

Childcare sector tells politicians: 'No rash promises' ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The largest childcare member organisations have joined forces in an open letter to all political parties, urging them not to make manifesto pledges that the sector will be unable to deliver.

The National Day Nurseries Association, the Pre-School learning Alliance, and the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), are concerned that there will be a repeat of the 2015 general election, when political parties rushed to make families promises of free childcare that were underfunded to the tune of hundreds of millions, according to exclusive analysis for Nursery World from 2015.

Working parents of three- and four-year-olds were promised 30-hours in the Conservative manifesto, while Labour pledged 25 hours, and the Liberal Democrats promised 20 hours a week for children aged two- to four-year-olds.

The Tories' 30 hours policy, currently being piloted, and rolled out across England from September is still viewed as unsustainable by many childcare providers.

As a result, the organisations are calling for well-thought through plans made in consultation with the early years sector, that are properly costed and support sustainable quality childcare.

The letter says, 'In 2015 there was a pre-election arms race on childcare policy, with political parties looking to outbid each other on their offer to parents. Two years on, the pledge of 30 hours free childcare for working parents is putting the quality and viability of early years provision at risk.

'Politicians rightly recognise that childcare has a dual benefit of better educational outcomes for children and support for parents to work and train. However, chronic underfunding remains and per child investment in under-fives is half that of primary school children.

'As the political parties finalise their manifestos, we call for well-thought out plans developed in consultation with the early years sector. Plans that support sustainable, quality childcare; delivered by fairly rewarded practitioners who can see a long term future in their profession. Not rash promises that cannot be delivered and do not support children or their parents.'

It is signed by Purnima Tanuku, chief executive of the NDNA, Neil Leitch, chief executive for the Pre-school Learning Alliance, and Liz Bayram, chief executive of PACEY.

Yesterday, a draft of the Labour party manifesto was leaked, pledging plans to increase funding for the free entitlement and extend the 30 hours to all two-year-olds and some one-year-olds.

The final version of Labour's manifesto will be published early next week, and the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are also expected to publish theirs around the same time.

-reprinted from Nursery World

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