

Parental awareness and use of childcare

June 2007

This paper sets out the findings of a survey NCMA conducted to investigate how aware parents are of various forms of childcare and which ones they use.

The questionnaire was conducted by Genesis Communications on behalf of the National Childminding Association (NCMA). Genesis contacted 1000 parents of children up to the age of 14, randomly selected from their database during February 2007. The data was then analysed by the Policy and Research Team at NCMA.

This is the second time that NCMA has surveyed awareness and use of types of childcare. This report will therefore provide both the level of awareness and use in winter 2007 and ascertain whether there has been any change over the previous year.

Parental awareness of forms of childcare

Parents were asked what types of childcare they could name. Initially they were not prompted. Once they had exhausted all the forms of childcare they were able to volunteer, they were asked again, this time being prompted as to whether they had heard of types of childcare provision that NCMA had previously identified. The findings are set out in Table 1 and can be compared using Figure 1.

Table 1: Types of childcare identified by parents (numbers, unprompted)

	Sum
nursery	855
childminder	837
nanny	204
pre-school playgroup	314
out-of school club	307
crèche	154
au pair	56
grandparent	237
other relative	209
friend	160
other	98
none	41

Figure 1: Types of childcare identified by parents (numbers, unprompted)

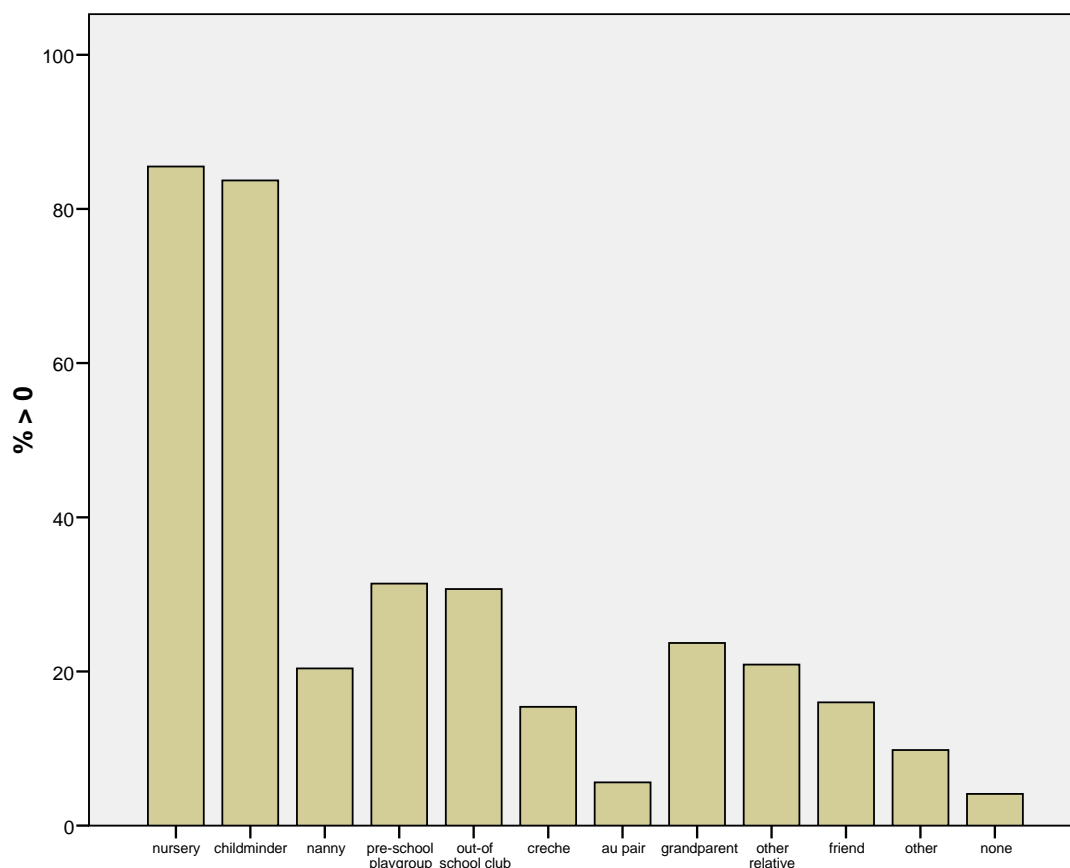


Figure 1 demonstrates that childminders and nurseries are far more well known than any other form of childcare. 83.7 per cent of parents were able to suggest childminders as a form of childcare without being prompted. This was only marginally less common than nurseries, which were identified by 85.5 per cent of parents. By comparison, the next most common, pre-schools and out-of-school clubs, were proposed by less than half as many parents (31.4 and 30.7 per cent respectively). Nannies were identified by 20.4 per cent of parents.

For formal care, this pattern is broadly similar to the recognition given by parents last year. The order of awareness is the same as last year and once again nurseries and childminders were found to be the most common forms of childcare in terms of parental familiarity. However, there is one fundamental difference from last year: the overall level of parental familiarity with the different forms of childcare is far higher in 2007. Whereas around half of parents were able to name nannies and two fifths named childminders last year, this year well over four fifths of parents were able to name both. In fact, every category of formal childcare appears to have increased its profile. This is borne out by the significant decline in the number of parents unable to volunteer any form of childcare; down to 4.1 per cent from 28.8 per cent last year.

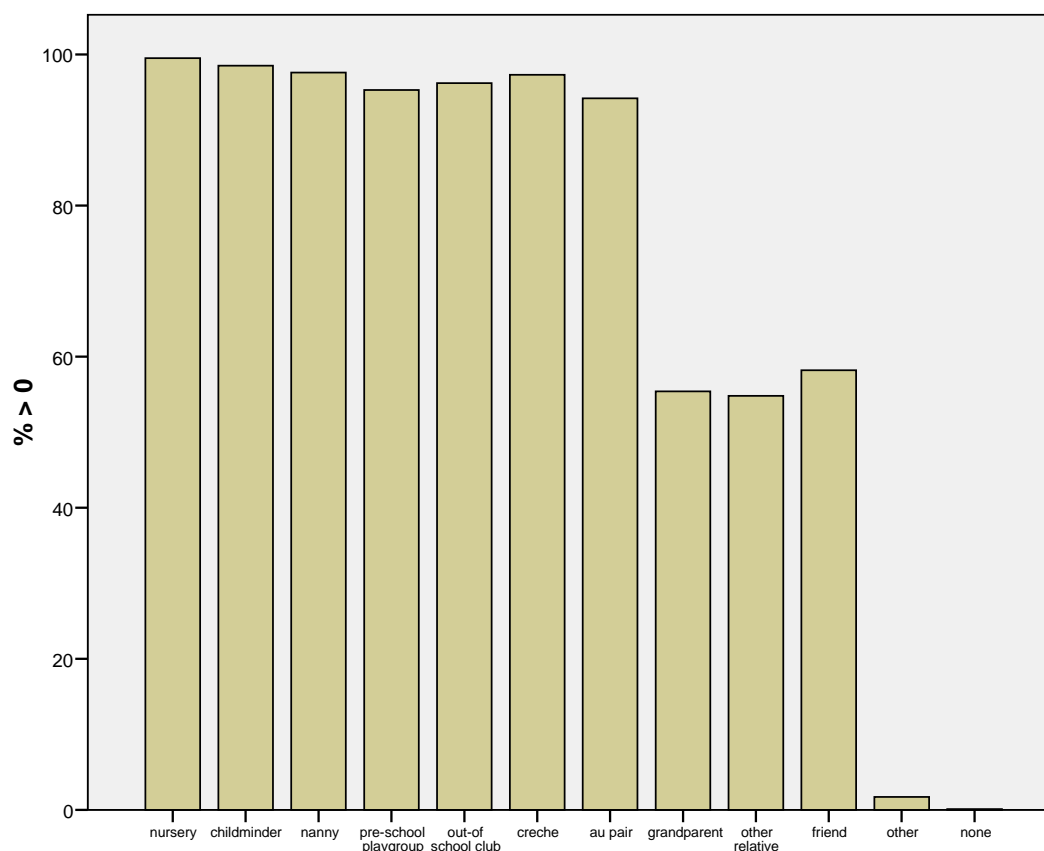
Interestingly, while there has also been an increase in the proportion of parents citing informal childcare arrangements through friends and family, these were still not common. Less than a quarter (23.7 per cent) suggested grandparents, only a fifth (20.9 per cent) named other relatives, and even fewer (16.0 per cent) suggested friends. This is despite the fact that more families use informal

childcare (67 per cent) than formal care (57 per cent) care, and the three most commonly used forms of childcare were grandparents, relatives and neighbours¹. This suggests that parents are aware of the distinction between formal and informal childcare, and that (at least when responding to this survey) they discounted informal arrangements as childcare.

Table 2: Types of childcare identified by parents (numbers, prompted)

	Sum
nursery	995
childminder	985
nanny	976
pre-school playgroup	953
out-of school club	962
crèche	973
au pair	942
grandparent	554
other relative	548
friend	582
other	17
none	1

Figure 2: Types of childcare identified by parents (percentage, prompted)



¹ Childcare and Early Years Provision: A Study of Parents' Use, Views and Experience, Research Report No. 723, National Centre for Social Research on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills, NatCen 2006, SIBN 1 84478 688 9, page 1.

Following the unprompted question, researchers repeated the question, but this time listing a number of childcare types and asking whether the respondent was aware of this type of childcare. Figure 2 and Table 2 shows that, once prompted, almost all parents recognised almost all forms of formal childcare. This reflects the situation in 2006, though once again the figures reflect an overall increase in awareness. In 2006, 95.2 per cent of parents recognised nurseries, 93.9 per cent recognised childminders and 78.4 per cent recognised au pairs – the least commonly recognised group. In 2007, these figures had risen to 99.5 and 98.5 per cent, and even au pairs were recognised by 94.2 per cent of the public.

The results for informal childcare are curious, however. Even when prompted, barely half of respondents said that they recognised grandparents (55.4 per cent), other relatives (54.8 per cent), or friends (58.2 per cent) as providing childcare. We can only speculate as to why this is the case, but it may reinforce the view that many parents do differentiate between childcare as a formal arrangement with trained professionals, and casual arrangements with friends and family.

Parental use of forms of childcare

As with awareness, parents were asked what types of childcare they used, without prompting in the first instance. Once they had exhausted all the forms of childcare they were able to volunteer, they were asked the same question again, but this time being prompted as to the whether they in fact employed the types of childcare provision NCMA had previously identified. It should be noted that the parents would have heard the list of types of childcare when being asked about awareness.

Table 3: Types of childcare used by parents (numbers, unprompted)

	Sum
nursery	198
childminder	90
nanny	17
pre-school playgroup	40
out-of-school club	99
crèche	10
au pair	0
grandparent	132
other relative	150
friend	73
other	69
none	422

Unprompted, less than one in 10 (9 per cent) parents recalled using a childminder. A similar number (9.9 per cent) reported using out-of-school clubs while twice as many (19.8 per cent) said that they used a nursery. Other forms of childcare were used less frequently; not a single parent volunteered the use of an au pair. While these figures may appear low, they represent an increase

on figures reported in 2006. In 2006 only 6.9 per cent of parents said they used a childminder and only 12.2 cent recalled sending their child to a nursery. The 1.7 per cent that used a nanny was in-line with the 2006 figure (1.9 per cent).

Again, Table 3 shows relatively few parents proposing friends or relatives as providers of childcare.

Table 4: Types of childcare used by parents (numbers, prompted)

	Sum
nursery	212
childminder	115
nanny	17
pre-school playgroup	50
out-of-school club	133
crèche	14
au pair	0
grandparent	334
other relative	297
friend	194
other	25
none	300

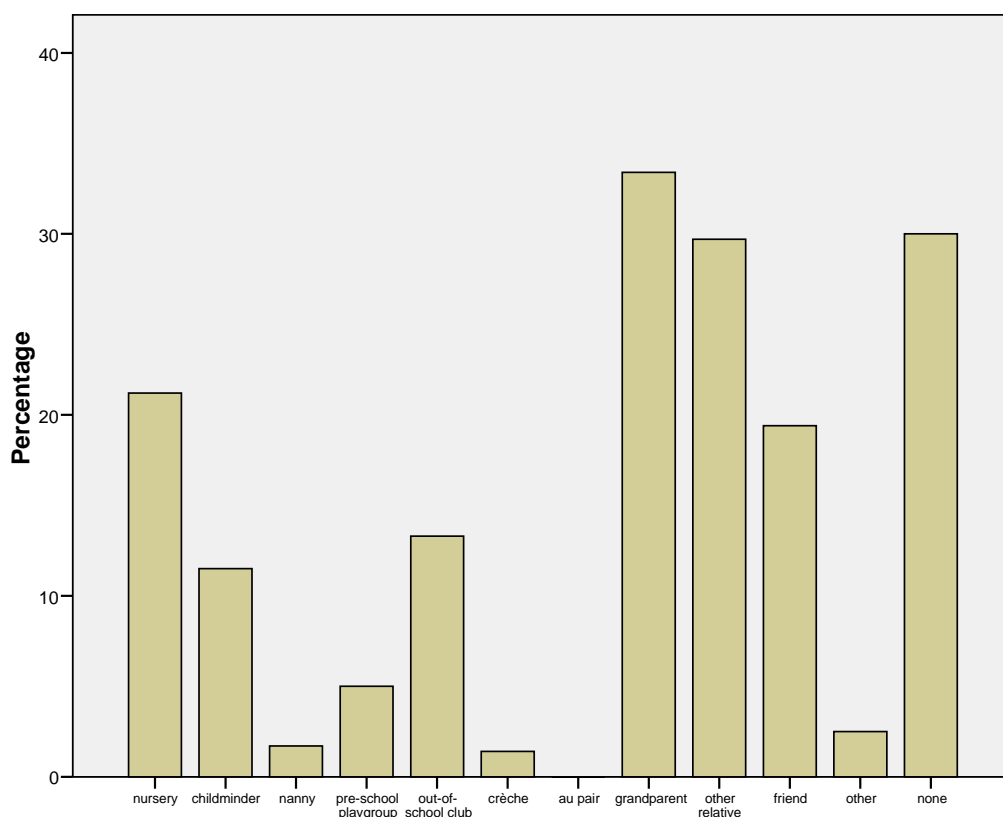
Unsurprisingly, considering the fact that the list of types of childcare had been read out previously during enquiries into type of childcare of which parents were aware, there was not a significant change in figures once parents were prompted about childcare. 11.5 per cent of parents said that they used childminders, 13.3 per cent used out-of-school clubs and 21.2 per cent nurseries. The figure for nannies was unchanged at 1.7 per cent, and even when prompted, no parent said that they used an au pair.

The most notable change was the increase in the number of parents confirming that they used informal care, the figures for which more than doubled. Presumably, despite the list having been read out for the earlier prompted question, this still represents the fact that many parents do not view informal arrangements with friends and family as “childcare” unless this is suggested to them.

Once again, a large number of parents – almost one third (30 per cent) – claimed not to use any of the childcare arrangements listed. Considering that the parents were prompted, that both formal and informal options were available, and that provision was made for types of childcare not on the list (2.5 per cent mentioned other arrangements), this represents a large block of parents that were clear that they did not use any childcare at all.

Figure 3 depicts the relative frequency with which parents claim to use forms of childcare when prompted.

Figure 3: Types of childcare used by parents (percentage, prompted)



It is apparent from Figure 3 that informal childcare still predominates, and that there are still a large proportion of parents not utilising any childcare at all, even from family and friends.

A comparison with last year's figures shows little change in reported use of formal childcare once the parents were prompted. The 11.5 cent of parents that said that they used a childminder was an increase on last year's 9.2 per cent. The figure for nurseries (21.2 per cent) also rose (from 19.8 per cent in 2006) but that for out-of-school clubs (13.3 per cent) fell (from 16.7 per cent in 2006). The percentage of parents who cited using a nanny (1.7 per cent) when prompted also fell from its 2006 level (2.9 per cent).

Figures for the use of formal care reported by parents after prompting were broadly in line with the previous year, though the use of relatives other than grandparents did rise significantly (to 29.7 per cent from 20.3 per cent). Nonetheless, as noted earlier, even when prompted to consider both formal and informal care – including relatives – 30 per cent of parents insisted that they did not use any childcare.

Conclusion

Childminding remains among the most well recognised and widely used forms of childcare in England and Wales. Around five out of six parents (83.7 per cent) were able to name childminding as a form of childcare without prompting, while almost all (98.5 per cent) recognised the term once prompted. Only nursery care could rival this prominence. This should not be surprising: Ofsted estimates that childminders provided 323,000 places in 2006,² and NCMA's Membership Survey 2007 suggests that 329,616 children are cared for by childminders.³

These figures compare favourably with the previous year, when only around two-fifths (39.5 per cent) could name childminding as a form of childcare without prompting. Almost all parents reported recognising childminding when prompted, so unsurprisingly the increase was not as dramatic (from 93.9 per cent in 2006 to 98.5 per cent in 2007). Nannies, too, had increased their profile from 16.4 per cent in 2006 to 20.4 per cent in 2007 (unprompted).

The reported use of childminders has also apparently increased. 9 per cent reported using childminders without prompting and 11.5 per cent when prompted, up from 6.9 per cent and 9.2 per cent respectively since the previous year. These figures will need to be compared with Ofsted figures for childcare places in 2007, as the general trend reported by Ofsted has been declining use of childminding places.

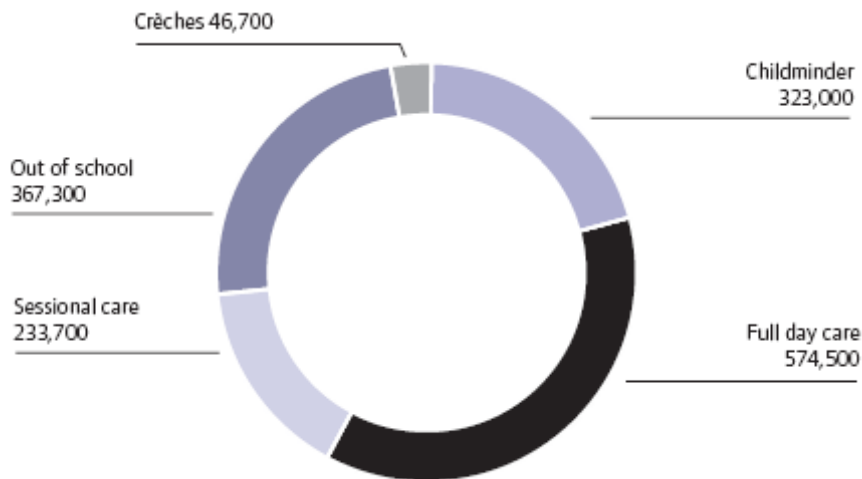
Nannies do not appear to have enjoyed a similar boost. In fact, the spontaneous reporting of the employment of nannies has fallen from 1.9 per cent unprompted and 2.9 per cent when prompted in 2006 to just 1.7 per cent in 2007. This suggests a decline in the use of nannies that needs further investigation.

Where NCMA's data does seem to support statistics provided by Ofsted is in the general proportion of the numbers of places taken up at each form of childcare (figure 5). Ofsted reports that out-of-school clubs offer slightly more places than childminders, while full day care (which includes nurseries) are by far the largest source of childcare. This is borne out by parents own reports of the childcare they use.

² The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools 2005/06 (Ofsted Annual Report 2006), November 2006.

³ NCMA Membership Survey 2007. NCMA members care for an average of 4.52 children. 2006 figures from Ofsted suggest that there are 72,924 childminders in England and Wales.

Figure 5: Ofsted figures on number of childcare places offered



Figures are rounded and do not match total.

Figures for nannies compared well in terms of recognition with most of their forms of childcare (though not with nurseries and childminding). Nannies are not used as frequently as other forms of care, however. As noted in last year's survey, it would be very useful to examine the reasons for this, as we can only speculate that cost (or even preconceptions about cost) would be the defining feature.