

Cost of childcare pushing parents out of work, research claims ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

One in five parents paying for childcare are considering reducing their working hours or giving up work altogether due to the financial strain, a survey commissioned by 4Children reveals.

Of the 1,000 parents of children aged between 0-16 questioned, more than a quarter (28 per cent) said they would need to cut down on treats in 2015 in order to meet high costs. A further 16 per cent said they would have to cut back on essentials in the next year to pay for childcare.

Parents with young children aged up to four years are particularly in need of support, 4Children said, and with the general election four months away, they are looking to politicians to provide more help. Nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of the parents with young children surveyed are calling on parties to offer them more support with childcare costs, and 62 per cent believe it should be an election priority.

Anne Longfield, chief executive at 4Children, said, 'Childcare represents a huge financial challenge for most parents and our poll shows the real impact costs are having on family life. Removing parents' choice as to whether or not they continue to work after having children is not the answer for families or for the economy.

'The family vote will be key at the ballot box in May and 4Children is throwing down the gauntlet to politicians to set out how they will ensure childcare meets the needs of modern family life.'

Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said, 'It is concerning to see the impact that high childcare costs continue to have on the lives of many families. We firmly believe that all parents should be able to access childcare that is both affordable and high quality, however, the hard truth is that unless the Government starts investing what is needed into the sector, the challenges currently facing parents are likely to continue.'

He highlighted research commissioned by the Alliance that found that Government funding for the free childcare scheme only covers four out of every five places, with early years providers left to make up the shortfall.

'Many have seen little to no increase in funding for several years now, while business costs have continued to rise,' Mr Leitch added. 'As a result, in some cases, providers have had no choice but to increase their fees in order to stay afloat,' he said.

However, the Government disputed the research findings.

A spokesperson said, 'After 12 years of consistently rising childcare prices, costs are stabilising in England and even falling for some types. All three- and four-year-olds now receive 15 hours of free childcare a week, and we have extended this to around 40 per cent of two-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds. The introduction of tax-free childcare will give almost two million families the opportunity to receive up to £2,000 of support per child.'

'We are doing more than any other Government to tackle the cost of childcare, with funding for early education for two-, three- and four-year-olds rising by over £1 billion during the course of this Parliament. The evidence shows there are more people in work than ever before, in particular more women, and the gender pay gap has fallen to its lowest on record.'

Related link: High childcare costs mean one in five parents are considering reducing hours or giving up work altogether in 2015 [3]

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