

UK: MPs warned of 'genuine childcare crisis' as figures indicate hundreds of nurseries and childminders are closing ^[1]

'To lose well over 500 nurseries, pre-schools and childminders every month is simply not sustainable.'

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EXCERPTS

MPs have been warned there will be a "genuine childcare crisis" as figures indicate hundreds of nurseries and childminders are closing.

Early years leaders urged politicians to invest more money into the sector as Ofsted data indicated that 179 nurseries and preschools closed every month between January and March.

A total of 401 childminders fell off the early years register over the same period.

Between September and December last year, an average of 164 nurseries and pre-schools appear to have closed.

Industry representatives warned of an impending "childcare crisis" if funding is not secured for the sector.

Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Early Years Alliance (EYA), said: "We have long warned that without adequate funding, many early years providers would be forced to close their doors and these figures sadly confirm that this is exactly what has been happening. To lose well over 500 nurseries, pre-schools and childminders every month is simply not sustainable.

"If more isn't done to ensure that the sector is adequately funded as a matter of priority, we are going to have a genuine childcare crisis on our hands in this country before too long."

Currently all three to four-year-olds and some disadvantaged two year olds in England are eligible for 30 hours of free childcare a week.

However, the sector has struggled under the burden of cuts in recent years. In June a report revealed that 17 per cent of providers, including nurseries, pre-schools and childminders, in the most deprived areas of the country anticipate being shut in the next year.

nd Melanie Pilcher, quality and standards manager at the EYA, told The Independent the organisation was "hearing of people cutting down on fresh fruit and vegetables that they are offering" as they attempted to balance the books.

The Department for Education has confirmed that hourly funding rates for the "free" childcare hours will increase this year by 8p to £4.38 in 2020/21.

Meanwhile officials contested the Ofsted figures – arguing they did not account for newly opened childcare offerings.

A government spokeswoman said: "These figures only provide a partial picture and don't take into account new providers joining the early years register. We also know that the number of childcare places available has remained broadly stable. We are increasing our hourly funding rates for councils so that they can continue to deliver free childcare places and over one million children every year are now benefiting from the Government's record investment in childcare and early years education."

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