

MPs to scrutinise effectiveness of childcare policy on parental employment^[1]

An inquiry into childcare policy and its influence on the economy has been launched by the Treasury Committee.

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Source: Nursery World

Format: Article

Publication Date: 4 Jan 2018

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EXCERPTS

The committee of cross-party MPs, which is chaired by former education secretary Nicky Morgan, will examine the role high-quality, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare can play in supporting labour productivity.

It will scrutinise how childcare schemes are delivered and the quality of computing systems such as the Childcare Service website and its previous failures.

The Committee will also consider the effectiveness of Government initiatives that aim to make childcare affordable (Tax-Free Childcare, childcare vouchers, 30 hours of funded childcare, the childcare element of Universal Credit), how individual initiatives interact with each other and whether they help parents into employment.

Key questions the Committee will consider in the inquiry include:

- What impact is a lack of access to affordable childcare having on the ability of parents to enter into employment?
- What proportion of parents are struggling to find affordable and high-quality childcare?
- What is causing the poor take-up of Tax-Free Childcare? The proportion of parents that are using the scheme is far less than Government projections.
- Did the IT failures on the Childcare Service website affect the administration of Tax-Free Childcare accounts and/or impact those trying to open a Tax-Free Childcare account? Did they also affect the administration of applications for the 30 hours?
- Has the Government provided sufficient funding for the 30 hours?
- What other measures could the Government implement to ensure that the childcare sector provides an affordable and high-quality offer that supports parents employment? For example, should further childcare support be provided to parents on apprenticeships or other training schemes?

The first evidence session of the inquiry will take place on Wednesday 31 January in the Houses of Parliament. Witnesses will include Elizabeth Truss, chief secretary to the Treasury with responsibility for childcare funding.

Nicky Morgan, chair of the Treasury Committee and MP for Loughborough, said, 'High quality and affordable childcare is important for getting parents into work and supporting working families. The Treasury Committee will look at how it delivers benefits to the economy and supports labour productivity and participation.

'We'll also look at the effectiveness of Government initiatives at making childcare accessible and affordable.

'There had been reports of problems with the HMRC-run Childcare Service website, which has been a cause for concern. We'll examine the impact of these failures on the take-up of Government initiatives that aim to make childcare affordable.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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