

Chancellor announces extra child care cash [GB] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Ministers today unveiled plans to give parents greater access to more affordable child care in a bid to help them balance the pressures of work and family life.

The government's 10-year child care strategy, set out in the pre-budget report, will allow parents to spend more time at home with their children while schools will open longer to help those who work. It promises an extra one million child care places.

The chancellor, Gordon Brown, announced an extension of maternity leave from six months to nine months in 2007. He also set a goal of 12 months' paid leave by the end of the next parliament, a portion of which could be transferred to the father.

The number of children's centres, providing advice and support for the parents of under-fives, will rise from 600 to 3,500 by 2010 - ensuring there is at least one in every community.

By 2007 all three to four-year-olds will be entitled to 15 hours of free nursery education per week for 38 weeks a year, with the goal of extending this to 20 hours a week by 2010.

By 2010 all parents of 5 to 11-year-olds will be offered affordable schools-based child care from 8am to 6pm on weekdays throughout the year. All secondary schools will have the same extended opening hours by the same date, providing activities such as IT and homework classes, sports and music.

Child care tax credits will rise from next April for those on lower and middle incomes, covering up to 80% of costs up to £175 a week for the first child. This will rise to £300 for two or more children.

The chancellor said this would mean an average two-parent family earning £34,000 would get an extra £700 towards their child care costs.

The children's minister, Margaret Hodge also unveiled plans to create a new type of early years child care worker, who would provide both learning and care. These pedagogues could also work alongside teachers in school.

- reprinted from the Guardian

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