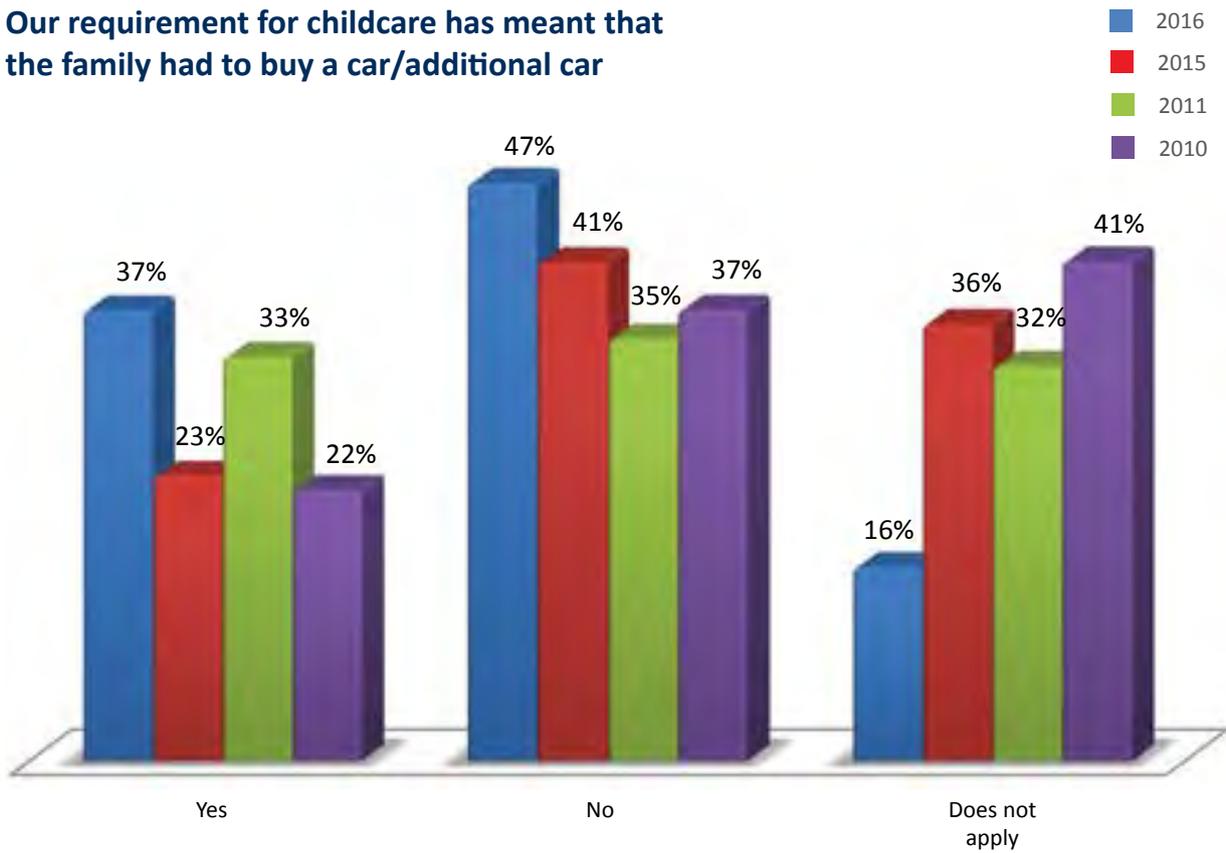
Approximately how far do you have to travel each way to take your children to/from childcare?



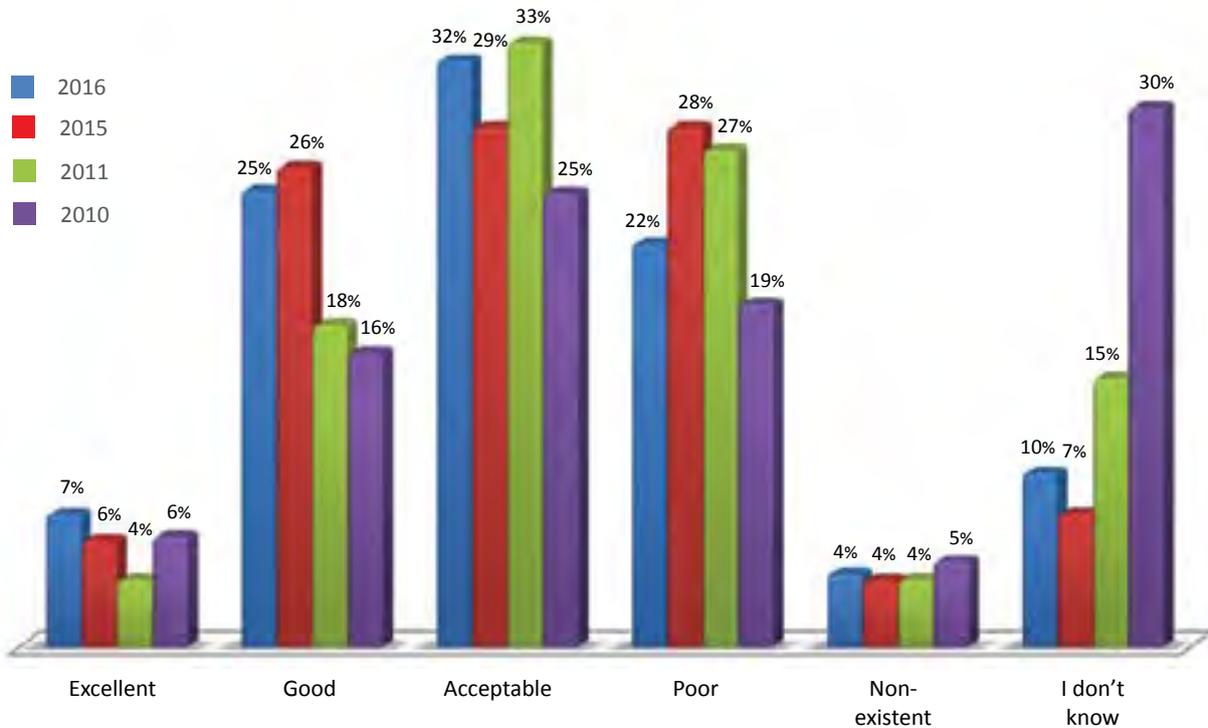
I/We currently travel the following distance (each way) to access childcare provision:



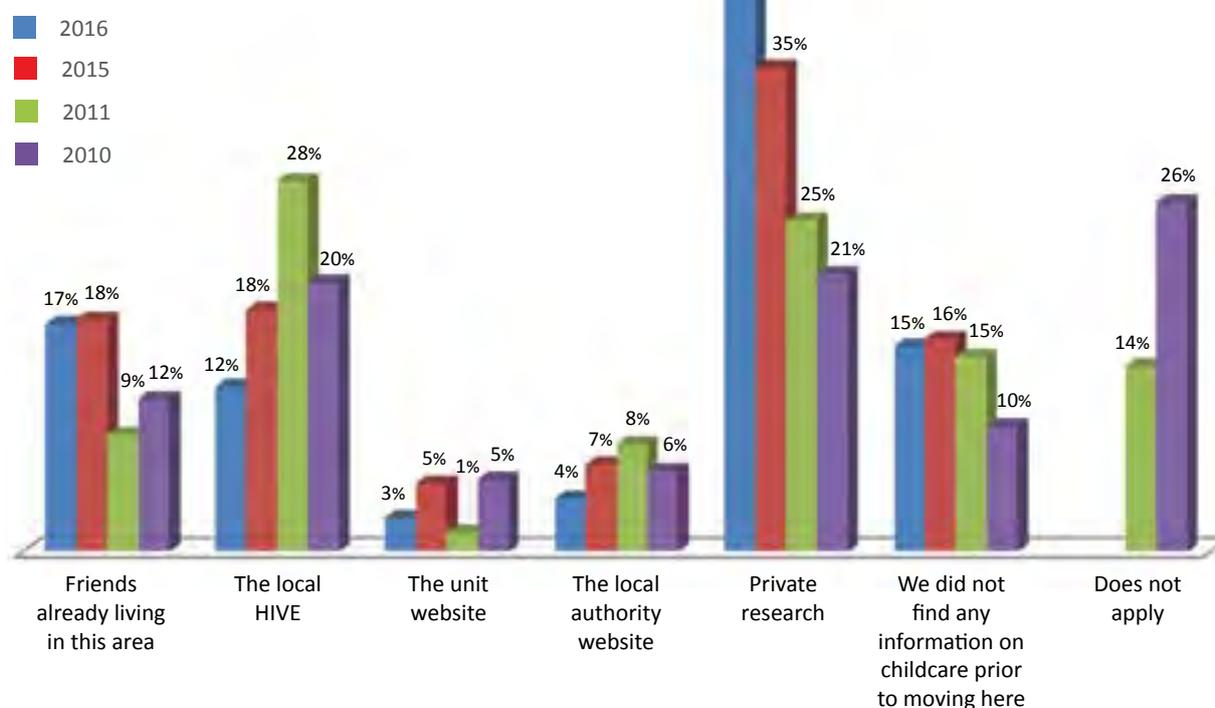
Our requirement for childcare has meant that the family had to buy a car/additional car



Within a five mile radius of this unit, the choice of childcare providers is:



When moving to this area, our MAIN source of information on childcare was:



Average weekly childcare costs by region and nation, 2016

Region/Nation	Nursery 25 hours (under 2)	Nursery 25 hours (2 and over)	Childminder 25 hours (under 2)	Childminder 25 hours (2 and over)	After-school club 15 hours	Childminder after-school pick up
East of England	£113.51	£110.88	£104.13	£104.08	£51.89	£63.04
East Midlands	£116.63	£109.15	£98.79	£98.74	£44.80	£58.65
London	£158.73	£148.74	£148.12	£146.81	£54.39	£88.17
North East	£109.49	£102.20	£97.76	£97.29	£48.20	£59.68
North West	£102.44	£101.08	£88.67	£88.21	£45.80	£55.95
South East	£137.88	£133.32	£117.58	£116.86	£50.81	£71.49
South West	£116.24	£111.63	£104.77	£103.53	£51.49	£63.49
West Midlands	£110.80	£106.91	£95.43	£93.06	£46.92	£59.64
Yorkshire and Humberside	£97.42	£93.60	£92.71	£91.16	£45.78	£55.56
England regional average	£118.13	£113.06	£105.33	£104.42	£48.90	£63.96
Scotland average	£111.13	£104.06	£102.50	£102.02	£53.21	£65.98
Wales average	£110.16	£109.07	£96.51	£96.53	£45.40	£57.16
Britain average of regions and nations	£116.77	£111.88	£104.27	£103.48	£48.97	£63.53

Information provided by Family and Childcare Trust 2016 Childcare Survey

Overseas

We received 97 responses from families accessing childcare overseas and particularly from Cyprus. Families in USA serving at USAF bases experienced difficulty in obtaining places because, not surprisingly, children of US personnel took priority. Issues were reported at Ramstein too – a 2 year waiting list for access to a German kindergarten just one example. However, the bulk of responses came from Cyprus, where great reliance seems to be placed on employing ‘at risk’, Filipino Domestic Assistants to solve the problem of limited availability and hours. Concern was expressed that these issues are not well known to SP considering an overseas assignment, and that families sometimes have no choice once in theatre other than to accept the risk of unqualified or poor quality childcare. Linked with the operational tempo in Cyprus and changes to working hours, this an issue of greater significance this year than we saw both in last year’s survey and during our last visit to Cyprus.

Survey comments from Cyprus

We have a crèche that is only open during school time (Cyprus 7.30-1) and is not cheap.

RAF Akrotiri has very limited childcare options. People currently use third country national Philippine ladies known as domestic assistance, but these ladies are not qualified, assured, effectively CRB checked and many can’t even speak a good standard of English. The few childminders that are qualified are those that are spouses of servicemen assigned to Akrotiri. There are no permanent options for childcare (very limited after school clubs and reliance on the transient population of serving spouses who may or may not choose to run child-minding businesses - many of which chose not to as the limited removals package to Cyprus prevents them bringing their child-minding goods with them). There is no childcare available in school holidays or outside of daily working hours. Compared to families in the UK, families in Cyprus are unable to rely on extended family members to assist with childcare. In sum, we have no quality childcare and no choice but to use third country nationals.

Akrotiri has 2 qualified child minders and a crèche which does not cover the working hours. The Unit ‘takes this at risk’ and there are unqualified Filipino domestic assistants which we also sign to ‘take it at risk’.

I live in Cyprus and unless you are happy to have a Domestic Assistant (which I am not) then you’re pretty limited to child care.

We are in Cyprus and I cannot work due to lack of childcare.

We are based at RAF Akrotiri. Jobs start at 7.30 until at least 1.30. Crèche doesn’t start until 8am and finishes at 12. This doesn’t really work so only leaves the option of a childminder.

Here in Cyprus it is very difficult to find age appropriate care.

Childcare is only available on camp in Cyprus and closes at 12.

I am currently living in Episkopi and I work 8am until 6pm; the childcare is only until 2pm and is of a very poor quality and not value for money. I refuse to have a DA who is unqualified and I am appalled that this is even an option.

In Akrotiri the crèche is open for 4 hours a day. These hours are insufficient to support any paid work.



**Royal Air Force
Benevolent Fund**
THE HEART OF THE RAF FAMILY



At the Heart of the RAF Family

Founded a year after the Royal Air Force, the RAF Benevolent Fund has a long and proud history of supporting serving personnel, past and present, and their families. We're there for any member of the RAF Family who is in need of financial, practical or emotional support – from the youngest child to the oldest veteran.

In 2015 we spent more than £18m assisting 41,500 members of the RAF Family with a wide range of issues from childcare and relationship difficulties, to injury, disability and bereavement. With over 74% of the RAF Family over the age of 65, much of our support goes on the older veteran community, but we're also there for the serving RAF and their families.

We know that Service life brings many challenges for RAF families; frequent moves, extended periods away from home, sometimes with little notice and living in remote locations. We also understand the new security issues facing RAF personnel. In 2015 the Fund spent £3.37m supporting serving personnel, whether single, married or in a partnership, and their families in need.

Supporting RAF children and families

To support RAF children, who face their own unique pressures, the Fund introduced its Airplay programme, which has three key components. The first is the provision of childcare centres on or near RAF stations, providing the best possible service at the lowest possible cost for the area. Where mums and dads experience particular problems paying their childcare costs, the Fund can consider providing short term support to alleviate financial distress.

The Fund has also built or refurbished a large number of multi-use games areas and play parks across the RAF estate, which stations and the DIO should be maintaining to a high level; if this is not the case, please tell your CDO and SCSO.

In addition, we provide youth workers on a large number of stations, supporting eight to 18- year-olds, and we are in the process, with the children's charity 4Children, of extending this through the provision of Ben Clubs, which provides support to five to eight-year-olds.

Relationship support

To support personnel and their families prior to experiencing relationship difficulties, the Fund (with some Libor funding) launched Building Stronger Families, a free online course which gives users the skills and knowledge to deal with common relationship issues. Single people can register online and those in a relationship can register separately or do the course together. This course is in addition to the free Relate counselling sessions the Fund already offers. We also provide heavily subsidised, confidential mediation support. Your PSF staff will be able to help with further information, or simply look on our website.

Providing a welcome break

The Fund's Seaside Cottages in Rustington, West Sussex, provide a welcome opportunity for Service families and couples or friends to get away and spend valuable time together. To meet the growing demand the Fund has recently renovated two new apartments close by which will double the Cottages' capacity. The feedback is that the facilities are excellent and we want as many people to benefit as possible. You can book accommodation on the Fund's website; places are allocated to those with the highest welfare need.

Support for Real People

The Fund is privileged to help people who are in need, on a daily basis. Stuart Robinson was seriously injured in an IED explosion in Afghanistan in 2013. He lost both legs in the explosion and with a young family needed extra support. We gave Stuart a specially adapted trike and part-funded major works and an extension to his home, which will allow him to live more comfortably.

Stuart says: "I don't like asking for help but you can't do everything on your own. I was always quite active, playing rugby and football and the trike allows me to get out and also spend time with my son George outdoors. It's been really important for me to be able to do the things with him that I could before I was injured.

"The RAF Benevolent Fund has been there for my family through the hardest time. I was aware of their work but, of course, you never think you're going to need them – it's been reassuring knowing they are at the end of a phone whenever I have needed them."

Not all of our support is for people who were injured on operations, far from it. If you or your family need support, then approach your Chief Clerk or SSAFA worker or anyone else providing welfare support on your station. They can help and advise you and if we can help, we will do all we can. We are proud to have helped so many people in the RAF Family in need last year, and want to do the same this year. Please do contact your station welfare staff to navigate your way to the most appropriate support for you, or look at our website.



**ROYAL
AIR FORCE
Families
Federation**
Investigate | Influence | Change

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RAF FF SURVEY REPORT