

David Cameron's generous child care pledge doesn't add up, experts warn ^[1]

Author: Weal, Sally

Source: The Guardian

Format: Article

Publication Date: 14 Apr 2015

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

David Cameron's promise of 30 hours of free childcare a week to working parents of three-to-four-year-olds doubles the current offer of 15 hours, but questions are already being raised about the feasibility of the policy.

Childcare campaigners say the existing offer is already underfunded by the government, with parents and providers making up the shortfall; doubling it to 30, they warn, risks undermining the sustainability of the sector.

Under current childcare arrangements, there is a universal offer of 15 hours to all parents of three- and four-year-olds and 40% of the most deprived two-year-olds.

The Tories' election pledge doubles it - trumping Labour's offer of 25 hours - but the enhanced offer is more narrowly defined to families where all parents are working, thereby missing deprived children who might need it most.

Conservatives say that is equivalent to £5,000 a year per child, which would cost approximately £350m, a figure the party claims will be funded by curbing pension relief for the highest earners.

Neil Leitch, the chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, raised concerns about the financial viability of the offer and how it will be delivered.

He said: "Although in theory any steps taken to improve the availability of childcare are positive, we would seriously question how feasible this pledge is in practice.

"At the moment, government funding does not cover the cost of delivering 15 hours of childcare for three- and four-year olds, and so it has been left to providers and parents to make up the shortfall.

"It is difficult to see, therefore, how plans to double the current offer without addressing this historic underfunding can be implemented without leading to even higher childcare costs, or risking the sustainability of the sector altogether."

Childcare costs are a significant concern for parents, who may see this offer as a vote-winner. Yet early years experts caution that childcare is about more than simply enabling parents to return to work and say any election offers should focus on the quality of early education and care.

Leitch said: "The first five years of a child's life are crucial to their long-term development. As such, it is vital that whoever is in government after 7 May is willing and able to provide the investment that providers need to be able to deliver affordable, sustainable and, crucially, high-quality early education and care."

While welcoming extra support for parents with childcare costs, the Family and Childcare Trust warned that the current complex system was broken and in need of a full independent review.

...

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: subsidy ^[4]

funding ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/15/04/david-camerons-generous-child-care-pledge-doesnt-add-experts-warn>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/15/04/david-camerons-generous-child-care-pledge-doesnt-add-experts-warn> ^[2]

<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2015/apr/14/david-cameron-conservatives-childcare-manifesto> [3]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/subsidy> [5]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding>