Second Education Statement of Common Ground

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Second
Statement of Common Ground
EDUCATION

CHILMINGTON GREEN, ASHFORD ROAD, GREAT CHART, TN26 2BQ

Planning Application Reference:

12/00400/AS

Planning Appeal Reference:

APP/E2205/W/24/3345454

Contents

THIS STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND HAS BEEN AGREED BY:

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

Signed

Name   **David Adams**
            Assistant Director Education (South Kent)
            Kent County Council

Dated   16 April 2025

HODSON DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED

Signed

Name   **Ben Hunter**
            Associate Director – Education and Social Infrastructure
            EFM Ltd
            (on behalf of Hodson Developments Ltd)

Dated   22nd April 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This second Statement of Common Ground ("**SoCG**") has been prepared jointly by Kent County Council ("KCC") and EFM on behalf of Hodson Developments Ltd ("**the Appellants**"). This statement concerns an appeal ("**Appeal**") to modify the education obligations contained in the S106 agreement related to CHILMINGTON GREEN, ASHFORD ROAD, GREAT CHART, TN26 2BQ ("**the Site**").

1.2. This SoCG sets out a written statement of further factual information about the Appeal, which is agreed between the Parties. The SoCG concludes with the areas that remain in dispute between the Parties.

2. CRITICAL ISSUES

2.1. The first Statement of Common Ground set out that two issues remained between the parties:

a. The housing mix that should be applied to the Education Assessment. KCC's position is this should be based on the Melton Mix (92.17 houses, 6.96% applicable flats) as this is reflected in the planning permission, which allows no more than 92.7% of the dwellings to be houses and no less than 5.9% to be applicable flats. The Appellant's position is that to achieve the densities required by the planning permission, the mix is likely to be nearer 74% houses and 26% flats, which is reflective of the planning permission under Condition 100.

b. In both the Education Assessment and the Alternative Education Assessment, KCC state that it is appropriate to assume that forecast roll numbers in Step 3 will stay the same beyond 2033/34 up to 2048/49. The Appellant disputes this, as it represents a fundamental change in the trend forecast over the previous ten-year period.

3. REFINEMENT OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES

Fertility

3.1. The parties agree that:

- The ONS Subnational population projections for England: 2018 based are the most recent set of ONS statistics that extend to district level.

- The ONS publication Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics is the appropriate publication to refer to for the 2018 based subnational projections.

- The ONS Ashford Birth Number Forecast chart in paragraph 67 of Mr Adams's Proof of Evidence is accurate (based on the 2018 based: 10-year migration variant (CD9/15)).

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- ONS produced new national population projections, which were released in January 2025. Their fertility assumptions are set out in National population projections, fertility assumptions: 2022-based - Office for National Statistics.

- Figure 3 of this fertility assumptions document shows that ONS's national total fertility rate (TFR) projections have been too high in successive iterations. Each successive iteration has had lower fertility assumptions than the previous round. However, all then follow a similar trend of a gentle increase in fertility to the end of their projection periods.

Figure 3: The 2022-based principal assumption projects a lower total fertility rate than in previous rounds of projections

Past and projected total fertility rate (TFR), UK, 2016-based to 2022-based principal projections, 1982 to 2047
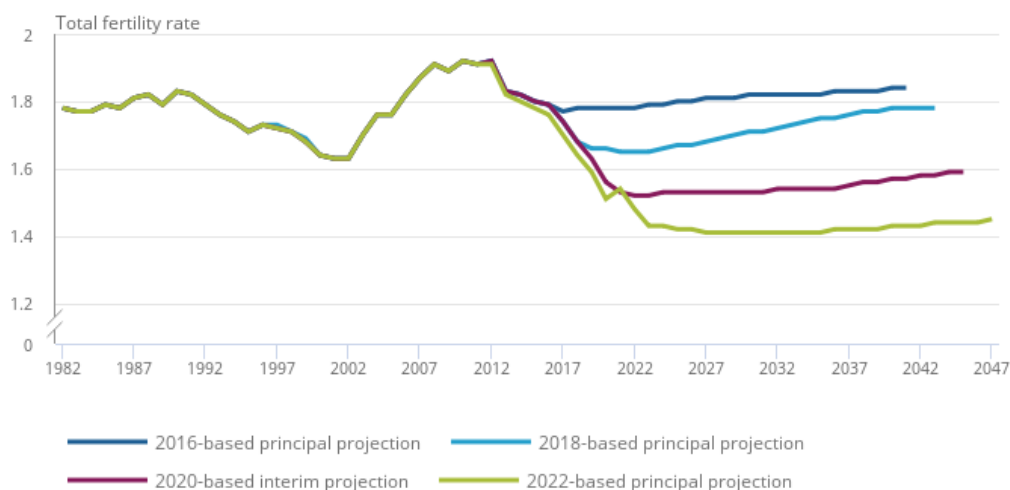
Source: National population projections, fertility assumptions from the Office for National Statistics

- The UK TFR has generally been declining since 2012, from 1.91 children per woman to 1.43 children in 2023. There was a small increase in 2021 when the TFR rose to 1.54 children before falling again to 1.48 children in 2022.

- ONS have set the UK principal TFR for the 2022-based round of projections as 1.41 children in the short-term at five years from the base year in 2027 and as 1.45 children in the long term at 25 years from the base year in 2047.

- Mr Hunter has produced a Statement on ONS Projections for the Inspector. The data in Table 1 (Paragraph 2.5) is agreed.

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- Mr Hunter, in his Statement on ONS Projections, quotes from an article published by the Social Market Foundation in January 2025. A full copy is [The ONS is too optimistic about the UK's demographic prospects - Social Market Foundation.](#)

- About ONS's latest fertility forecast (2022 based national population projections), this article also says these are "too pessimistic – at least in the short term"…"infant patient counts in England were up nearly 2% year-on-year in September (*2024*) (vs. an average annual decline of 2% over the prior 5 years). The author says "my consulting firm notified clients this previous December of our expectations for British fertility, shown in the figure (below) as the "Demographic Intelligence" forecast.

Figure 3: Demographic Intelligence vs ONS projections, when compared to actual
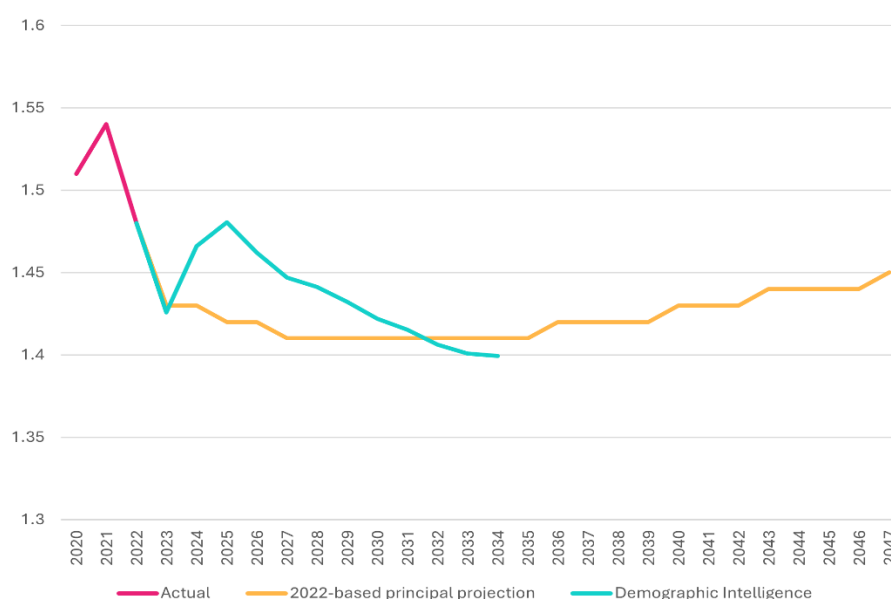
- The article states – "We find that the ONS has probably *underestimated* fertility for the mid-2020s. The gap is not enormous; the ONS expects fertility rates around 1.41-1.43, whereas we expect them nearer 1.46-1.49. Nonetheless, that's a 4% difference in the number of children who will be starting school around 2028-2032….. Furthermore, while the ONS expects a gradual long term increase in fertility, my firm projects a decline."

3.2. The latest available local data shows birth numbers in Kent, Ashford and Ashford South rose in 2024 compared to 2023:
- Across the Kent and Medway NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) area, GP surgeries had 17,437 0-year-olds enrolled as at 30th November 2023 (i.e. born between 1 December 2022 and 30th November 2023) and 17,869 0-year-olds enrolled as at 31st November 2024 (i.e. born between 1 December 2023 and 31 November 2024). This is 2.5% increase in births across the CCG area. (*Source: NHS England - Patients Registered at a GP Practice, December 2023 / 2024: Single year of age (Commissioning Regions-ICBs-SICBLs-PCNs)). The Look-up was on Kent and Medway CCG number E38000237 and age = 0.*

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- Data that KCC receives from NHS Digital (via the DfE) shows an increase in births for Ashford Borough between year ending 31st August 2023 and year ending 31st August 2024 from 1,322 to 1,401, a rise of 6%. Corresponding data for Ashford South planning area shows an increase in births from 311 to 369, a rise of 18.6%.

- Data from Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT) (to KCC) based on health visitor records show births in Ashford Borough increased from 1,361 to 1,433 between year ending 31st August 2023 and year ending 31st August 2024, a rise of 5.3%. Corresponding data for Ashford South planning area shows an increase in births from 321 to 370, a rise of 15.3%.

- Although the above datasets are not directly comparable, it is fair to say that from the latest available data, the indication is that Kent experienced a modest increase in births (a higher % increase than England's) while Ashford experienced a much higher growth rate of more than double the county average. The Ashford South area growth is significantly higher still.

4. Appendices

4.1. ONS 2018 Subnational population projections document.

Subnational population projections for England 2018-based (2).pdf

4.2. ONS 2022 Fertility Assumptions document.

National population projections, fertility assumptions_ 2022-based (6).pdf

4.3. Commentary article by Social Market Foundation

The ONS is too optimistic about the UK's demographic prospects - Social Market Foundation.

4.4. NHS England monthly GP registrations data (links below). For Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) area filter on **ONS code = E38000237** and for births (0-year-olds) filter on **Age = 0**

Patients Registered at a GP Practice - December 2024: Single year of age (Commissioning Regions-ICBs-SICBLs-PCNs)

Patients Registered at a GP Practice - December 2023: Single year of age (Commissioning Regions-ICBs-SICBLs-PCNs)

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4.5. NHS Digital (via the DfE).

250411 NHS Digital
PSP data files 2023 a

4.6. Yearly data from Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT).

250411 KCHFT PSP
data files 2023 and 2

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Office for
National Statistics

Statistical bulletin

Subnational population projections for England: 2018-based

Indicate potential future population size of English local and health authorities. Widely used in planning – for example labour market, housing, health and education.

Release date:
24 March 2020

Next release:
9 May 2025 (provisional)

Table of contents

1 . Main points

- The populations of all regions within England are projected to grow by mid-2028.

- All regions are projected to have a greater proportion of people aged 65 years and over by mid-2028.

- The East Midlands is projected to be the fastest-growing region, increasing 7% by mid-2028.

- The three northern regions are projected to grow at a slower rate than all other regions in England over the next 10 years.

Subnational population projections do not attempt to predict the impact of political circumstances such as the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

Statistician's comment

"Over the next decade, the population of most areas is set to continue growing, particularly in the south and Midlands. Our projections also show the share of people aged 65 years and over will increase almost everywhere. This information is particularly important for anyone planning local services – for example, opportunities and services for older people."

Andrew Nash, Population and Household Projections, Office for National Statistics

Follow the ONS Centre for Ageing and Demography on Twitter @RichPereira_ONS

2 . Change by age

Over time, England's population is projected to age, meaning that a higher proportion will be in older age groups. More detail on this is included in the national population projections bulletin.

A common measure of ageing is the proportion of people aged 65 years and over. In England as a whole, this is projected to increase from 18.2% to 20.7% of the total population between mid-2018 and mid-2028. This is the continuation of a trend seen in the population estimates. The proportion is also projected to increase for all regions and local authorities, with the exception of Coventry where there is a slight reduction.

An alternative measure of ageing is the old age dependency ratio (OADR), defined as the number of people of State Pension age (SPA) per 1,000 people of working age. Working age covers all people aged from 16 years up to State Pension age. Note that being over SPA does not necessarily mean someone is retired, nor are all working age people in employment.

By 2028, the State Pension age will rise to age 67. As a result, the OADR in England is projected to fall from 293 in mid-2018 to 287 in mid-2028. However, at local authority level around a third of areas see a rise in OADR over this period.

After mid-2028, almost all areas are projected to have an increasing OADR up to the end of the projection in mid-2043. This reflects the continued ageing of the population during a period in which no more rises in State Pension age are scheduled.

Figure 1: A heat map of proportion of people aged 65 years and over and old age dependency ratio by local authority over the 25-year projection

Notes:

1. Old Age Dependency Ratio (OADR) is defined as the number of people of State Pension age (SPA) per 1,000 people of working age. Working age covers all people aged from 16 up to State Pension age. Under current legislation, the SPA in mid-2028 and mid- 2043 will be 67 years old for both sexes.

Download this chart

.csv .xls

The interactive population pyramids (Figure 2) allow you to explore the results of the 2018-based population projections for local authorities, counties, regions and England as a whole. By choosing the name of an area you can see how the size and age structure of its population is projected to change. You can create age groups by highlighting your desired ages and can also compare two areas at once.

Figure 2: Population age structure by single year of age and sex for local authorities, counties, regions and England as a whole, mid-2018 to mid-2043

Source: Office for National Statistics – Subnational population projections

3 . Change by region

The East Midlands is projected to be the fastest-growing region in England, growing by 7.0% between mid-2018 and mid-2028

The population of England is projected to increase by 5.0% over the next 10 years, from 56.0 million in mid-2018 to 58.8 million in mid-2028. By mid-2043, the population of England is projected to be 61.7 million. More information on this is available in the 2018-based national population projections. The population of every region in England is also projected to increase by mid-2028.

The East Midlands is projected to be the fastest-growing region in percentage terms; its population is projected to increase by 7.0% by mid-2028, an increase of 334,000 people. Regions in the north are projected to grow at a slower rate than regions in the Midlands and south. The North East is the region with the slowest projected population growth, 2.3% (61,000) by mid-2028.

London is projected to be the largest-growing region in absolute terms; its population is projected to increase by 434,000 people by mid-2028. However, although it was the region with the fastest-growing population in the 2016-based projections, it has dropped to fifth place in the 2018-based.

This can be explained by two factors. The 2016-based projections used internal migration trend data that included some years with lower levels of net internal out-migration from London, years that are no longer used in the 2018-based projections. There have also been higher levels of internal out-migration from London to the rest of England resulting from the improved methodology for estimating internal migration. More information about this methodology change can be seen in the 2018-based methodology report.

Table 1: Projected population change for English regions, mid-2018 and mid-2028

Region	Mid-2018 population	Mid-2028 population	Population change over 10 years	Percentage population change
England	55,977,000	58,752,000	2,775,000	5.0
East Midlands	4,804,000	5,138,000	334,000	7.0
South West	5,600,000	5,983,000	383,000	6.8
West Midlands	5,901,000	6,263,000	362,000	6.1
East	6,201,000	6,512,000	311,000	5.0
London	8,908,000	9,342,000	434,000	4.9
South East	9,134,000	9,539,000	405,000	4.4
North West	7,292,000	7,581,000	289,000	4.0
Yorkshire and The Humber	5,480,000	5,674,000	195,000	3.6
North East	2,658,000	2,719,000	61,000	2.3

Source: Office for National Statistics – Subnational population projections

Notes

1. Because of rounding, figures may not sum.

Figure 3: Projected percentage population change for regions in England, mid-2018 to mid-2028

What causes population change?

Population change is the result of:

- natural change – the difference between births and deaths

- net migration – the difference between the number of people moving into and out of an area

Migration is further divided into:

- within UK migration – the movement of people within the UK, including between the four countries of the UK and also between areas in England

- international migration – the movement of people into and out of the UK

The balance of factors underlying population change varies by region.

Table 2: Projected population change for English regions by component of change, mid-2018 to mid-2028

Region	Population change	Natural change	All migration net	Net within UK migration	Net international migration	Other
London	434,000	629,200	-199,700	-1,040,700	841,000	400
South East	405,300	61,300	343,400	106,400	237,000	1,000
South West	382,900	-56,500	433,000	357,000	76,000	7,100
West Midlands	362,200	103,700	258,500	46,700	211,800	800
East Midlands	333,900	21,700	312,800	167,400	145,400	400
East	311,200	52,800	257,200	116,000	141,200	400
North West	289,100	56,200	232,400	115,500	117,000	800
Yorkshire and The Humber	194,600	48,000	147,000	25,400	121,600	700
North East	61,300	-31,900	93,200	41,100	52,000	500

Source: Office for National Statistics – Subnational population projections

Notes

1. Because of rounding figures may not sum.

The dynamics of population change vary by region. In some areas – for example, the South East – natural change, net within-UK migration and net international migration are all positive. However, in the North East and the South West, the growth rate is slowed down by negative natural change, meaning more deaths than births. Conversely, although London is the only area with a net outflow of migrants to the rest of the UK, this is more than offset by high net international migration and high positive natural change.

There is also a relationship between different components of population change. For example, London's high levels of natural change reflect a young population where there are many births but few deaths. However, at a slightly older age many people leave London for elsewhere in England, often now with children, contributing to the large net within-UK migration outflow.

Use the interactive population pyramid (Section 2) to see the age structure of regions in England and how they are projected to change over time.

4 . Change by local authority

Nearly all local authorities are projected to grow by mid-2028

Although every region in England is projected to grow by mid-2028, there are considerable differences at the local authority level; slow-growing regions can contain fast-growing local authorities and the other way around. However, of the 10 local authorities with the fastest projected population growth to mid-2028, five are in the fastest-growing region, the East Midlands, but none are in the more northerly regions.

Population projections at local authority level are especially subject to any limitations of the source data, as well as annual local fluctuations in those sources. In addition, actual local population change will be strongly influenced by local economic development and housing policies. On that basis you should be cautious when comparing different areas' exact numbers or growth rates.

With that caveat, however, the populations of all but 22 local authorities are projected to grow by mid-2028. Tewkesbury is projected to have the greatest percentage increase, 16.4%. This is mainly because of a high level of net internal migration.

Table 3: Local authorities in England with the highest projected population growth between mid-2018 and mid-2028

Local Authority	Population in 2018	Population in 2028	Population change over 10 years	Percentage population change
Tewkesbury	92,600	107,800	15,200	16.4
Tower Hamlets	317,700	368,500	50,800	16.0
North West Leicestershire	102,100	118,400	16,300	15.9
Dartford	109,700	126,700	17,000	15.5
Daventry	84,500	97,300	12,800	15.2
South Derbyshire	104,500	120,300	15,800	15.2
South Norfolk	138,000	158,400	20,400	14.8
Corby	70,800	81,000	10,100	14.3
Blaby	100,400	114,600	14,100	14.1
Cotswold	89,000	101,500	12,500	14.0

Source: Office for National Statistics – Subnational population projections

Notes

1. Figures may not sum because of rounding.

Copeland is the area with the largest projected decrease in population, at 3.9% by mid-2028. This is mainly because of more deaths than births. Oxford is next, with a projected decrease of 3.5%. This is because of the net outflow of people moving to other areas in England.

Table 4: Local authorities in England with the highest projected percentage population decline between mid-2018 and mid-2028

Local Authority	Population in 2018	Population in 2028	Population change over 10 years	Percentage population change
Copeland	68,400	65,800	-2,700	-3.9
Oxford	154,300	149,000	-5,300	-3.5
Luton	214,100	206,800	-7,400	-3.4
Barrow-in-Furness	67,100	65,000	-2,200	-3.3
Rushmoor	95,100	92,800	-2,400	-2.5
Ealing	342,000	336,100	-5,900	-1.7
Ipswich	137,500	135,400	-2,200	-1.6
Wycombe	174,600	172,000	-2,700	-1.5
Woking	101,200	99,700	-1,500	-1.5
Tamworth	76,700	75,900	-800	-1.0

Source: Office for National Statistics – Subnational population projections

Notes

1. Isles of Scilly has been omitted from the table because its small size makes reliance on accuracy of the source data especially challenging.

2. Figures may not sum because of rounding.

Figure 4 is an interactive tool that illustrates how the populations of each local authority in England are projected to change. By choosing a local authority, you will see total population change, natural change, net international migration and net within-UK migration over the 10 years to mid-2028.

Figure 4: Population change for local authorities in England between mid-2018 and mid-2028

Source: Office for National Statistics – Subnational population projections

5 . Variant population projections

All statistics in this bulletin are from our main (principal) subnational projection. However, we have also published a range of variant projections. These include:

- a high international migration variant

- a low international migration variant

- an alternative internal migration variant

- a 10-year migration variant

The high and low international migration variants assume either higher or lower levels of net international migration to England as a whole, but the proportional distribution at local authority level remains the same. The result is that all areas see correspondingly higher or lower population totals, with areas that have high levels of international migration in the principal projection (especially parts of London) seeing the greatest difference.

There is often debate around how many years of data should be used to inform the projected population change at local level. In general we use five years of data, but we have used just two years of data for internal migration in the 2018-based projections. This is because we only have two years of data for internal migration available using our current method.

We have produced the alternative internal migration variant, which uses five years of data for internal migration: two using the new method and three using the old method. We have also produced a 10-year migration variant where all migration trends (internal, cross-border and international) are based on 10 years of data.

The pros and cons of using different numbers of years of input data are complex. More information and a comparison of the results of the principal projection, the alternative internal migration variant and the 10-year migration variant are discussed in our article on the Impact of different migration trend lengths. However, you can explore the different results for your area in the interactive Figure 5.

Figure 5: The variant population projections showing a range of future demographic scenarios by local authority, mid-2009 to mid-2043

Source: Office for National Statistics – Subnational population projections

6 . Subnational population projections data

2018-based subnational population projections
Datasets | Released 24 March 2020
This release includes:

- a range of datasets containing all the projections data; this includes summaries and detailed data, as well as projected population by components of change

- supporting documentation to help you understand how the projections are produced

7 . Glossary

Population estimates

Population estimates provide statistics on the current size and age structure of the population in the UK at country, region, county and local authority level. They are the official source of estimated population size in between censuses and inform a wide range of National Statistics.

Population projections

Population projections provide statistics on the potential future size and age structure of the population. They are based on past trends and assumptions of future levels of births, deaths and migration. They do not incorporate local development plans, but instead provide a baseline, which can be combined with local knowledge as required.

Variant projections

Variant projections are based on alternative assumptions of fertility, mortality and migration to those used in the principal projection. Each variant provides an alternative set of plausible projections that users may find helpful. They provide an indication of uncertainty but do not represent upper or lower limits of future demographic behaviour.

Components of change

Components of change are the factors that contribute to population change. This includes births and deaths (commonly referred to as natural change) and net migration. Migration includes movements of people between England and the various countries of the world (international migration), the other countries of the UK (cross-border migration) and between local areas within England (internal migration).

Mid-year

This is 30 June of any given year.

Usually resident population

Projections estimate the "usually resident population". This is the standard United Nations definition and includes only people who reside in a country for 12 months or more, making them usually resident in that country. As such, visitors and short-term migrants are excluded.

Old age dependency ratio (OADR)

The number of people of pensionable age for every 1,000 people of working age.

8 . Measuring the data

The 2018-based subnational population projections provide statistics on the potential future size and age structure of the population in England at region, county, local authority, clinical commissioning group and NHS England region levels. They are used as a common framework for informing local-level policy and planning as they are produced in a consistent way. They are also used in the production of the 2018-based household projections for local authorities, to be published in early summer 2020. This publication supersedes the 2016-based projections.

The projections take the mid-2018 population estimates, published on 26 June 2019, as their starting point. The projected local authority populations for each year are calculated by ageing on the population from the previous year, applying local fertility and mortality rates to calculate the number of projected births and deaths, and then adjusting for migration into and out of each local authority.

The total projected population for England is also constrained to the 2018-based national population projections for England, by single year of age and sex, for each year of the projection.

In these projections we have incorporated two changes. The first is to treat prisoners as a special population group and the second is to include improved estimates of internal migration. Further information on these changes and on the methodology used to produce the subnational population projections is in the 2018-based methodology report.

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the Subnational population projections QMI.

Proposed timing of next projections

Following the publication of the subnational population projections, we will publish the 2018-based household projections for local authorities in England, in early summer 2020.

We usually publish population projections every two years. However, we are currently proposing not to produce 2020-based projections, which would theoretically be published in autumn 2021 for the national projections and spring 2022 for the subnational projections. This is because the first 2021 Census results are also expected in spring 2022; we therefore propose that the next round of projections will be based on 2021, enabling them to use the updated base population that the 2021 Census results will offer, and also a revised back-series of earlier years of input data. This approach would also apply to our household projections.

At this stage, this is not a definitive policy and we cannot be certain of exact timings. Factors that will affect our plans include how different the 2021 Census results are from the current population estimates and our evaluation of the causes of any differences. However, we aim to produce national population projections using a mid-2021 population base by around the end of 2022.

We would welcome any feedback on this proposed approach – please let us know your thoughts at pop.info@ons.gov.uk. Further updates on the timing of future projections will be communicated in our quarterly Migration and Population Statistics Newsletter. To sign up to this, please contact us at pop.info@ons.gov.uk.

Transformation of population statistics

It is our mission to provide the best insights on population and migration using a range of new and existing data sources to meet the needs of our users. Our ambition is to deliver a fully transformed system by 2023, making regular improvements to our statistics along the way as more administrative data become available. We will rigorously quality assure new methods and share the impact of any changes made. The Transformation of the population and migration statistics system: overview gives more information on this work. The resulting improvements will also be incorporated into future sets of population projections.

9 . Strengths and limitations

Subnational population projections are produced in a consistent way across all areas and use a robust methodology so that they are relevant to all types of users. They are used in a number of ways, including: for local planning of health, education and other service provisions; as a basis for household projections; and as a basis for projections produced by other organisations. Dependent on timing of central government planning rounds, they are also sometimes used in the assessment of local authority needs and the funding formula.

Since projections are produced in a consistent way, they can be used as a common framework for informing local-level policy and planning; local areas are advised to supplement them with any local information they have.

The assumptions used in the subnational population projections are based on past trends. However, demographic behaviour is inherently uncertain, so projections become increasingly uncertain the further they are carried forward. This is particularly so for smaller geographical areas and detailed age and sex breakdowns. In the longer-term, demographic patterns are increasingly likely to differ from recent trends. This bulletin focuses on the first 10 years of the projections, up to mid-2028. The data files published with this release include projections going forward 25 years to mid-2043.

It is currently not possible to calculate projections for any further breakdowns such as ethnicity, marital status or lower-level geographies, because of limitations in the availability of data and the lack of a robust methodology required for such projections.

The projections are not forecasts and take no account of local development aims, policies on growth, capacity to accommodate population change, or economic factors that could impact the population in the future. As with the national population projections, they also do not try to predict any potential demographic consequences of future political or economic changes, including the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

There is already a margin of error in the underlying input data used in the projections, for example, estimates of the current population and past migration flows. In addition, our assumptions about the future cannot be certain as patterns of births, deaths and migration are always liable to change and can be influenced by many factors.

In most cases, each set of projections is superseded when the next scheduled release is published. However, should there be cause to revise a specific set of projections – for example, because of an error in production – the policy on revisions is outlined in the Quality and Methodology Information report.

The subnational population projections Quality and Methodology Information report helps users to understand the strengths and limitations of the data and the suitable uses for the data. It will also help users to reduce the risk of misusing the data.

10 . Related links

Projections for other countries in the UK

Scotland

National Records of Scotland (NRS) publishes subnational population projections every two years. The 2018-based population projections for Scottish Areas were published on 24 March 2020 and are constrained to the 2018-based national population projection for Scotland.

Wales

Local area population projections are produced by the Welsh Government.

The 2018-based population projections for Welsh areas were published on 27 February 2020 and are constrained to the 2018-based national population projection for Wales. In future it is intended these will be produced every three years.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) publishes subnational population projections every two years. The 2016-based population projections for areas within Northern Ireland were published on 26 April 2018. These projections are constrained to the 2016-based national population projection for Northern Ireland. The 2018-based population projections for areas in Northern Ireland are provisionally planned for publication in April 2020.

Office for
National Statistics

National population projections, fertility assumptions: 2022-based

The data sources and methodology used to produce fertility assumptions in the 2022-based national population projections.

Contact:
Population and Household
Projections
pop.info@ons.gov.uk
+44 1329 444661

Release date:
28 January 2025

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1 . Main points

- The long-term assumption for completed family size for the UK will be 1.45 children per woman by mid-2047; this is lower than previous rounds of projections.

- The long-term low-fertility variant is calculated as principal minus 0.2; the high-fertility variant is calculated as the principal plus 0.1 in the short-term, rising to the principal plus 0.2 in the longer term.

- The UK long-term total fertility rate (TFR) for the low variant is 1.25 children per woman and for the high variant is 1.65 children per woman by mid-2047; these projections are broader than those produced in the 2018-round of national population projections, when variants were last produced, where the UK variants were set as 1.58 children and 1.88 children around the principal (1.78 children), respectively.

- Age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) have been projected to decline in the long term for women aged under 30 years and to increase for women aged 30 years and over.

- The methodology used to set the fertility assumptions is broadly similar to the method used to set previous rounds of projections.

2 . Overview of fertility rates

This methodology details the principal and variant fertility assumptions used in our 2022-based national population projections (NPPs). It includes the rationale behind our assumptions-setting process, a summary of recent fertility trends in the UK, and details input from the devolved administrations and the expert advisory panel that we convened.

We have presented fertility rates on a calendar-year basis, unless otherwise stated. There may be small differences between the figures presented in this methodology and our published National population projections table of contents dataset. This is because the underlying data used in setting the assumptions are available on a calendar-year basis.

The short-term (five years from the base year) and long-term (25 years from the base year) fertility assumptions underlying the population projections presented in Table 1 are on a mid-year basis.

Table 1 shows the total fertility rate (TFR) for 2022 and the principal projected TFR five years and 25 years from the start of the projections.

Table 1: Principal projected short-term and long-term total fertility rates
2022-based fertility assumptions, UK and constituent countries, 2022 and years ending mid-2027 and mid-2047

	2022	Mid-2027 (projected)	Mid-2047 (projected)
England	1.49	1.42	1.46
Wales	1.46	1.37	1.40
Scotland	1.33	1.27	1.29
Northern Ireland	1.71	1.63	1.65
United Kingdom	1.48	1.41	1.45

Source: National population projections, fertility assumptions from the Office for National Statistics

Notes

1. The figures for 2022 are based on the published fertility rates for each country.

2. Fertility rates for 2023 have been published for each country and have been accounted for in setting the fertility assumptions.

3 . Recent trends in fertility

Total fertility rate

Total fertility rate (TFR) is the average number of live children that a group of women would have if they experienced the age-specific fertility rates (ASFR) for the calendar year in question throughout their childbearing lifespan.

Period fertility rates like the TFR will rise or fall if births are brought forward or delayed for any reason. This contrasts with cohort measures of fertility, which are affected only by changes in the number of children women have and not by the timing of births within women's lives.

Figure 1: Total fertility rates have generally been declining since around 2012

Total fertility rates, UK and constituent countries, 1982 to 2023

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Total fertility rates, UK and constituent countries, 1982 to 2023
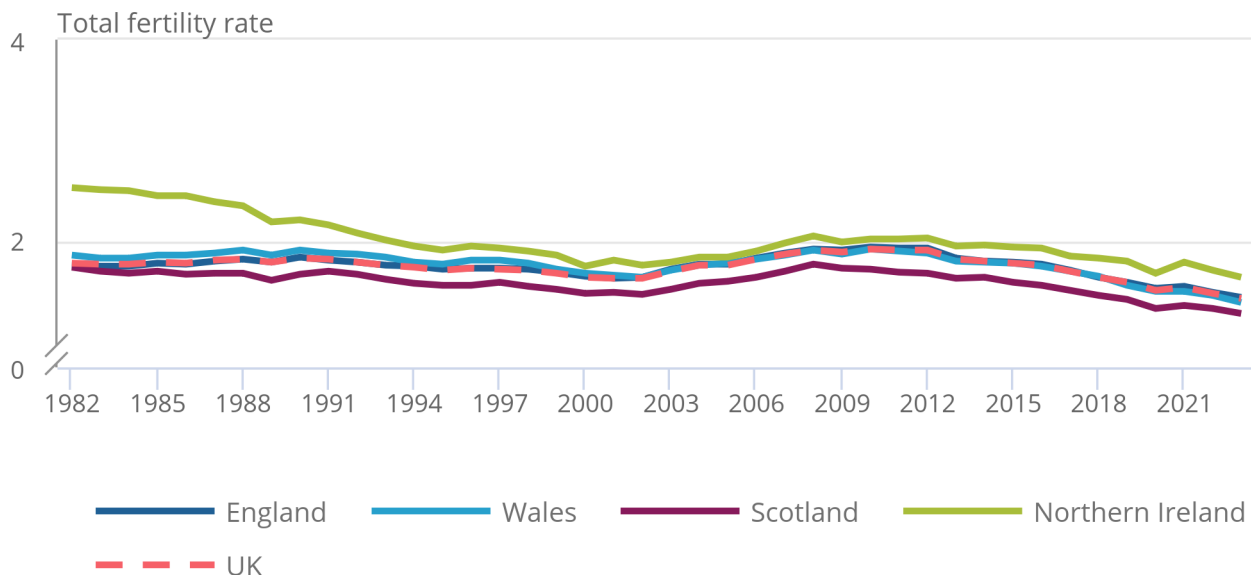
Source: National population projections, fertility assumptions from the Office for National Statistics

The UK TFR has generally been declining since 2012, from 1.91 children per woman to 1.43 children in 2023. There was a small increase in 2021 when the TFR rose to 1.54 children before falling again to 1.48 children in 2022.

Figure 1 shows the TFR for the UK and for its constituent countries. Northern Ireland has always experienced the highest TFR and Scotland has the lowest levels of the constituent countries.

Completed family size

We formulate long-term fertility assumptions considering both the TFR and the average number of children for women born in different years, known as completed family size (CFS). The TFR and CFS converge to the same value when projecting fertility in the long term.

Replacement fertility is the level of fertility required for the population to replace itself in size in the long term. Women in the UK would need to have 2.075 children on average to ensure long-term natural replacement of the population.

Figure 2 shows that CFS has declined gradually. The average number of children per woman was 2.22 in the 1945 cohort, whereas the cohort of women born in 1975 had a CFS of 1.90 children. More recent cohorts, like the 1995 cohort, have so far shown signs of lower fertility in their 20s than previous cohorts.

Figure 2: More recent cohorts have lower achieved family size in their 20s

Achieved family size by birth cohort of mother, UK, 1945 to 2005 birth cohorts

Figure 2: More recent cohorts have lower achieved family size in their 20s

Achieved family size by birth cohort of mother, UK, 1945 to 2005 birth cohorts
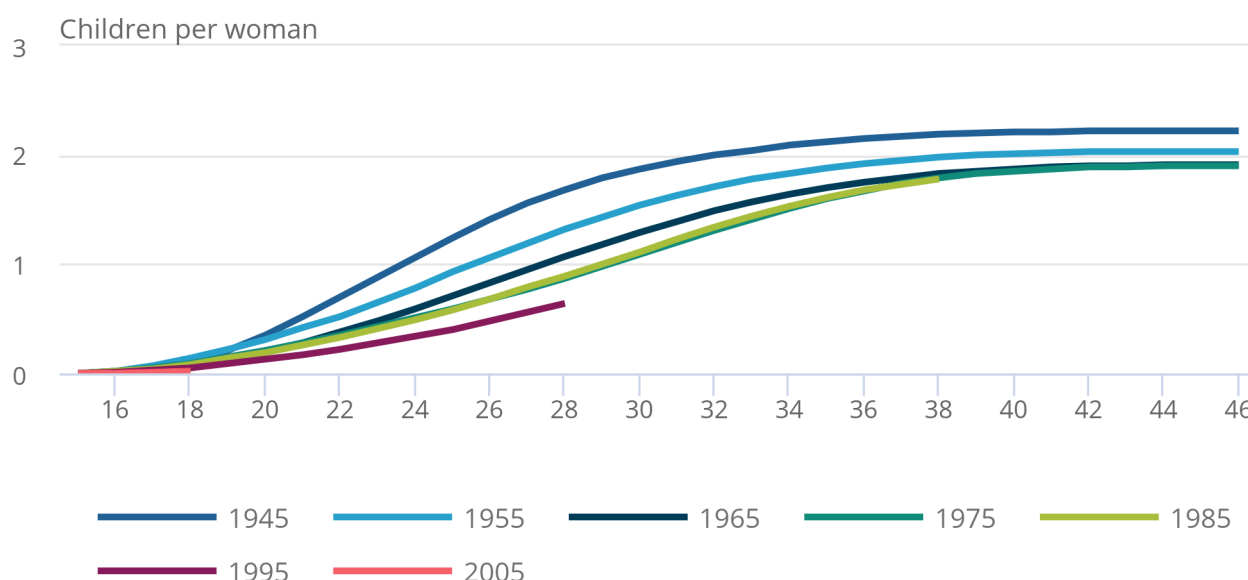
Source: National population projections, fertility assumptions from the Office for National Statistics

4 . Principal fertility assumptions

We have set the UK principal total fertility rate (TFR) for the 2022-based round of projections as 1.41 children in the short-term at five years from the base year in 2027 and as 1.45 children in the long term at 25 years from the base year in 2047. The short-term figure is below the 2022 UK TFR of 1.48 children. This is because we have accounted for the latest TFR data for 2023, which show a marked decline from 2022.

The long-term fertility assumption for the UK is below the long-term figures produced in our previous round of projections, as shown in Figure 3. Each set of fertility assumptions has been lower than the last for recent projection rounds.

Figure 3: The 2022-based principal assumption projects a lower total fertility rate than in previous rounds of projections

Past and projected total fertility rate (TFR), UK, 2016-based to 2022-based principal projections, 1982 to 2047

Figure 3: The 2022-based principal assumption projects a lower total fertility rate than in previous rounds of projections

Past and projected total fertility rate (TFR), UK, 2016-based to 2022-based principal projections, 1982 to 2047
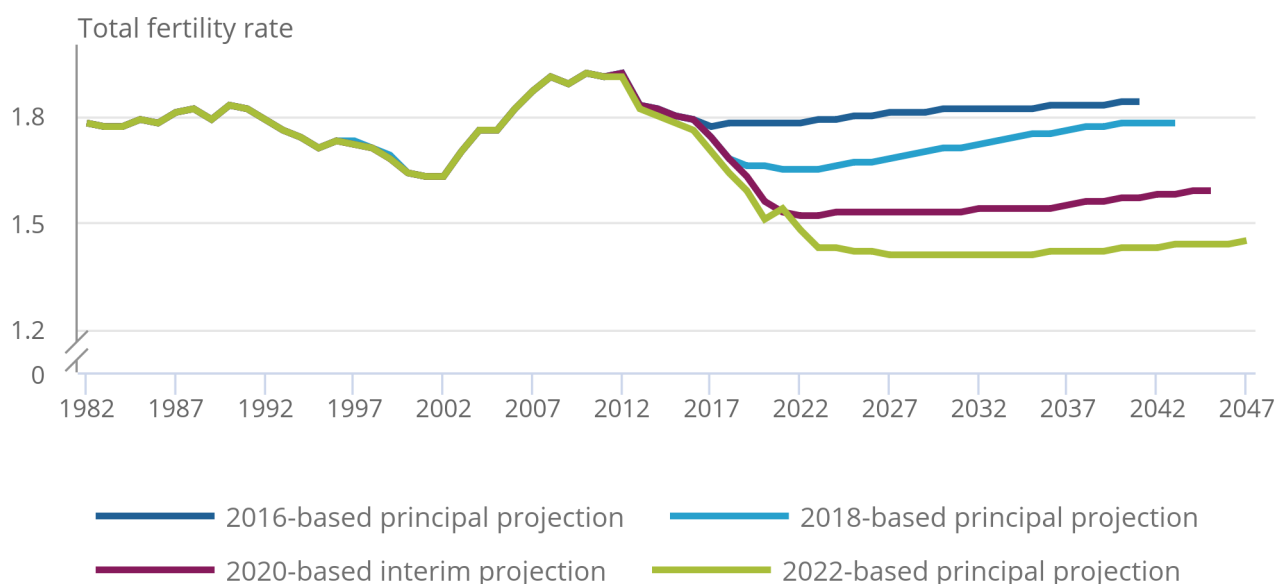
Source: National population projections, fertility assumptions from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Historical TFRs are lower in the 2022-based assumptions because of census rebasing.

Figure 4 shows the age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) for the UK for the principal scenario. This broadly reflects the advice on trends for each age group provided by the fertility expert panel. More information on the fertility expert panel is in Section 7: Expert views on future fertility.

We applied a decline for age groups under 30 years and an increase for ages over 35 years, in line with expert opinion. We also applied a small increase for those aged 30 to 34 years. This does not follow the experts' expectation that fertility for this age group is likely to remain stable. However, experts agreed that we may need to slightly increase fertility rates for this age group to achieve the long-term trend in target TFR without overinflating fertility rates for those aged 35 years and over.

Figure 4: Fertility rates for women in all age groups under 30 years are projected to decrease, while age groups over 30 years are projected to increase

Past and projected age-specific fertility rates (ASFR), UK, 1972 to 2047

Figure 4: Fertility rates for women in all age groups under 30 years are projected to decrease, while age groups over 30 years are projected to increase

Past and projected age-specific fertility rates (ASFR), UK, 1972 to 2047

Births per 1,000 women

Legend: 15 to 19, 20 to 24, 25 to 29, 30 to 34, 35 to 39, 40 to 46
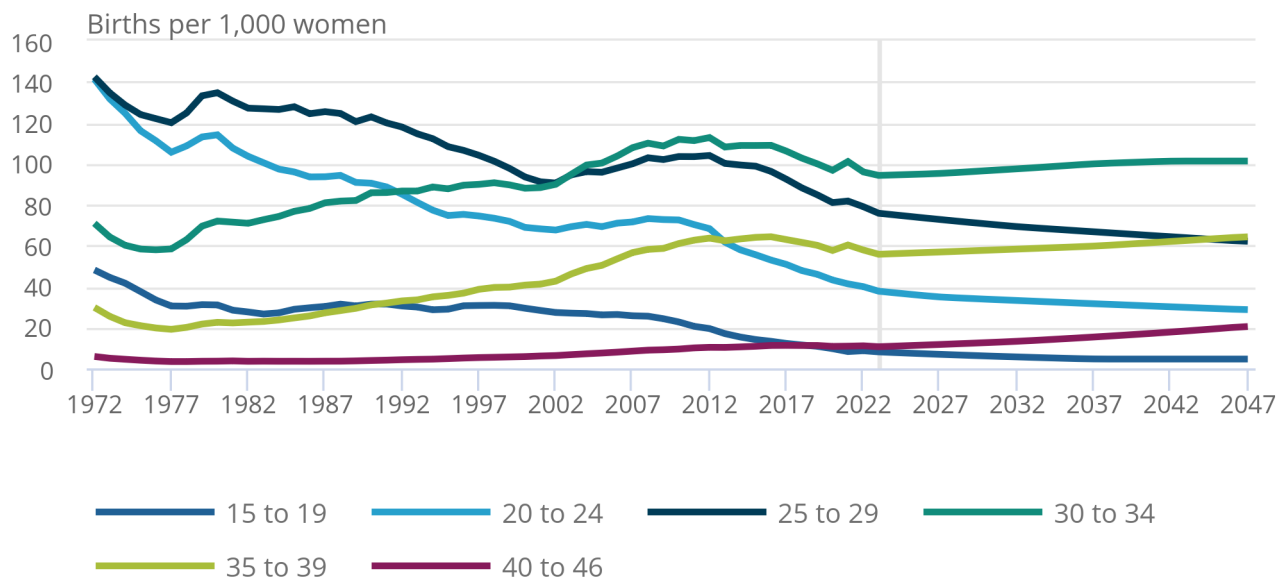
Source: National population projections, fertility assumptions from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Figures up to 2023 are based on published data.

Constituent countries of the UK

Figure 5 shows the principal projected TFRs for the UK and its constituent countries. These are in line with our desired trends, based on expert opinion.

Figure 5: Northern Ireland continues to have the highest total fertility rate, while Scotland has the lowest

Past and projected total fertility rate (TFR), UK constituent countries, 2000 to 2047

Figure 5: Northern Ireland continues to have the highest total fertility rate, while Scotland has the lowest

Past and projected total fertility rate (TFR), UK constituent countries, 2000 to 2047
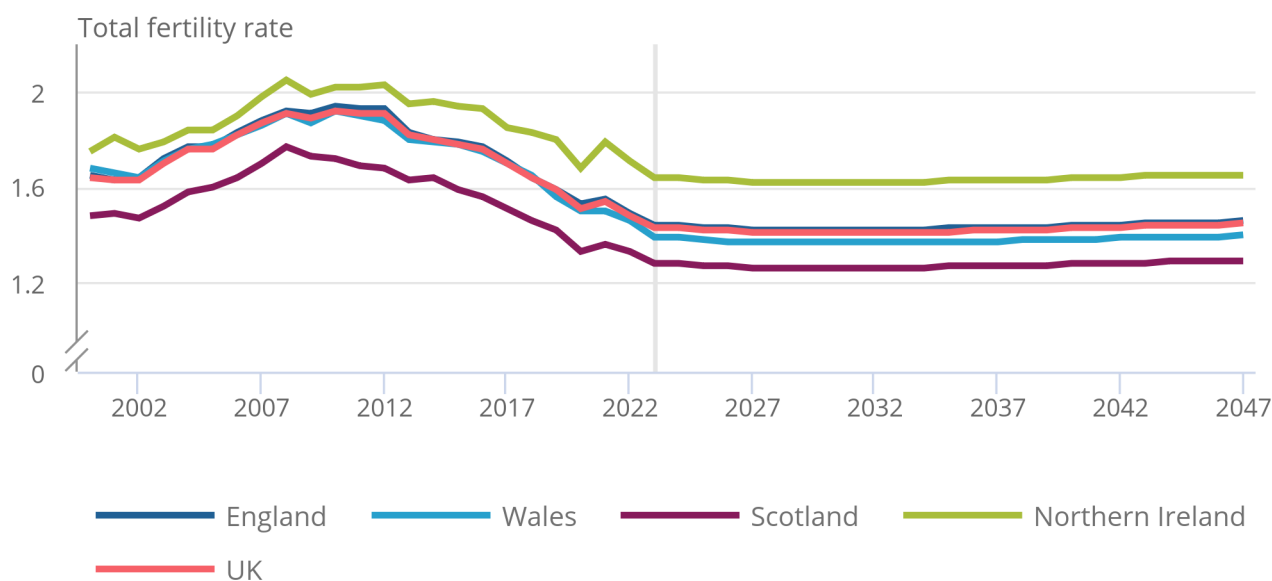
Source: National population projections, fertility assumptions from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Figures up to 2023 are based on published data.

Each country's TFR has maintained a similar position in the projection as shown in the 2023 data, in comparison with the UK TFR. These are within the range of expected differences between the UK and constituent countries' TFRs, based on expert opinion. The TFR deviated from the UK when we applied the principal scenario to Wales. To reduce this, we applied an adjustment to Wales.

Age-specific fertility rates for Wales

The UK trend applied to each constituent country generally increases fertility for the older age groups and decreases rates for younger women. Women in Wales tend to have children at younger ages, compared with the other countries of the UK. This resulted in the TFR for Wales diverging from the UK average in the long term, which was contrary to expert opinion.

To address this, we reduced the rate of decline in ASFRs for women aged 20 to 24 years and 25 to 29 years. This brought the TFR for Wales closer to the UK average in the long term. We applied a similar adjustment for Wales for our 2020-based national production projections.

5 . Assumptions for fertility variants

We produced variant projections to show the impact of fertility rates above or below that of the principal projection. The variants are designed to provide plausible alternative future fertility scenarios.

We have developed high- and low-variant assumptions for the 2022-based national population projections (NPPs). The last time we produced variant projections was for the 2018-based NPPs. This is because the 2020-based interim projections only included the principal assumptions.

Variants have been developed based on discussions with the fertility expert panel and with National Records of Scotland (NRS), Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), and the Welsh Government.

The low-variant fertility rate for the 2022-based NPPs has been set as the principal minus 0.2. The high-variant fertility rate has been set as the principal plus 0.1 in the short-term, rising to the principal plus 0.2 in the longer term. The fertility variants have a short-term transition from the current rate to reach these levels and the trend has been smoothed.

The variant widths were applied to the UK and constituent countries as shown in Table 2.

We also produced a "replacement rate" fertility variant with a long-term total fertility rate (TFR) of 2.075. Replacement fertility is the level of fertility required for the population to replace itself in size in the long term, in the absence of migration.

Table 2: High and low variants were set as 0.2 above and below the principal projection in the long term
Principal and variant long term (2047) total fertility rates, UK and constituent countries

	Principal	**Low variant**	**High variant**
England	1.46	1.26	1.66
Wales	1.40	1.20	1.60
Scotland	1.29	1.09	1.49
Northern Ireland	1.65	1.45	1.85
United Kingdom	1.45	1.25	1.65

Source: National population projections, fertility assumptions from the Office for National Statistics

Figure 6 shows the principal, low, and high variants, in comparison with the 2020-based principal assumption. The 2020-based principal assumption was broadly in line with the 2018-based low-variant assumption.

Figure 6: High and low variants were set as 0.2 above and below the principal projection in the long term for the 2022-based fertility assumptions

Past and projected total fertility rates (TFR), 2020-based principal projection and 2022-based principal, low and high fertility variant assumptions, UK, 2000 to 2047

Figure 6: High and low variants were set as 0.2 above and below the principal projection in the long term for the 2022-based fertility assumptions

Past and projected total fertility rates (TFR), 2020-based principal projection and 2022-based principal, low and high fertility variant assumptions, UK, 2000 to 2047

2020-based interim projection   2022-based principal projection
2022-based low variant   2022-based high variant
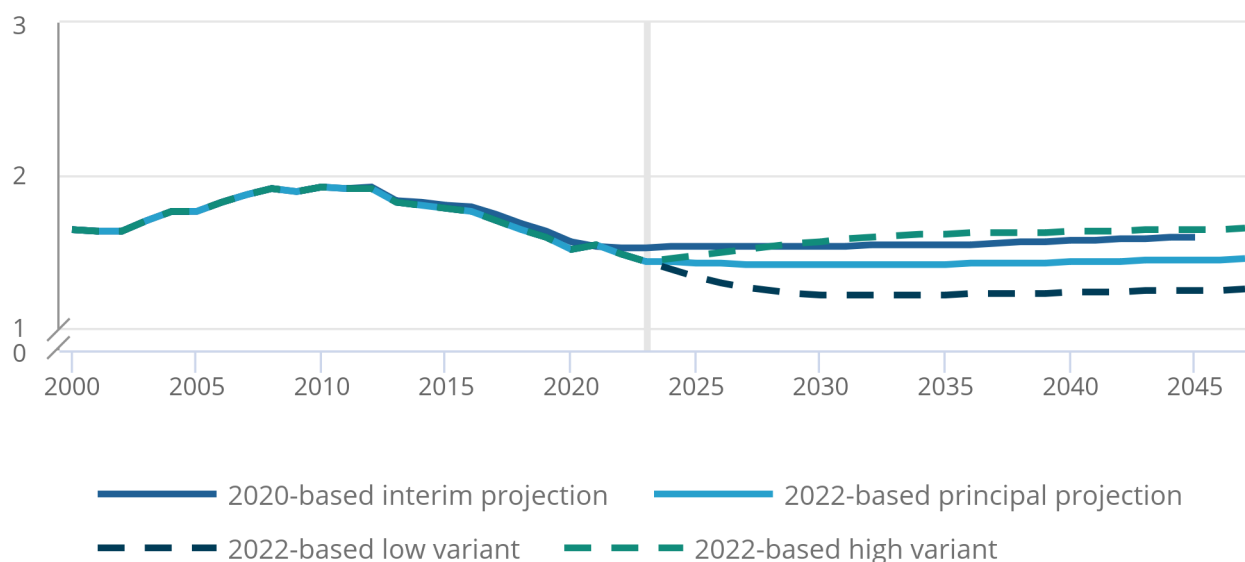
Source: National population projections, fertility assumptions from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. High and low fertility variants were not produced for the 2020-based interim projections.

2. Figures up to 2023 are based on published data.

3. Historical TFRs are lower in the 2022-based assumptions because of census rebasing.

6 . Methodological approach

Principal fertility assumptions

The principal fertility assumptions are set for the short-term (five years from the base year) and the long-term (25 years from the base year).

We started the fertility assumption-setting process by updating our historical period and cohort fertility rates with data up to the base year of the projection. For the 2022-based national population projections (NPPs), we used births data up to 2022 (on a calendar year basis) and the latest available rebased mid-year population estimates up to mid-2022.

A group of fertility experts gave their views on the future trends in fertility via a questionnaire and through discussion at an expert panel meeting. We compiled a list of desired goals for setting the fertility assumptions from the information provided. Our final goals were modified to incorporate the latest fertility rate information for 2023. Further information on the expert panel and desired goals can be found in Section 7: Expert views on future fertility.

Our primary focus was setting the principal fertility assumptions at the UK level. We looked at past trends in the TFRs and age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs), and tried various ways of projecting this forward. After looking at many different options, we decided which scenario was the most plausible, best met our desired goals, and was best supported by the evidence, including the latest fertility rates, and this then became our final approach. We then converted the ASFRs to mid-year by averaging data across two years, before being input into the projections system.

Our final scenario was applied through the projections system. This included constraining the fertility rates in the first year of the projection (year to mid-2023). This ensured that the total number of births for each country matched actual births data provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the devolved administrations.

The lower number of actual births in the year to mid-2023 resulted in a lower TFR than the expert panel had projected it would decline to by 2027, based on data up to 2022. We mitigated this by incorporating the latest published fertility rates for 2023 into the final scenario.

This scenario for the UK was then applied to each country's data to determine the long-term assumptions for England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. National Records of Scotland (NRS), the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), and the Welsh Government reviewed and provided feedback on the assumptions for their respective country via correspondence and committee meetings.

The TFR for Wales diverged from the UK average in the long term when we applied the scenario, against expert opinion. We made an adjustment to reduce the rate of decline in fertility for the 20 to 24 years and 25 to 29 years age groups, with the agreement of Welsh Government. This increased the TFR for Wales in the long term, and better aligned it with the UK average and the 2023 TFR for Wales.

Fertility variant assumptions

We developed potential variant options based on feedback from the fertility expert panel and we presented them to the NPP committee.

Following feedback and further discussions on the potential variants, we selected our final variants. The low variant was set as the principal TFR minus 0.2. The high variant was set as the principal TFR plus 0.1 in the short term, rising to the principal TFR plus 0.2 in the longer term. We applied some smoothing and a short-term run-in to reach these levels.

In the 2016-based and 2018-based rounds of the NPPs, we set the variants as 0.2 below the principal TFR for the low-fertility variant and 0.1 above the principal TFR for the high-fertility variant. We have selected a similar low variant for the 2022-based NPPs. However, the high variant rises in the longer term, which reflects experts anticipating a recuperation of fertility in the long term.

At the UK level, factors were calculated and applied to the principal assumption to achieve each of the high and low variants. These factors were then applied to the projected ASFRs, inflating or deflating these rates by the same proportion for each age within a particular year. We applied these proportions to the UK constituent countries and scaled to meet the target TFRs shown in Table 2. This process is consistent with the method used for setting variants in previous years.

NRS, NISRA and the Welsh Government reviewed and provided feedback on the principal and variant assumptions for their respective country via correspondence and committee meetings. The final principal and variant assumptions for the UK and each country were signed off by the NPP committee in December 2024.

7 . Expert views on future fertility

We convened a panel of UK fertility experts to provide their views on future fertility rates via a questionnaire and at an expert panel virtual meeting.

The questionnaire asked for their views on:

- projected short-term and long-term UK total fertility rates (TFR)

- expected fertility trends between the short-term and long-term TFR

- projected patterns in age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) for the UK in the short-term and long-term

- low and high variants

- differences in TFRs between the UK and each constituent country

- any factors that may affect fertility (for more information, see the subsection Underlying factors that may influence future fertility)

During the virtual meeting in May 2024, we outlined the method used to set the fertility assumptions, recent fertility trends up to 2022 using the latest published data at the time, and briefly covered the expert's questionnaire responses before discussing future fertility further.

Expected future fertility

We developed our desired goals to use for assessing different projection scenarios based on the fertility experts' questionnaire responses and discussion from the expert panel virtual meeting.

Our initial desired goals, following expert opinion based on data up to 2022, were:

- to aim for 1.46 TFR in the short-term (2027) and for 1.50 in the long-term (2047) at the UK level

- that fertility may decline in the short term as women delay having children, followed by a rise from the late 2020s/early 2030s, reflecting an expected recuperation in fertility as women have children at older ages

- that completed family sizes (CFSs) for the 1980 and 1985 cohorts will exceed CFS levels of the 1965, 1970, and 1975 cohorts

- that age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) for age groups under 20 years would decline in the short term and stabilise in the long term

- that ASFRs for women in their 20s would decline in the short and long term

- that ASFRs for women aged 30 to 34 years would remain stable throughout the projection

- that ASFRs for women aged 35 years and over would increase in both the short and long term

- that the differences in the TFR of each country, compared with the UK TFR for 2027 and 2047, should remain broadly similar to the differences experienced in 2022

After developing our initial scenarios based on expert opinion, we were able to incorporate the latest fertility data for 2023 in late 2024, which showed a decline. We adjusted the short- and long-term assumptions considering this. We maintained the trends based on expert opinion, while short- and long-term rates were adjusted accordingly. We sought further expert input to ensure the final scenario was the most plausible.

Underlying factors that may influence future fertility

We also asked the fertility experts on their views on the impact of several factors on future levels of fertility. They suggested that:

- the cost-of-living crisis will reduce period fertility in the short term

- climate change will either have a negligible impact on fertility or may reduce fertility, resulting in reduced CFS in the long term

- change to childcare funding will have a limited impact in the short term

- conflicts put a downwards pressure on fertility or have a negligible effect

- there will be minimal or no further impact on fertility levels because of the COVID-19 pandemic in the future

- international migration patterns may influence future fertility levels

8 . Related links

[Births in England and Wales: summary tables](#)
Dataset | Released 23 February 2024
Live births and stillbirths annual summary statistics, by sex, age of mother, whether within marriage or civil partnership, percentage of non-UK-born mothers, birth rates and births by month and mothers' area of usual residence.

[User guide to birth statistics](#)
Article | Last revised 28 October 2024
Supporting information for birth statistics, which present figures on births that occur and are then registered in England and Wales. Figures are based on information collected at birth registration.

[Births in Scotland](#)
Dataset | Released 30 July 2024
National Records of Scotland's births time series data.

[Births in Northern Ireland](#)
Webpage | Updated as new data become available
Northern Ireland Statistics and Records Agency's birth statistics from 1887 onwards.

[Births QMI](#)
Methodology | Last revised 28 October 2024
Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) for live births occurring and registered in England and Wales, detailing the strengths and limitations of the data, methods used, and data uses and users.

[Childbearing for women born in different years QMI](#)
Methodology | Last revised 1 February 2024
QMI for childbearing in England and Wales, detailing strengths and limitations of the data, methods used, and data uses and users.

9 . Cite this methodology

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 28 January 2025, ONS website, methodology, [National population projections, fertility assumptions: 2022-based](#)

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The ONS is too optimistic about the UK's demographic prospects

COMMENTARY

The ONS is too optimistic about the UK's demographic prospects

PUBLISHED: 31 January 2025   **AUTHOR:** Lyman Stone

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The Office for National Statistics' recently-published national population projections expect continued population growth for the United Kingdom at a relatively strong pace until 2047. This forecast might come as something of a surprise given the constant drumbeat of news about falling fertility rates in the UK and abroad. As this brief review of British population dynamics will suggest, the ONS' forecast includes several unfounded assumptions which lead to considerable excess optimism about the future of British population growth.

Projection vs. Forecasting: a distinction without difference

Before addressing the data the ONS provides, it should be noted that the ONS adopts an unreasonable distinction: that "projections" are different from "forecasts." The ONS places a warning on their published document saying, "National population projections are not forecasts and do not attempt to predict potential changes in international migration.

Migration assumptions do not directly account for recent and future policy or economic changes. Demographic assumptions for future fertility, mortality and migration are based on observed demographic trends." This disclaimer is strange, since "projection" is simply, etymologically, derived from the Latin "to launch forward," while "forecast" is simply, etymologically, derived from the Old High German "to launch forward." They are literally synonyms, and in fact identically derived, it's just that Alfred the Great made forecasts, while William the Conqueror made projections.

The ONS insists on this kind of logomachy in order to avoid serious scrutiny. "Projections" presumably based simply on walking past trends forward sound safe. If they are wrong, nobody can be blamed: it's only a model. "Forecasts" however might be wrong, they are statements about *what will be*. Outside observers might track and check the accuracy of forecasts. In reality, of course, the ONS is perfectly aware that virtually every single reader of their reports will immediately interpret their "it's only a model" as an actual prediction of the future, because that is, in fact, what it is. Because this is the inevitable and nearly exclusive popular interpretation of their data, they owe it to the public not to hem and haw about "projections," but in fact to produce a credible and defensible *forecast*, or prediction.

The projections produced are, unfortunately, not credible or defensible. Below, I will lay out reasons to believe that not only are the projected immigration values dubious, but the projections for fertility and mortality are perhaps even more so. We'll start with immigration.

Immigration

The ONS does anticipate that deaths will outnumber births in the very near future. How, then, does population growth continue apace? The answer is international migration. The

ONS anticipates that international migration will decline over the next few years, then remain stable at around a net gain of 350,000 people per year. The ONS says they "do not attempt to predict potential changes in international migration," but this is not true: they predict international migration will fall quite a bit in the mid-to-late 2020s, but then it will remain at levels greater than those observed any time in the 20th century. The ONS anticipates that net migration into the U.K. will be about the same in 2030-2039 as it was for the entire cumulative period from 1940-2009.

Figure 1: Net migration by decade

This could be correct, or it might not be, but it seems clear that this is neither a simple forecast of "current rates continue into the future," nor "future trends return to historic baselines." Rather, the ONS is assuming that the U.K. will maintain an immigration stance which is more open to immigration than it was at any point in the 20th Century – but not quite as liberal as it has been in the last few years. This may or may not be true, but the ONS should forthrightly state that their view of population presupposes a specific set of political outcomes, namely, persistent failure of political efforts to reduce migration for many decades to come. If that

political forecast implied by these projections does not come to pass, British population growth will come crashing down. Moreover, the 21st century thus far saw a wave of quite unique events: European Union expansion allowed a dramatic increase in immigration in the 2000s and 2010s, while major refugee crises (especially in the Middle East and Ukraine) drove huge increases in the 2010s and 2020s. If the ONS expects the U.K. to rejoin the E.U. or expects that the unusual pace of civil and interstate conflict observed 2010-2025 will continue through the 2040s, they should say so, and perhaps defense budgets will need adjusting too.

Mortality

Life expectancy is stagnant in the UK. According to the ONS' data release, in 2012, English baby boys had a life expectancy of 79.3 years. In 2023, English baby boys still had a life expectancy of 79.3 years. This pattern of stagnation was also generally true for baby girls, and in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

And yet, rather than recognize this stagnation and take seriously the possibility that the health of British people may not inexorably improve as it did during the 20th Century, the ONS insists on assuming that "long run rates of mortality improvement" will continue. These long-run rates assume that gains to health in the next 20 years will be better predicted by the gains made in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, than the stagnation experienced over the last decade.

This is not a credible forecast. Every single ONS projection since 2012 has forecast rising life expectancy, and every single forecast since 2012 has had to start that forecast rise at a lower point, because the rise in lifespans continues to not happen. The ONS would be better off just assuming that life expectancy is going to remain stable where it is, that British lifestyles and the British healthcare system are not going to

improve considerably in the near future. To their credit, the ONS has reduced the rosiness of their projections: while in 2012 they expected annual life expectancy gains of 0.18 years between 2012 and 2047, in these latest figures they expect just annual life expectancy gains of just 0.12 years between 2022 and 2047. Nonetheless, that is still far greater than recent experience suggests may be credible.

Fertility

But perhaps the strangest error the ONS makes is on fertility. Since 2010, the ONS has been persistently forecasting that fertility would remain stable. In fact, fertility has fallen dramatically, as the figure below shows.

Figure 2: ONS fertility projections, against actual
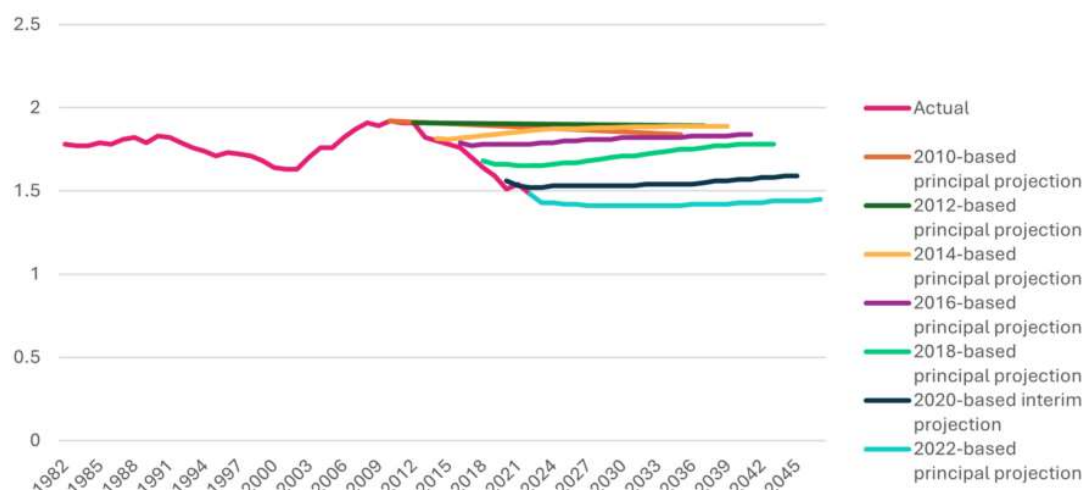
The 2016-based forecast, for example, anticipated a 2023 total fertility rate of 1.79. The true value was likely nearer 1.41–1.45 based on data reported for 2023 thus far (the statistical agencies in the United Kingdom report birth data at a ponderous speed compared to other countries). That miss of about 0.35 children per woman is enormous: birth rates were 20% lower than expected. The entire COVID pandemic only reduced life expectancy by about 1.2% at its height, and the large forecasting error for mortality I noted above nonetheless amounted to just a 3.3% error. The ONS' misses

on fertility in their previous forecasts have seismic implications for planning in the U.K. Schools planning their entering cohorts of 5 or 6 year olds based on these data would have found fully one-in-five of expected incoming children to be missing.

So, what about the newest fertility forecast? Is it also excessively rosy?

Bizarrely, no. It's actually too pessimistic – at least in the short term. Northern Ireland and Scotland both publish relatively reliable provisional birth data and, while England and Wales do not, England's health system publishes monthly data on the number of newborns registered with pediatricians and other doctors, which turns out to be *extremely* strong predictive of eventual birth reports. As such, although we do not know for sure what birth rates were in the U.K. in 2024, we know that births in Scotland through October were pretty much unchanged vs. 2023 after years of decline, births in Northern Ireland were down just 1.6% (vs. an average annual decline of 2.7% over the prior 5 years), and that infant patient counts in England were up nearly 2% year-on-year in September (vs. an average annual decline of 2% over the prior 5 years). In other words, unless Welsh women went on an extraordinary birth strike in 2024, UK births in 2024 almost certainly rose vs. 2023. And since the pace of that increase actually grew bigger over the course of 2024, it's reasonable to think 2025's birth rate may not be as low as expected either.

Figure 3: Demographic Intelligence vs ONS projections, when compared to actual
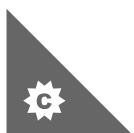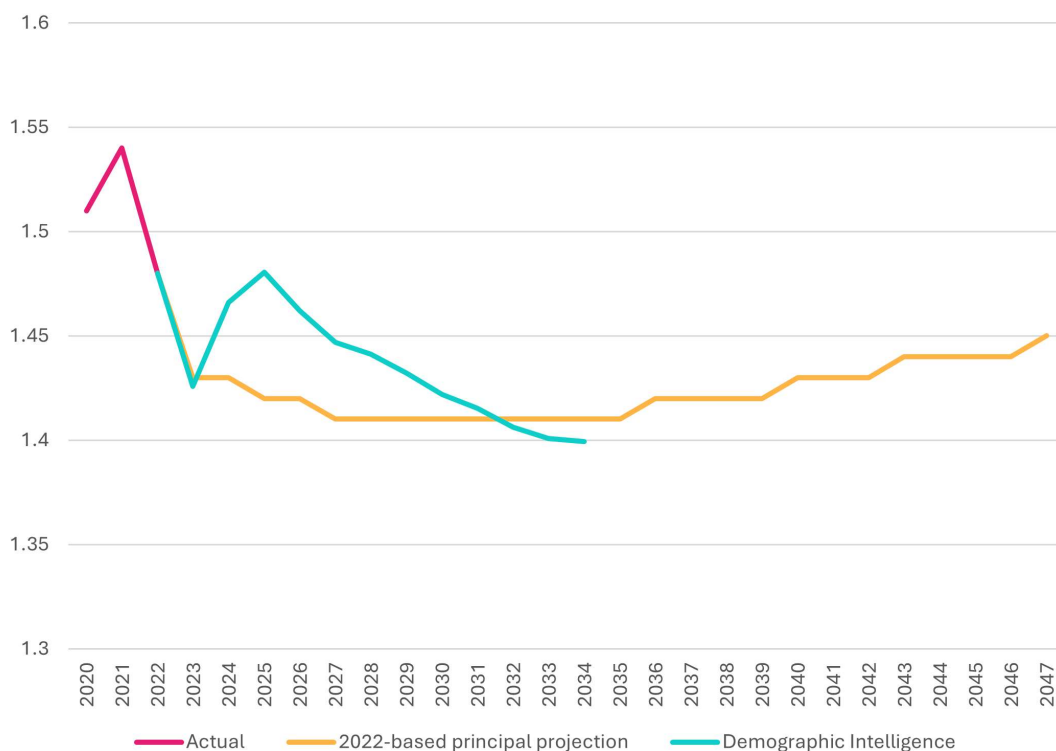
Using these data to calibrate nearby years, as well as a demographic cohort model comparable to that used by ONS, my consulting firm notified clients this previous December of our expectations for British fertility, shown in the figure above as the "Demographic Intelligence" forecast. Our forecast is almost certainly more accurate than the ONS', not least since we incorporated 2023 and 2024 provisional data, which the ONS elected not to do. We find that the ONS has probably *underestimated* fertility for the mid-2020s. The gap is not enormous; the ONS expects fertility rates around 1.41-1.43, whereas we expect them nearer 1.46-1.49. Nonetheless, that's a 4% difference in the number of children who will be starting school around 2028-2032, and a 4% difference in how much space will be needed in maternity wards. It may sound small, but if pharmaceutical companies use these forecasts to plan production of vaccines (which can be expensive to store in large quantities), it won't feel small to the parents whose

child's jabs have to be rescheduled because the local clinic ran out.

Furthermore, while the ONS expects a gradual long term increase in fertility, my firm projects a decline. In my view, the fundamental dynamics driving low fertility (namely, poor economic outcomes for young adults and especially young adult men, housing costs at levels which are ruinously unaffordable for young adults, and rapidly falling marriage rates) are not about to disappear. While there may be year-to-year volatility, without a major course correction, there is only one reasonable direction for a projection of British fertility in the long run: *down*.

It should be noted, however, that course corrections are possible. Migration is obviously highly sensitive to politics, but fertility is too – as the SMF has argued. Pro-family policies in most countries are relatively small: even in unabashedly pronatal Hungary, the reality is that the benefits a family receives for investing time in raising their children are extremely modest compared to the wages they receive from investing time in market work. But even these modest policies are known to be effective: recent academic reviews strongly support the notion that more generous family policies modestly boost births. The British Government should not allow the ONS projections to lull it into a false sense of security: policies to tackle the root causes of falling fertility and directly support families with childrearing are needed to avert a worsening demographic picture.

This piece is co-published with Boom, the campaign to make it easier to choose to have children, for everyone.

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PUBLICATION	EXTRACT_DATE	ORG_TYPE	ORG_CODE	ONS_CODE	SEX	AGE	NUMBER_OF_PATIENTS
GP_PRAC_PAT_LIST	01Dec2023	SUB_ICB_LOCATION	91Q	E38000237	FEMALE	0	8491
GP_PRAC_PAT_LIST	01Dec2023	SUB_ICB_LOCATION	91Q	E38000237	MALE	0	8946
Total Kent and Medway Births - single year to 31 November 2023							17437

Source
NHS England monthly GP registrations data

For Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) area filter on **ONS code = E38000237**
and for births (0-year-olds) filter on **Age = 0**

PUBLICATION	EXTRACT_DATE	ORG_TYPE	ORG_CODE	ONS_CODE	SEX	AGE	NUMBER_OF_PATIENTS
GP_PRAC_PAT_LIST	01/12/2024	SUB_ICB_LOCATION_CODE	91Q	E38000237	FEMALE	0	8725
GP_PRAC_PAT_LIST	01/12/2024	SUB_ICB_LOCATION_CODE	91Q	E38000237	MALE	0	9144
Total Kent and Medway Births - single year to 31 November 2024							17869

Source
NHS England monthly GP registrations data

For Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) area filter on **ONS
code = E38000237** and for births (0-year-olds) filter on **Age = 0**

Pre-school population by education planning area

Data supplied by NHS Digital (via the DfE)

District	PA code	PA name	Age as at 31st August 2023 (20231001)						Age as at 31st August 2024 (20241001)					
			<0 years	0 years	1 years	2 years	3 years	4 years	<0 years	0 years	1 years	2 years	3 years	4 years
Ashford	886AS01	Chilham	0	13	24	14	18	29	2	12	12	29	15	20
Ashford	886AS02	Challock and Charing	0	44	38	52	49	54	1	35	46	43	52	54
Ashford	886AS03	Ashford North	7	328	337	370	368	345	15	305	311	326	382	375
Ashford	886AS04	Ashford Rural East	1	26	50	46	43	57	0	51	30	52	48	39
Ashford	886AS05	Ashford East	13	394	438	386	463	401	15	411	410	451	406	472
Ashford	886AS06	Ashford South	5	311	377	379	383	378	10	369	325	380	381	398
Ashford	886AS07	Ashford Rural West	1	41	46	51	55	56	0	47	47	49	56	54
Ashford	886AS08	Hamstreet and Woodchurch	1	44	50	55	56	62	2	44	47	51	55	56
Ashford	886AS09	Tenterden North	3	47	71	67	66	78	7	63	58	76	72	69
Ashford	886AS10	Tenterden South	4	74	62	86	92	85	3	64	77	64	89	89
Ashford Total				1,322						1,401				

Source: NHS Digital (data look-up 1st October 2023 and 1st October 2024)

Notes:
KCC receives data from NHS Digital (via the DfE) twice a year (in May and October) for the five youngest cohorts of children (0-4 year olds) born up to 31st August of the previous year. The data extract provided to KCC is for Kent resident children by LSOA ad postcode of residence. LSOA data is then aggregated to primary planning areas by KCC MI.

Worksheet in G E & L Kroner AEOs South Kent Files 2019 Schools 2019 on Ashford Chilmington Green S106 Request to change Drafts Second Education SoCG - v3.docx

Summary by EPA

Pre-school population by LSOA and education planning area (age as at 31st August 2023)

Source: NHS Primary Care Registration (Demographic) database (NHS Digital)
Run date: 1st October 2023

LSOA11	PA code	PA name	District	Age as at 31st August 2023 (20231001)					
				<0 years	0 years	1 years	2 years	3 years	4 years
E01023974	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	15	16	15	16	16
E01023975	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	26	23	34	30	44
E01023976	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	14	25	16	24	17
E01023977	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	12	16	7	14	13
E01024001	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	12	16	23	20	15
E01024002	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	13	28	25	17	23
E01024016	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	10	14	12	20	10
E01024017	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	21	25	19	26	22
E01024019	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	24	20	21	25	26
E01024020	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	16	22	31	40	33
E01024028	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	2	31	34	37	34	28
E01024029	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	1	23	28	25	33	18
E01032813	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	19	29	34	20	27
E01032814	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	20	24	31	29	32
E01032816	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	1	33	31	30	26	29
E01032823	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	1	22	26	19	9	25
Ashford South Total					311				

Worksheet in G E & L Kroner AEOs South Kent Files 2019 Schools 2019 on Ashford Chilmington Green S106 Request to change Drafts Second Education SoCG - v3.docx
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Pre-school population by LSOA and education planning area (age as at 31st August 2024)

Source: NHS Primary Care Registration (Demographic) database (NHS Digital)
Run date: 1st October 2024

LSOA11	PA code	PA name	District	Age as at 31st August 2024 (20241001)					
				<0 years	0 years	1 years	2 years	3 years	4 years
E01023974	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	16	17	16	16	14
E01023975	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	27	25	27	34	32
E01023976	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	1	20	15	26	14	24
E01023977	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	12	9	20	8	13
E01024001	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	15	13	16	22	16
E01024002	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	18	13	27	22	22
E01024016	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	1	15	12	14	11	22
E01024017	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	1	20	21	23	20	27
E01024019	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	1	24	25	19	18	28
E01024020	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	33	20	24	33	36
E01024028	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	33	31	30	38	32
E01024029	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	2	30	28	25	27	35
E01032813	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	1	26	20	23	34	25
E01032814	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	0	31	20	28	32	30
E01032816	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	2	26	34	35	33	29
E01032823	886AS06	Ashford South	Ashford	1	23	22	27	19	13
Ashford South Total					369				

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Pre-school population by education planning area

Data supplied by the Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT)

District	PA code	PA name	Age as at 31/08/2024					Age as at 31/08/2023				
			0 years	1 years	2 years	3 years	4 years	0 years	1 years	2 years	3 years	4 years
Ashford	886AS01	Chilham	13	13	28	18	18	13	25	17	18	28
Ashford	886AS02	Challock and Charing	33	44	43	54	54	44	38	51	53	56
Ashford	886AS03	Ashford North	321	321	334	383	378	340	329	386	375	343
Ashford	886AS04	Ashford Rural East	49	32	55	50	40	27	49	50	42	54
Ashford	886AS05	Ashford East	424	410	444	412	473	400	432	387	463	378
Ashford	886AS06	Ashford South	370	325	387	381	405	321	387	381	391	384
Ashford	886AS07	Ashford Rural West	46	49	48	56	54	43	48	53	50	51
Ashford	886AS08	Hamstreet and Woodchurch	46	44	52	53	54	39	49	55	52	62
Ashford	886AS09	Tenterden North	66	62	75	74	73	54	72	68	69	71
Ashford	886AS10	Tenterden South	65	74	60	91	94	80	62	88	93	85
Ashford total			1,433					1,361				

Source: Child Health Information System (CHIS), KCHFT (data look-up Winter 2023/24 and 2024/25)

Notes:
KCC receives data from the Kent Community Health Foundation Trust (KCHFT) from their Child Health Information System (CHIS) once a year in Winter for the five youngest cohorts of children (0-4 year olds) born up to 31st August of the previous year. The CHIS system is populated from health visitor records and the data extract provided to KCC is for Kent resident children by LSOA of residence. LSOA data is then aggregated to primary planning areas by KCC MI.

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LSOA21CD	LSOA21NM	PA code	PA name	WD24CD	WD24NM	LAD24CD	LAD24NM	Age	Number of children
E01023974	Ashford 007A	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	16
E01023975	Ashford 007B	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	27
E01023976	Ashford 008A	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	20
E01023977	Ashford 007C	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	12
E01024001	Ashford 009A	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011761	Norman	E07000105	Ashford	0	14
E01024002	Ashford 005B	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011761	Norman	E07000105	Ashford	0	19
E01024016	Ashford 007D	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011768	Singleton East	E07000105	Ashford	0	15
E01024017	Ashford 007E	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011776	Washford	E07000105	Ashford	0	21
E01024019	Ashford 008B	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011770	Stanhope	E07000105	Ashford	0	27
E01024020	Ashford 008C	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011770	Stanhope	E07000105	Ashford	0	30
E01024028	Ashford 007F	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	31
E01024029	Ashford 005E	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011775	Victoria	E07000105	Ashford	0	33
E01032813	Ashford 012E	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011769	Singleton West	E07000105	Ashford	0	25
E01032814	Ashford 012F	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011777	Weald Central	E07000105	Ashford	0	32
E01032816	Ashford 008E	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011766	Roman	E07000105	Ashford	0	25
E01032823	Ashford 008F	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011776	Washford	E07000105	Ashford	0	23
Ashford South Total									370

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LSOA21CD	LSOA21NM	PA code	PA name	WD23CD	WD23NM	LAD23CD	LAD23NM	Age	Number of children
E01023974	Ashford 007A	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	15
E01023975	Ashford 007B	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	26
E01023976	Ashford 008A	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	13
E01023977	Ashford 007C	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	11
E01024001	Ashford 009A	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011761	Norman	E07000105	Ashford	0	14
E01024002	Ashford 005B	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011761	Norman	E07000105	Ashford	0	12
E01024016	Ashford 007D	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011768	Singleton East	E07000105	Ashford	0	11
E01024017	Ashford 007E	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011776	Washford	E07000105	Ashford	0	20
E01024019	Ashford 008B	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011770	Stanhope	E07000105	Ashford	0	26
E01024020	Ashford 008C	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011770	Stanhope	E07000105	Ashford	0	17
E01024028	Ashford 007F	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011744	Beaver	E07000105	Ashford	0	34
E01024029	Ashford 005E	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011775	Victoria	E07000105	Ashford	0	26
E01032813	Ashford 012E	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011769	Singleton West	E07000105	Ashford	0	20
E01032814	Ashford 012F	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011777	Weald Central	E07000105	Ashford	0	21
E01032816	Ashford 008E	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011766	Roman	E07000105	Ashford	0	33
E01032823	Ashford 008F	886AS06	Ashford South	E05011776	Washford	E07000105	Ashford	0	22
Ashford South Total									321

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