

Quality childcare for all: Making England's childcare a universal basic service ^[1]

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Source: New Economics Foundation

Format: Report

Publication Date: 15 Jan 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Full report [PDF] ^[3]

Excerpted from summary

This short paper sets out a vision for early years provision as a Universal Basic Service (UBS), with an emphasis on the achievement of social goals. It is one of a series of working papers developing proposals for Universal Basic Services.

The childcare system in England is broken. Our nurseries are among the most expensive in the world, while childcare professionals are some of the lowest paid workers in society. Over the past 20 years, policymakers have come up with various interventions in childcare policy. In September 2017, Theresa May's government introduced 30 hours of free childcare for some three- and four-year-olds. But the policy is badly thought out as well as severely underfunded. Nurseries across the country make use of loopholes to charge parents for 'additional extras' like nappies and food, to increase fees for nongovernment funded hours, and to reduce opening hours. Even more worryingly, 17% of childcare providers in England's poorest areas are facing closure. The latest data from Ofsted indicates that over 500 nurseries, pre-schools and childminders have closed each month between April 2018 and March 2019.

Childcare as a Universal Basic Service has the potential to transform the lives of children and parents. Extra money alone will not tackle the underlying structural problems of our broken childcare system. Before investing more money, we need to ask where that money is going. 84% of early years provision is now run by private providers, 4 as a consequence of government policies with the express intention of accelerating the marketisation of childcare. From inequalities of access to the risk of collapse from debt-fuelled expansion, the evidence shows that we cannot trust the care of our children to unaccountable, profit-driven companies.

Change need not entail a top-down restructuring led by central government. We argue for an approach that meets this shared need by exercising collective responsibility. This requires policy interventions that ensure true universality by approaching childcare as a Universal Basic Service (UBS) for all children from the end of paid maternity leave.

Region: Europe ^[4]

Tags: universal ^[5]
system ^[6]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/20/10/quality-childcare-all-making-england%E2%80%99s-childcare-universal> [2]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/universal> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/system>