

Sector leaders dismayed over removal of children's centres' duty to provide full daycare ^[1]

Author: Mahadevan, Janaki

Source: Children & Young People Now

Format: Article

Publication Date: 16 Nov 2010

EXCERPTS

Government has been warned that removing the duty on children's centres to employ staff with qualified teacher and early years professional status and provide full daycare will limit both the quantity and quality of childcare provision in deprived areas.

John Chowcat, general secretary of the children's services union Aspect, said freeing centres in the 30 per cent most disadvantaged areas from the obligation to employ highly qualified staff will be detrimental. "This is a major blow to professionalism," he said. "Parents living in these areas are entitled to qualified staff."

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, added that the move will allow councils to recruit less-qualified staff as part of budget reduction plans.

"When even the government accepts that children make more progress in nurseries, pre-schools and playgroups with staff who have higher qualifications, it seems totally contrary to remove the requirement for staff to have qualified teacher and early years professional status," she said. "We are deeply unhappy about this and fear that in an era of cuts local authorities and nursery owners will use it as an excuse to recruit less well-qualified staff so that they can cut their wage bills."

While government plans to legislate so that disadvantaged two-year-olds receive 15 hours of free early education a week have been welcomed, there are fears that removing the duty to provide a full 40 hours of daycare per week will be damaging.

Anand Shukla, acting chief executive of the Daycare Trust, said: "We were pleased to hear the minister confirm the government's commitment to early years services as a means to tackle social deprivation and improve children's life chances.

"However, we are concerned about the ability of parents in deprived areas to access childcare if there is no longer a requirement for children's centres to provide these places."

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