

Blair spells out plan on vital lessons for the under-fives [GB] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Starting education at the age of five "no longer meets the future needs of Britain", Tony Blair said yesterday.

In a speech to the National Association of Head Teachers [NAHT] annual conference in Cardiff, the Prime Minister said he wanted a "nationwide universal early years service for under-fives".

A key plank could be free part- time nursery education for two- year-olds in poorer areas, he indicated.

Chancellor Gordon Brown announced an experimental version initially involving 6,000 two-year-olds in the March Budget.

Ministers have often stressed the need in recent months to focus the education budget on the early years of a child's life.

Since 1997, hundreds of millions of pounds have been pumped into Sure Start, a flagship programme offering education, health and child care services to families in some of the poorest parts of Britain. It is likely that the children's and early excellence centres will be closely involved in the experiment to extend free nursery education on a means-tested basis to two-year-olds.

More affluent parents will have to make a contribution to the cost.

Mr Blair told the NAHT that the "importance of quality early years provision is now incontrovertible. Pre-school education has a powerful impact on children's development - as primary school heads you know that your children achieve more if they get the best of early starts."

- reprinted from Daily Post

Region: Europe ^[2]

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