

Childcare allowance 'fails to address regional differences' ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The childcare element of the universal credit must take account of the varied costs of formal provision across the country, so parents in London can afford to access local childcare, the London Assembly has warned.

In its latest report, *Tackling Childcare Affordability*, the assembly's health and public services committee said with childcare costs in London up to a third more than the rest of the country, parents and in particular mothers struggle to go back to work and access early education for their children.

With the added burden of longer working hours and commuting time, the committee said that many parents on low to middle incomes find that working is unaffordable, resulting in the lowest level of maternal employment in the country. To overcome the problem the committee is calling on the government to make allowances within the universal credit that recognise the higher costs of childcare in the capital and also to ensure that the free entitlement to childcare is more flexible so parents can access it at more suitable times for those who work.

The committee added that the mayor of London has a role to play in encouraging employers to set up childcare voucher schemes.

The report states: "In London, the combination of higher childcare costs, longer working hours and commutes, a lack of extra financial support and a lack of informal care mean that employment is simply not a workable option for many Londoners.

"This is a particularly pressing issue for the capital's mothers who struggle to find childcare that is affordable enough to make work possible. The committee is therefore calling on local authorities, the mayor and the government to help tackle the barriers to affordable childcare to prevent Londoners from being locked out of employment."

The committee also recommended that London Councils should draw up a plan by June to promote good practice in improving access to affordable childcare and develop a register of organisations willing to consider managing nurseries linked to children's centres.

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