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Britain's best place for bringing up kids holds top spot

Children in Scotland's Orkney Islands enjoy the best quality of life of any local area district (LAD) in Great Britain, according to the 2016 Halifax Children's Quality of Life Survey.

The latest research placed the Orkneys, Shetland and Western Islands in the top three based on low primary school class size, high school spending per pupil; they live in an area of low population density and little traffic. These children are also likely to be surrounded by adults in employment and who rate their own personal wellbeing as very high.

The top 50 best places for children to live were split evenly between southern England (South East, South West and East of England) and the north (Scotland, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, West Midlands, East Midlands and Wales). Apart from the North East and London all regions are represented in the top 50.

Top 50 best places to bring up children evenly split between the North and South

- The region with the most places in the top 50 best places for children to live is the South East (13); including Winchester, West Berkshire, Chichester, Horsham and Mole Valley.
- Seven are in Scotland – along with the top three; the Highlands, Perth and Kinross, Argyle and Bute and Aberdeenshire.
- The South West and the East of England, both with six areas are next, including West Somerset, East and Mid Devon and East Dorset in the South West and St Edmundsbury, South Norfolk, Broadland and East Cambridgeshire in the East of England.
- The East Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West have five areas, including South Northamptonshire, Rutland, Derbyshire Dales (East Midlands), Craven, Ryedale, Selby and Harrogate (Yorkshire & the Humber) and Ribble Valley, South Lakeland and Fylde (North West).
- Monmouthshire and Powys in Wales and Staffordshire Moorlands in the West Midlands make up the remaining areas. (See Table 1)

Many of these areas score highly in factors that govern the environment in which children are brought up. These include high levels of employment, bigger houses where children are more likely to have their own bedroom, faster broadband, relatively low traffic volumes and population densities and where adults rate personal wellbeing as high.

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What makes the northern tip of Scotland Islands such a good place to bring up children?

- The average primary school class size (17.0) and pupil to teacher ratio (PTR) in secondary schools (10.0) in the Western Islands are the lowest in Britain (national averages of 26.9 and 20.9 respectively). The Orkneys follow with primary class sizes of 18.1 and a PTR of 9.3.
- An average school spend in the Orkneys of £9,281 per pupil is the highest in the survey – just over twice the national average of £4,623. The spending ratio in the Western Islands and Shetlands follow at £9,095 and £8,844 per pupil respectively.
- These factors appear to help secondary school children achieve excellent exam results, with over 90% of pupils in the Islands getting 5 awards at SCQF 4 or better (69.7% GB average¹)
- The Western Islands have the lowest population densities in Britain with just 9 people per square kilometre – compared to the national average of 276. The Shetlands and Orkneys also have equally low population densities with 16 and 22 people/square km respectively.
- Children can walk about in relative freedom with an average of 71 vehicles per square kilometre in the Western Islands, 142 in the Orkneys and 145 in the Shetlands, compared to 9,587 in Britain as a whole.
- Importantly, the ONS survey on personal wellbeing indicates the Orkney and Western Island adult populations are among the happiest, most satisfied, least anxious and content in Britain. This bodes well for those growing up on the isles.
- On the flip side, there is bad news for kids who like online games, as between only 52% and 56% of households have access to fast broadband; significantly below the national average of 86%.

Table 1: 2016 Halifax Children's Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 areas

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2016
Orkney Islands	Scotland	1
Shetland Islands	Scotland	2
Western Isles	Scotland	3
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	4
South Oxfordshire	South East	5
Ribble Valley	North West	6
West Somerset	South West	7
Mole Valley	South East	8
Chiltern	South East	9
West Oxfordshire	South East	10
Hart	South East	11
Highland	Scotland	12
Winchester	South East	13
South Lakeland	North West	14

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Harrogate	Yorkshire and The Humber	15
St Edmundsbury	East of England	16
Allerdale	North West	17
Eden	North West	18
Staffordshire Moorlands	West Midlands	19
South Norfolk	East of England	20
Monmouthshire	Wales	21
Powys	Wales	22
Perth & Kinross	Scotland	23
Ryedale	Yorkshire and The Humber	24
Tandridge	South East	25
East Devon	South West	26
Broadland	East of England	27
Argyll & Bute	Scotland	28
Derbyshire Dales	East Midlands	29
West Berkshire	South East	30
Horsham	South East	31
Rutland	East Midlands	32
Erewash	East Midlands	33
Mid Devon	South West	34
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	35
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	36
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	37
North Hertfordshire	East of England	38
Teignbridge	South West	39
Fylde	North West	40
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	41
Dacorum	East of England	42
Stroud	South West	43
Mid Sussex	South East	44
Surrey Heath	South East	45
East Dorset	South West	46
Waverley	South East	47
Chichester	South East	48
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	49
Craven	Yorkshire and The Humber	50

Source: Halifax

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Table 2: Best Area for Children's Quality of Life in each region in 2016

Local Authority	Region	Rank
Orkney Islands	Scotland	1
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	4
South Oxfordshire	South East	5
Ribble Valley	North West	6
West Somerset	South West	7
St Edmundsbury	East of England	16
Staffordshire Moorlands	West Midlands	19
Monmouthshire	Wales	21
Derbyshire Dales	East Midlands	29
Northumberland	North East	168
Merton	London	184

Source: Halifax

Table 3: Best Children's Quality of Life in each category in 2016

Group	Variable	Local Authority District	Region
Labour market			
	Highest employment rate: 89.1% (GB average is 75.2%)	Shetland Islands	Scotland
Housing			
	Highest average number of rooms in house: 6.4 (GB average is 5.4 rooms)	Uttlesford Chiltern Rutland South Bucks	East of England South East East Midlands South East
	% of households with more than 2Mbps – and where more than half of household have chance of having superfast broadband: 100%² (GB average is 86.0%)	Manchester Tamworth Ipswich Brent Woking (37 LADs in total – a full list is provided in Editors Notes)	North West West Midlands East of England London South East
Urban environment			
	Lowest population density per sqr km: 9 (GB- 276 per sq/km)	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 70.6 cars /km (GB- 9,587 per sq/km)	Western Isles	Scotland
Education			
	Lowest average number of pupils in primary	Western Isles	Scotland

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school class: 17.0 (GB average is 26.94 pupils per class)		
Highest % of 15+ yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent: 97.9 (GB average is 69.7 ¹)	East Dunbartonshire	Scotland
Highest average state school (primary and secondary) spending per pupil: £9,281 (GB average is £4,623)	Orkney Islands	Scotland
Lowest secondary school pupil teacher ratio :10.0 (GB average is 20.85)	Western Isles	Scotland
Personal Well Being		
Highest personal wellbeing (average of life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety): 8.0 (GB average 5.0)	Western Isles	Scotland

Source: Halifax March 2016

Ends

Notes to editors:

¹ GB results refer to GCSEs

² 37 LAD- small sample of each region is selected. Full list is available on request.

The Quality of Life index has been produced at a local authority district level from 377 Local Authority Districts in Great Britain.

The quality of life reading for each local authority has been created by summing scores across 10 variables within 5 broad groups.

Each local authority district is given a score out of 10 for each variable contained in the index. Scores within each of the broad groups are averaged and then the seven group scores are summed to create an overall quality of life score.

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Group	Variable	Period covered
Labour	Employment rate %	April 2015 – March 2016
Housing	Number of rooms in house	England & Wales 2011 ONS Census Data Scotland – Housing Conditions Survey 2009/11
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	Point Topic June 2014
Urban environment	Population density per square km	2015 – ONS
	Traffic flows per square km	2015
Education	Number of pupils in primary school class	January 2016 England & Wales, Scotland 2015
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2014/15 England, Wales & Scotland
	Average state school (primary and secondary) spending per pupil	England & Scotland 2016, and Wales 2015/16
	Secondary school pupil teacher ratio	England 2015 (adjusted class size data), Wales 2014 and Scotland 2014
Personal Well-Being		April 2014-March 2015 ONS

"This report is prepared from information that we believe is collated with care, however, it is only intended to highlight issues and it is not intended to be comprehensive. We reserve the right to vary our methodology and to edit or discontinue/withdraw this, or any other report. Any use of this report for an individual's own or third party commercial purposes is done entirely at the risk of the person making such use and solely the responsibility of the person or persons making such reliance. "© Bank of Scotland plc all rights reserved 2016.