

# British childcare isn't working<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Read online<sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Rather disturbing numbers from the OECD here:

Childcare costs in Britain are by far the highest in the Western world, an international study has found.

Couples spend more than a third of their income on nurseries and childminders in the UK – more than three times the cost in France and Germany.

A full-time nursery place for a child under two costs £222 a week, up by a third in six years. It means working mothers now have to spend £11,300 a year on average on childcare, and up to £15,700 in London.

Leave aside the sounds of various axes being ground and consider the detail of the OECD numbers. These are a little old but will still be about right.

The UK is just behind the Nordics on the public spending on childcare. There's nothing either right or wrong about that - it's a policy choice. Should child care be largely privately funded or publicly?

For example, we hear often enough that British rail fares are the most expensive in Europe, the world, the universe, whatever. And the reason is that taxpayer support for fares is lowest here. It's simply a policy choice.

But here comes the problem. British child care is also very high on the list for private costs. The Nordics, with their high public payments, are all at the very low end for private costs. Those places which are alongside us in having high private costs have low public costs.

We have, somehow, managed to create a system which has both high private costs and also high public costs. Which is absurd of course. It means that we've simply got the whole system wrong.

Ourselves we think this goes back to the Blair/Brown days when ever more regulation about who can provide childcare and how was loaded onto the system. But we're willing to listen to other explanations - for a system which manages to be expensive both ways is obviously one we want and need to change.

-reprinted from Adam Smith Institute

**Region:** Europe<sup>[3]</sup>

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