

Working at the edge: Childcare ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report in PDF ^[2]

Description:

Childcare in Scotland has moved up the political agenda in recent years with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 extending the amount of free early education available for three and four year olds as well as looked-after two year olds, those in kinship care and those from workless households, from 475 to 600 hours per year.

Evidence from citizens advice bureau (CAB) clients has however shown that for working parents the costs of childcare can be a route to in-work poverty. Despite the increase in the statutory guarantee of hours, a number of issues remain, which must be tackled to ensure that Scotland's children get the best start in life and their families can avoid poverty through work:

- **Affordability of childcare** - Working parents have sought advice from a CAB because they cannot afford the cost of nursery places or childminder's fees on their income.
- **Availability of childcare** - CAB clients have been unable to increase hours or take up offers of work because there are no childcare facilities available in their local area. This appears to be a particular problem in rural areas.
- **Childcare in summer holidays** - The school holidays can be a real difficulty for working parents. Clients on low incomes have reported problems finding and paying for increased childcare during the summer months.
- **Changes to Tax Credits** - Reductions in state support to top up family incomes as a result of restrictions to the tax credits system have led to working families being vulnerable to income shocks and financial difficulties.
- **Zero hours contracts and childcare** - The rise of the zero hours contract has led to some parents struggling to arrange childcare around their unpredictable hours, and having difficulties accessing support from the benefits system with a fluctuating income.

Citizens Advice Scotland recommends that action should be taken by local authorities and the Scottish Government to increase the availability of affordable local childcare across the country. CAS also believes that more should be done to make sure that the benefits system supports working families and ensures that parents do not face poverty because of the cost of childcare.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: poverty ^[4]
affordability ^[5]

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