

Early years sector vents anger as childcare proposals leak out ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

nger and protest from the early years sector mounted over the weekend as apparent leaks to national press saw more details of the proposals expected in the Nutbrown response due out on Tuesday emerge.

Changes in staff: child ratios being reported were that it would be one adult to four babies and one adult to six two-year-olds in nurseries, while childminders would be able to care for two babies rather than one and four under-fives rather than three.

Other rumoured proposals were for all childcarers to have GCSE English and Maths, a new two-year qualification for Early Years Educators, and the introduction of childminder agencies.

The sector's ire was further fuelled by minister for education and childcare Liz Truss's comments about the need for young children to be 'educated' – interpreted by the Sunday Times in an interview with Ms Truss as meaning that toddlers should be taught reading and maths at a younger age 'reassuring mothers that their children are receiving an education and giving them the confidence to seek work'. The ST article was headlined 'Playtime is over in Britain's nurseries'.

Kids Allowed chief executive Jennie Johnson, **interviewed on the BBC** ^[2], said that the ratio plans would lead to 'a two tier system' where children in poorer areas got poorer childcare. Her nursery group would not cut ratios, she said, and already had many highly qualified staff.

Nursery World's LinkedIn group discussion on the likely proposals was united against cuts to ratios and the prospect of earlier formal teaching. One nursery manager said, 'This is so disappointing. All we have worked so hard for, about to be undone. Is there anything we can do to try to find more influential support? There is not one early years organisation that I know of endorsing these decisions and much research to show decisions and pressure of this kind on our youngest children will not work. "Teaching" them earlier does not mean they are ready to learn, in that formal way. I feel so sad about it all.'

Another said that Truss 'has not even listened to the Europeans who are reviewing the very policies she is advocating because they failed'.

Likewise, Twitter users weighed in against likely plans, with nurseries pledging not to cut ratios. 'As a nursery nurse I would not want the responsibility of 4 tiny babies alone, what about the safety aspect? Absolutely absurd,' said one nursery. 'Stop toddlers playing. Tories march on,' added poet and children's author Michael Rosen.

Denise Burke, director of United for All Ages, added, 'How will Liz Truss square the circle of improving the quality of childcare, paying staff more and making childcare more affordable to parents?

'Her announcement is simply rearranging the deckchairs. Deregulating nurseries and childminders so they can look after more children will undermine quality and won't make childcare more affordable. Evidence

from other countries like France and Holland shows that this is a move in completely the wrong direction. When France reduced ratios in 2009, there was a backlash from parents concerned about quality and higher sickness levels among childcare workers. The French government is now reviewing its policy. Similarly changes in Holland introduced in 2005 have not worked with many since reversed.

‘Surveys regularly show that parents’ biggest concern is the cost of childcare. But Liz Truss’s announcement does nothing to tackle affordability. Parents will have to wait until the Budget in March to see what the government will do to help families on low and middle incomes to pay for childcare.

‘The country is going through a baby boom so more families need childcare. Better more affordable childcare requires substantial investment by government as well as a review of how current funding is used.’

-reprinted from Nursery World

Region: Europe ^[3]

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