

## uk news

# Nursery queues cause despair

Academics at some of the UK's top universities are waiting for up to two years for a place for their children at their institution's nurseries.

University nurseries were heavily oversubscribed in the 2017-18 academic year, data from nursery heads show. The lack of provision is causing huge stress, say academics, and is forcing them into an expensive and time-consuming hunt for private childcare.

Marie-Pierre Moreau, an education sociologist at the University of Roehampton, says there has been a downward trend in university nursery provision across the country. Universities tend to give priority to the children of students and single parents, those with disabilities, and children with siblings already at the nursery. This can leave newly arrived researchers at the back of the queue.

Parents among the 12,400 staff at University College London had to wait between 12 and 15 months on average for one of only 68 places across the institution's two nurseries. At the University of Cambridge, where about 11,400 people work, there are places for 297 children. The University of Bristol, which employs 6,500 staff, only has nursery places for 74 children, leading to a waiting time of between 18 and 24 months.

Alexandra Morel, a postdoctoral fellow at the Environmental Change Institute at the University of

by Eleni Courea

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Oxford, told Research Fortnight that she requested a nursery place in July 2016 and has yet to hear back. Upon applying she was told that the average waiting time for non-priority children was 18 to 24 months.

Cécile Girardin, another postdoctoral fellow at the institute, said university nursery places were "completely oversubscribed". "I wouldn't have been able to do my PhD or postdoc without them—it's just that getting a place is crazy," she said.

A spokeswoman for the University of Oxford, which has 13,000 staff, said that in 2017 the average waiting time was 27 days from when a place was needed. However, she said this applied to children in high-priority groups such as people with disabilities and single parents. The university had not calculated the waiting time for children in the non-priority group. It also offers "a small discount on university places at community nurseries", she said.

Change is coming to some institutions. Demand for nursery places at the University of Exeter, which has 50 places and about 4,500 staff, prompted the construction of a new building. When it opens in September it will provide space for 104 more children.

## Golden triangle dominates mock KEF

Universities in the golden triangle have claimed the top spots in a mock Knowledge Exchange Framework ranking developed by Research Fortnight's sister publication HE.

The KEF, announced by former universities and science minister Jo Johnson in October 2017, will evaluate how well universities engage with industry and carry out knowledge exchange activities. It forms part of the government's industrial strategy and could be used to allocate money to universities from the Higher Education Innovation Fund, which will distribute £250 million per year by 2020-21.

Using annual Higher Education Business and Community Interaction surveys, HE has looked at where universities might expect to rank in the KEF. While the HE metrics are not as nuanced as the official KEF methodology will be, they build on the dataset used to distribute Heif and their weighting is based on discussions with leading figures in higher education.

Should the KEF be used to distribute funding, then the implications of this shadow KEF are clear: traditional research-intensive universities can expect to strengthen their grip on UK public funding.

The shadow ranking, which cover three years of data,

by Anna McKie and Gretchen Ransow

places the University of Oxford first. Imperial College London comes in second, followed by University College London, the University of Cambridge and the University of Manchester.

The details of the official KEF are not yet settled: it could be benchmarked like the Teaching Excellence Framework, which compares universities that have similar characteristics. However, HE has compiled its mock rankings based on relative performance against all institutions, in a similar way to the Research Excellence Framework.

Johnson said that the KEF should assess universities using data that is already being gathered. This would include the annual Higher Education Business and Community Interaction survey released by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, which collects financial and output data related to knowledge exchange. The KEF will also rely on other databases produced by Hesa and the umbrella funding body UK Research and Innovation.

*The full mock KEF scores and ranking for 163 institutions appear in our sister publication HE. To request a free trial of HE contact aw@ResearchResearch.com*