

The coalition needs to improve the quality of childcare, not just the cost ^[1]

There is a gulf in the quality of childcare available to parents in prosperous areas and those in deprived areas

Author: Lee, Lucy

Source: New Statesman

Format: Article

Publication Date: 10 Jan 2013

EXCERPTS:

"I don't need childcare, I have a wife." This was one of the responses to a recent survey we carried out for our upcoming report on childcare. The government is right to worry about the equality of choice for women when attitudes like this still exist.

Women's employment rates since the birth of a child never reach the same level as men's, even after their children are teenagers. Yet, increases in female employment have been shown by recent analysis to be the key driver of increases in wealth among low and middle-income families in the last 50 years. Finding the right kind of high quality and affordable childcare, which makes a return to work financially viable, is rightly high on the political agenda as we kick start 2013.

Analysing Ofsted inspection marks from last year, Policy Exchange has today highlighted a gap between the quality of childcare available to parents across the country. Three quarters (77 per cent) of childminders were judged "good" or "outstanding" by Ofsted last year compared to only 61 per cent of childminders working in more deprived areas. This is deeply worrying as we know that high quality early years education improves children's life chances. Research has shown that in terms of vocabulary development, the poorest children are the equivalent of 16 months behind those in the highest income families.

Our report also highlights that only 1 in 10 childminders and just over 1 in 5 daycare staff hold a qualification above A-Level equivalent. We need to attract more bright graduates into the early years profession, particularly into these deprived areas which are most in need of high quality provision. We should ensure that professionalization can be reflected in pay rates by prioritising early years education spend.

Despite citing quality as the most important factor in choosing a provider cost was more important for low-income families. This increases the pressure on some nurseries to provide the cheapest childcare in order to attract parents. If we want consumer choice to drive improvements, we have to ensure that all consumers, particularly those on low incomes, are genuinely able to make informed decisions based on quality and not cost. Publishing Local Authority childcare provider quality ratings will allow parents to compare providers in their area alongside Ofsted ratings in order to make a more informed decision and better hold Local Authorities to account.

Entitlement to free early years education is taken up less by the most disadvantaged families. Equally, we estimate that 52,000 recipients who already apply for Working Tax Credit (WTC) and are fully eligible for the childcare element do not in fact claim it. Furthermore, the HMRC have estimated that £265m was claimed erroneously in 2010/11, the majority in error, totalling 16.5 per cent of the total budget. Simplification of the system for claiming childcare support by introducing online childcare accounts, which the childcare element of WTC, employer vouchers, and any money parents, friends or relatives wanted to set aside for childcare, could be paid into. As a parent, you would not have to make complicated calculations about whether you are better off with vouchers or tax credits as the applications would be managed through one system and you could instantly access the most financially sensible choice.

The coalition has an opportunity to address these issues in its response to the Nutbrown Review next week. Let's hope the quality of childcare is at the top of its agenda.

-reprinted from New Statesman

Region: Europe ^[2]

Tags: poverty ^[3]

affordability ^[4]

quality ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/01/coalition-needs-improve-quality-childcare-not-just-cost>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/01/coalition-needs-improve-quality-childcare-not-just-cost> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/poverty> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality>