

Is the 'quality' of preschool childcare, measured by the qualifications and pay of the childcare workforce, improving in Britain? ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Excerpted from Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to report on the changing qualifications, pay and working conditions of the British childcare workforce between 2005 and 2014. This is in order to contribute to current debates on the 'quality' of childcare provision for preschool children. The theoretical framework for this study draws upon concepts of 'quality' in childcare, to discuss the argued importance of increasing access to and raising standards of childcare for children's cognitive development, for women's labour market participation and for reducing poverty. The analysis comes from an ESRC funded study entitled 'Provision and use of preschool childcare in Britain'. This paper focuses on examination of childcare provision by the formal childcare workforce and presents results from a secondary analysis of the UK's Labour Force Survey, Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, and Ofsted registration data. The 2005-2014 results show a highly gendered (98% female), low valued workforce in which qualifications are modestly rising (12% increase over time in NVQ level 3) but persistently low paid (on average £6.60 per hour) compared with other occupations (£13.10 per hour). The study also finds a shrinkage in the childcare workforce - of around five per cent in Britain since 2005 (from 329k in 2005-07 to 313k in 2012-14) - and more people describing themselves as childminders in the LFS than are registered with Ofsted, suggesting a possible growth in illegal childminding. The implications of these findings raise questions about what the British childcare workforce will look like in the future, who will do childcare work in the future, and whether it is possible to achieve 'good quality', 'affordable childcare' and 'decent pay' for British childcare workers. These issues are important for the future regulation of the British 'childcare' workforce and policy development in this vital area.

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