

Parents being held back in their careers by lack of childcare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Nine out of ten parents in Scotland who want to change their working situation say a lack of appropriate childcare is the main barrier.

A new report published today (19 September) by the Fair Funding for our Kids (FFFOK) campaign group, based on a survey of 440 parents of two-, three- and four-year-olds in Scotland, shows parents are being held back in their careers by a lack of available and flexible childcare. The survey was carried out during the summer.

This is despite the aim of the Scottish Government's 600 hours of free childcare a year for all three- and four-year-olds to support parents to work, train or study, especially those who need help with finding sustainable employment, says FFFOK. From 2020, the number of hours of free childcare in Scotland will more than double to 1,140 hours per year.

The campaign group's new report 'Beyond a Half Day Place' also reveals that over two-fifths of parents are dissatisfied with their childcare arrangements, with half of those saying it is because the hours available are too short or do not suit their working arrangements.

According to FFFOK, this is largely because most councils only offer free childcare hours in slots of three hours ten minutes during term time only, with no option for parents to add hours, which is 'an unusable system for many working families'. Research by the campaign group last year found that half of all nursery places in Scotland were for half days only.

Some funded (partnership) places are available at private and voluntary nurseries which are contracted by the council, but in most cases, there are limited spaces.

The report also reveals that for over two-fifths of parents, the funding that they receive for the 600 hours of free childcare (a year) does not cover the full cost.

Other findings include:

- a fifth of parents have to pay for their funded place in advance and wait to receive a refund;
- 15 per cent are unable to take up their free place because their private nursery does not have enough partnership places;
- 15 per cent of parents are receiving no free hours at all;
- One in ten parents did not know about the 600 hours free childcare.

Of those parents with children under the age of three, over a third were not confident they would be able to access a funded place. The most common reason for this was an expectation that they would only be offered a half day nursery place.

Fair Funding for our Kids (FFFOK) is now calling for an end to councils capping the number of places in partnership nurseries they will fund. It also wants a national agreement on funding children who live in one area, but attend nursery in another, for childcare funding to be ringfenced and a minimum hourly rate to be paid to providers by local authorities.

A spokesperson for FFFOK said, 'This research shows once again that parents are confused, frustrated and being held back in their careers by a childcare system that doesn't recognise the reality of life for working parents. We need full-day nursery places to be available to all parents now.'

Father of two Nick Treanor, who lives in Edinburgh, said, 'My partner and I both work, and we've really struggled to find a way to access our free hours that doesn't rely on one of us being available to pick our son up at lunchtime. The system seems to think all mums stay at home and want a nursery for a couple of hours a day so they can do the shopping and Hoovering. That's not how most families live these days.'

A Scottish Government spokesperson said, 'We recognise the importance of increasing flexibility to support the needs of families. While evidence shows that the majority of local authorities are consulting with families and increasing flexible options, we know that some places offered to parents are not where and when they need them and increasing choice must be continued and accelerated.'

'Our commitment to increase free early learning and childcare to 1140 hours by 2020 will transform childcare provision in Scotland, but families are already starting to benefit from participation in our trials, which are testing innovative approaches and new models, and

through a phased approach to expansion, that will focus initially on those children and families who will benefit most.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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