

Labour pledges free childcare for EVERY family in £5billion vow as it launches landmark election manifesto ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Labour will pledge £5billion a year to create a universal childcare service for every family in Britain.

In a landmark pledge Jeremy Corbyn will vow to extend 30 hours-a-week of free nursery care - currently only promised to working parents - to every family regardless of their circumstances.

The massive entitlement, bringing the value of state-backed childcare to £12.5bn a year, would be available from the day every child turns two years old until they start school, even if neither parent is in work.

Labour said an additional 1.3million kids across Britain will benefit from the policy if the party wins the election on June 8.

The spectacular pledge - only hinted at in last week's leaked manifesto - will be the centrepiece of the party's official election manifesto, to be launched at a glitzy event in West Yorkshire on Tuesday.

Labour said the additional cost of extending the current Government offer will be £5billion-a-year, and pledged to set out how it will be funded when the manifesto is published this morning.

A further £2.7billion of capital investment will be poured into nurseries over the course of the Parliament "to ensure the places exist to meet demand".

Speaking at today's manifesto launch Mr Corbyn will promise a "programme of hope" for British voters which is "radical but responsible" and will transform Britain.

"It's a programme that will reverse our national priorities, to put the interests of the many first.

"It will change our country while managing within our means," the Labour leader will say.

Currently all families receive 15 hours' free childcare a week for their three- and four-year-old kids.

The current scheme is also available to some two-year-olds from poorer families, on a means-tested basis.

Under Tory plans, the 15 hours will double to 30 hours-a-week from this September - but only to families where both parents are in work, and with the richest families excluded.

Labour said the current system is "difficult to navigate" and means many families "are not accessing their existing entitlements".

The party's draft manifesto leaked to the Mirror last week vowed to "overhaul the existing childcare system", and promised to extend the current offer to all two-year-olds.

But today's pledge goes much further by creating a universal 30 hours-a-week service for all young kids, regardless of their parents' working status.

Party sources said the number of three and four-year-olds receiving 30 hours-a-week will nearly treble, from 390,000 to 1,016,739.

The universal offer for two-year-olds will be phased in over the course of the five-year Parliament and Labour said that by 2022, a further 688,000 two-year-olds will benefit.

Sources said the new proposals will send the total cost of Government-funded childcare soaring from £7.5billion-a-year to £12.5billion-a-year by 2022.

The policy will inevitably draw claims from the Tories that it is uncoded, as the £5bn a year funding has yet to be announced.

Critics may also say it makes more sense to focus free childcare on parents who are in work, rather than splashing large sums of public

money on other families too.

But Labour will insist that offering an average of six hours a day of nursery care for all will create a simpler system for parents and benefit all kids, regardless of their background.

Labour insisted the policy is fully costed, and that full details of where the cash is coming from will be unveiled later today.

It is understood the party is considering a new 45p tax rate for people earning more than £80,000-a-year, and hiking the rate for people on more than £150,000-a-year to 50p.

They have already vowed to clobber big business with a £20billion-a-year hike in corporation tax, and slap new charges on private health firms and private schools.

Labour said that alongside the extra funding, the whole childcare system will be shaken up - with nurseries paid directly by Government rather than cash being channeled through parents.

And the party insisted that all kids would benefit from spending extra time at nursery.

“Early years education has a major impact on child development,” a Labour source said.

“Centre-based care of children between the ages of 18 and 35 months is associated with better language skills and leads to academic benefits at primary school.”

Labour will also vow to improve the quality of nursery provision by developing a “qualified, graduate-led workforce”.

They said nursery workers’ wages would be increased and training opportunities enhanced.

Over the longer term Labour said some childcare would even be extended to one-year-olds, while full maternity pay could be extended to 12 months.

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