

daycare trust

Childcare Charter

A manifesto for early childhood education and care

Support for families and children is fast becoming an election issue and as we approach the general election, Daycare Trust is proud to publish this Childcare Charter. With the backing of our supporters, we want to show politicians how important childcare is to families up and down the country.

Childcare - the best start in life

All parents want their children to have the best start in life, and the evidence shows that high quality childcare can improve children's social, communication, and learning skills. It has the potential to transform futures, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities.

Enormous progress has been made in creating more childcare places and there is now much more choice for parents, along with more financial support and higher standards. Free nursery and childminder places, Sure Start Children's Centres, extended schools, childcare vouchers and tax credits have all proved hugely popular with parents. Our survey of mums, published alongside this Charter,¹ shows that a party which plans to cut or remove these entitlements is significantly less likely to get their votes.

Childcare is the kind of family support that matters to parents in this election.

Improve quality, reduce costs

Despite increased investment over the last decade, the quality is not yet good enough to ensure all children reach their potential and too often the cost of childcare makes it difficult for parents to work or to achieve the work-life balance they want.

This is because Britain spends less on early education and childcare than many other countries – around £4 billion or just half a per cent of GDP in England, compared to £23 billion on higher education and £30 billion on secondary schools. Yet the evidence is clear that **spending has the biggest impact if invested in the first few years of a child's life**, putting them on the right path and allowing any problems to be spotted early. In one analysis, returns to the economy from investment in the early years and children's services were estimated to have the potential to yield as much as £486 billion over 20 years.² And two major studies of inequality in the UK highlighted the importance of early years policies in reducing the gap between rich and poor.³

Childcare - a priority for Britain

From our experience of working with families for nearly 25 years, we believe that if politicians want to support families and give children in Britain the best start in life, the priority should be to secure high quality, affordable childcare for every parent who wants or needs it. Our six-point charter is based on our consultation with parents through our expert helpline, our website and our research programme. **Find out how you can help by turning to the back page.**



We call on the next Government to:

- 1. Aim to spend 1% of GDP on early childhood education and care so that all children get the best start in life**
- 2. Extend free places to ensure that all children benefit from early childhood education and care**
- 3. Extend parental leave and make workplaces family-friendly**
- 4. Fill the gaps in provision and guarantee extended schools**
- 5. Make childcare affordable for all parents**
- 6. Celebrate Sure Start Children's Centres and extend the range of services on offer**

We call on the next Government to:

1

Aim to spend 1% of GDP on early childhood education and care so that all children get the best start in life

In order to make a positive difference, early childhood education and care need to be high quality. This means having highly trained staff with a low staff-to-child ratio, good facilities and strong management. To raise all childcare to the same high quality level, we need to spend at least one per cent of GDP on childcare.⁴ This would be £9 billion per year, a fraction of the £30 billion we spend on secondary schools, in line with international targets from OECD and Unicef, and still below that in other countries, for example in Scandinavia.

Daycare Trust's vision is that half of the workforce should have graduate level qualifications, with salary and benefits comparable to those of a primary school teacher. Currently nursery nurses and childminders earn less per hour than school secretaries, who have comparable qualifications, and

mid-day assistants – often no more than the national minimum wage. Poor pay and progression has an impact on staff retention, which has a direct impact on child outcomes. The experience of New Zealand, which is aiming to achieve 100 per cent graduate early years workforce by 2012, shows that such reforms are achievable in a relatively short time.

A focus on quality would particularly help children from poorer backgrounds, as at the moment the poorest quality provision is often in the most disadvantaged areas.

Providers serving disadvantaged communities should get more funding and support, and services may need to be provided directly by local authorities if a market for private and voluntary sector providers can't be sustained.

2

Extend free places to ensure that all children benefit from early childhood education and care

The free entitlement to 12.5 hours of education and care for all three and four year olds means that **for the first time almost all children start school with the benefits of structured early years education and care.** The free entitlement is popular; 85% of children take up their place⁵ and **in our poll with Bounty 69% of mums said they would be less likely to vote for a political party if it proposed to remove or limit funding for this free entitlement.**

The free entitlement is increasing to 15 hours from September 2010, but our vision is for a free entitlement to 20 hours of education and care per week for all two to four year

olds. Currently, whilst the free entitlement is benefiting children, it is not enough to support parents to work without paying for extra hours of care, unless it is provided flexibly and for the hours that parents need. A 20 hour entitlement, delivered flexibly, would give parents genuine choice about taking a job that was half full-time hours, or involved some travelling.

We also believe that the free entitlement should be extended to 48 weeks per year, as managing during holidays can be a real problem for working families.

3

Extend parental leave and make workplaces family friendly

We know that many parents want to stay at home during their child's first year, and there are benefits to the child of having their mother or father at home during this crucial time. **We believe that paid parental leave should be extended to twelve months as soon as possible, that this should be paid at least at minimum wage level with the possibility of sharing most of this between parents.**

Further effort is also needed to make all our workplaces family-friendly. Flexible working brings benefits for employers and employees alike. There should be more part-time jobs at

a senior level, and the right to request flexible working from day one of a job, to help both mothers and fathers spend more time with their children.

There is currently a gap between the end of maternity leave and the free entitlement for childcare when the child is two or three. We propose allowing parents to use parental leave on a flexible basis to extend into this period, so that they have the option of returning to work part-time. This parental leave should be paid and be available to both parents.

4

Fill the gaps in provision and guarantee extended schools

Children come in all shapes and sizes, and so should childcare. There are big gaps which make it impossible for some families to find childcare. These include: lack of holiday childcare, out of school childcare, childcare for older children, for parents working atypical hours, for disabled children and, in some areas, for the under-twos.

Our recent survey of Family Information Services (FIS) found that 54% of FIS in England said that parents had reported a lack of childcare in the previous 12 months. Less than a quarter of all local authorities reported that they had

sufficient services for disabled children or those aged 12 and over. Safe and reliable activities for older children are particularly important for lone parents, and if they knew that their children had a place to go before and after school, many more would be able to work. Government now requires lone parents with a child over the age of ten to look for work, making the provision of wraparound care for school-age children an urgent priority. **We believe that all schools should offer childcare from 8am until 6pm, which should be free for low-income families, aiming ultimately for it to be free for all.**

5

Make childcare affordable for all parents

Parents in Britain pay around 60% of the cost of childcare⁶, more than most other developed countries. Childcare is still unaffordable for many families. Parents, particularly lone parents, are forced to remain on benefits or work fewer hours than they want to, because their entire wages would be spent on childcare. The average part-time nursery place for a child under two costs £88 per week, more than half of average part-time gross earnings of £153 per week.⁷ **Sixty-seven per cent of our Bounty mums said childcare costs had led them to consider not returning to work at all or on a part-time basis.**

Parents need more help through expanding free places and by providing more subsidy to providers. Currently, the

childcare tax credit helps many families meet their childcare costs and **67% of the mums we surveyed said any party intending to cut or remove these entitlements would not get their vote, with 60% saying the same about childcare vouchers.** However, tax credits are complex to apply for and many parents don't claim what they are entitled to even though they are struggling to get by. We think tax credits should cover up to 100% of childcare costs and a simplified system could be designed which separates the childcare from the working tax credit, and gives all families some help towards their childcare costs. It is essential that the money continues to go directly to the purse or wallet of parents so that they choose how to spend it.

6

Celebrate Sure Start Children's Centres and extend the range of services on offer

Sure Start has had a huge impact, and is now established in every community in the UK as a visible place that parents can go for services, support and information. **The majority of our Bounty mums said they would not vote for a party that planned to cut it.** Sure Start Children's Centres can offer a truly integrated service offering childcare, family support and health services, as well being a hub for childcare provision by offering childminding networks and support for other forms of home-based care.

We believe that Children's Centres should continue to be a universal service for the whole community. It is precisely because Children's Centres are open to everyone that they

can reach those families who wouldn't normally use services, to ensure they take up all their entitlements and to offer them help with parenting skills or training. But in order to reach the families that need it most, Centres should be running outreach services and finding innovative ways to encourage parents to use the services on offer.

We believe that many of the benefits of Sure Start will not be observed for many years. It is an essential part of the local public service infrastructure and one which, if cut, would put at risk the future of thousands of children across the country.

Get involved!

Whoever you are, you can take action today to back Daycare Trust's campaign...

If you are an MP or parliamentary candidate:

- **Will you commit to making childcare a priority issue in the next Parliament?** Show your support by emailing campaigns@daycaretrust.org.uk. We will then highlight you as a 'family-friendly candidate' on our website at www.daycaretrust.org.uk
- Pass on our Childcare Charter to your fellow candidates
- Check out our research with mums by **downloading 'Keeping mum' from www.daycaretrust.org.uk** to find out how your party's childcare policies could affect your chances of victory

If you are a parent or supporter:

- Question your local candidates on childcare, and ask them to sign up to Daycare Trust's Childcare Charter. You could also issue a challenge to all your local candidates by writing to your local newspaper. As candidates vie for your vote, it's your chance to make sure they are family-friendly. **A toolkit to help you do this is available on our website**
- Help make Daycare Trust's voice louder, and sign up to join our free parent network via our website
- If you are a parent **willing to share your experiences** of childcare with the media as part of our campaign, why not join our parent panel? Email press@daycaretrust.org.uk to find out more

If you are a childcare provider:

- Help publicise our campaign by telling your friends and colleagues about Daycare Trust's Childcare Charter, including information in your newsletters to parents, or putting a link on your website.

About Daycare Trust

Daycare Trust is the national childcare charity, campaigning for quality affordable accessible childcare for all and raising the voices of children, parents and carers. We advise parents and carers, providers, employers, trade unions and policymakers on childcare issues. We recognise that everyone is unique and we value difference in our communities. We listen to all views and are committed to act without prejudice.

Daycare Trust runs an Information Line on **0845 872 6251**, open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 10.00am-1.00pm and 2.00pm-5.00pm, Wed 2.00pm-5.00pm (only). Parents can also visit www.daycaretrust.org.uk and www.payingforchildcare.org.uk for information and helpful factsheets.

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And everyone can help by spreading the word:

- Follow us on twitter - @daycaretrust
- Become a fan of 'Daycare Trust - the national childcare campaign' on Facebook



Daycare Trust – speaking up for parents

- 1 Daycare Trust/Bounty (2010) Keeping mum: childcare as a vote winning issue, London: Daycare Trust
- 2 NEF/Action for Children (2009) Backing the future: why investing in children is good for us all, London: NEF/Action for Children
- 3 Hills et al (2010) An anatomy of economic inequality in the UK: report of the National Equality Panel, London; CASE/LSE; Marmot et al (2010) Fair society, healthy lives, London, The Marmot Review
- 4 Goddard & Knights (2009) Quality Costs: paying for Early Childhood Education and Care, Daycare Trust: London
- 5 Speight et al (2009) Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2008 Research Report DCSF-RR136, DCSF: London
- 6 Calculated from figures contained in Goddard & Knights (2009)
- 7 Childcare costs survey 2010, Daycare Trust: London