

Abstract: “Universal pre-school education: the case of public funding with private provision”
(with Jo Blanden, Emilia Del Bono, Sandra McNally)

This paper studies the effect of free pre-school education on child outcomes in primary school. We exploit the staggered implementation of free part-time pre-school for three-year-olds across Local Education Authorities in England in the early 2000s. The policy led to small improvements in attainment at age five, with no apparent benefits by age 11. We argue that this is because the expansion of free places largely crowded out privately paid care, with small changes in total participation, and was achieved through an increase in private provision, where quality is lower on average than in the public sector.