

# Government denies that Budget adjustments indicate 30-hour places shortfall <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Labour has accused the Government of 'more broken promises' over the delivery of the 30 hours, after Budget documents said that supply of places would rise more slowly than assumed.

The statement is made in the Treasury's Spring Budget policy costings document, which says of 30 hours free childcare, 'As with TFC (Tax-Free Childcare), we have made a small adjustment to the expected reduction in tax credits and associated welfare spending from the introduction of 30 hours of free childcare for working families, where it seems likely that the supply of places will rise more slowly over the first two years than originally assumed.'

However, the Department for Education (DfE) has said that the 'slow rise' is based on an adjustment by made by the Office for Budget Responsibility, not the Government, which it says is 'on track' to deliver the 30 hours.

Shadow education secretary Angela Rayner said, 'The cost of childcare has rocketed under the Tories and their promises to offer free hours have completely fallen flat.

'First we saw delay after delay to the Tax-Free Childcare, and the extra free hours offer has been plagued with problems because the Tories have failed to fund it properly. Now there will be even fewer places available, so more children and their families will be losing out.

'The Tories just aren't delivering for ordinary working families.'

According to Labour, the Government was forced to cut the number of eligible families from those originally promised at the General Election due to insufficient funds.

A recent survey by the Family and Childcare Trust also revealed that more than half of the three-quarters of Family Information Services in England that took part said they didn't know if there would be enough places to deliver the 30 hours, and more than one in ten said there wouldn't be enough places.

A Government spokesperson said, 'As set out in our manifesto, we are on track to deliver 30 hours free childcare to working parents of three- and four-year-olds. More than 4,000 parents are already benefitting from this offer in eight pilot areas, and the commitment is being rolled out nationwide from September.'

Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said, 'We have long warned of the very real risk of a shortage of 30-hour places when the scheme rolls out in September. For far too long, the Government has ignored the sector's valid concerns about underfunding, and as a result, many childcare providers are now planning to limit the number of 30-hour places they offer, if not pull out of the scheme altogether.

'With recent Ofsted statistics also showing that childminders are leaving the sector in droves and increasingly frequent reports of nurseries and pre-schools being forced out of business due to a lack of adequate funding, it's clear that we are at a crunch point.

'These Budget documents show that the Government knows full well there is going to be a problem with the supply of 30 hours places, so there is no excuse for inaction. If this issue is not addressed urgently, many parents expecting to be able to access their 'free places' in September are going to be left sorely disappointed.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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