

Labour moves towards promise for free childcare for all preschoolers ^[1]

Author: Grice, Andrew

Source: Independent

Format: Article

Publication Date: 12 Dec 2013

EXCERPTS

Labour is moving towards a pledge to bring in universal state-funded childcare for preschool-age children if it regains power at the 2015 general election, The Independent can disclose.

Senior Labour figures say they want to include a "big offer" on childcare in its manifesto. Options include ensuring a children's centre in every neighbourhood in an improved Sure Start programme, reversing cuts which have seen about 400 of the 3,000 centres close since the 2010 election.

Labour's thinking will be heavily influenced by a study published today by the Institute for Public Policy Research ^[2] (IPPR), a think-tank with close links to the party. It argues that a huge expansion of childcare would pay for itself over time. Many mothers would go back to work if there were better affordable childcare. The IPPR calculates that attracting 280,000 back into the labour market would save almost £1.5bn in extra tax revenue and lower spending on benefits and tax credits.

The report proposes a shift in spending away from Gordon Brown's flagship tax credits, admitting that with hindsight it might have been better to spend the money on a Scandinavian-style system of state-funded childcare rather than giving people handouts.

Labour has already promised to increase to 25 hours a week the 15 hours of "free" childcare for three- and four-year-olds introduced by the Coalition. But there are growing signs that Labour will go further in a significant extension of Ed Miliband's campaign on the "cost-of-living crisis". Childcare is a front-runner to be included on Labour's 2015 "pledge card", along with the promise to freeze energy prices for 20 months and build at least 200,000 homes a year by 2020. Party strategists believe an expansion of childcare would be a big vote-winner in key marginal seats.

It is not yet clear how much money Labour would "invest" in childcare at an election when its spending plans will come under intense scrutiny. Universal free provision would cost billions. One option would be free childcare for those on low incomes and subsidised low-cost provision for the better-off. The party might decide to make universal provision a long-term goal.

Lucy Powell, the shadow minister for childcare and children, told The Independent: "My job is to make the economic case and the political case. Boosting childcare is good for the economy as well as good for families."

Speaking at the launch of the IPPR report, Jon Cruddas, the Shadow Cabinet member who heads Labour's policy review, will hint at the party's support for the plan, saying that Mr Miliband's "One Nation" approach means "public services which invest in prevention not wasting money for our failure to do so".

....

- reprinted from The Independent

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: election ^[4]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/12/labour-moves-towards-promise-free-childcare-all-preschoolers>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/12/labour-moves-towards-promise-free-childcare-all-preschoolers> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/13/12/condition-britain-interim-report> [3]

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