

# Tory 30 hours' childcare pledge 'could put children at risk' as nurseries are starved of cash <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

David Cameron's flagship free childcare pledge could put youngsters at risk of poorer care because he's starving nurseries of cash, experts have warned.

Today's damning verdict is a blow to the Prime Minister's election vow of 30 hours a week of free care for three- and four-year-olds.

A report by University College London researchers warns the huge commitment is 'not viable' because the government 'is not adequately funding these free places'.

That means nurseries will have to keep pay barely above minimum wage for even their most talented staff, forcing them to seek work somewhere else.

Report author Charlie Owen told the Telegraph: "This risks children not being looked after as well as parents have the right to expect."

Last month the PM pledged his scheme would roll out as early as September 2016 - though Downing Street was later in a climbdown saying it would have to 'take time'.

Nurseries are being handed extra money to provide new childcare under the scheme.

But the government's rates are lower than what they'd usually charge, says the report by UCL's Institute of Education.

The report looked at how nursery staff are becoming better-qualified and deserving of better wages which they're not being paid.

By last year 75% of childcare staff now hold NVQ level 3 or higher, an increase of 12% since 2005.

Despite this rise, the report found average pay for private nurseries is still close to the minimum wage at an average of £5.60 an hour.

In the public sector pay is better at £7.80 an hour. Nearly all childcare workers - 98% - are female, and many of them are under 21.

Lead researcher Antonia Simon wrote: "Young women have seen a reduction in employment opportunities open to them due to the recession.

"It is possible that they are continuing in the sector due to the lack of alternative employment.

"We have already seen a decrease in the childcare workforce of 5% since 2005.

"As the economy gradually starts to pick up good candidates may move to better paid work in other sectors.

"This will make recruitment harder for providers looking to grow their workforce to cover the Government's increased offer of 30 funded hours per week."

She added: "The problem is that the provision of these places is not actually viable. The Government is not adequately funding these free places, so nurseries and crèches will have to raise their fees. Parents already pay high childcare fees and if the cost of usage increases many may not be able to afford to access childcare."

A Department for Education spokesman said the investment is 'significant', adding: "As part of that we have worked closely with the profession to help raise its status.

"As a result salaries have increased, numbers of qualified staff have risen, and a record number of providers are rated Good or Outstanding.

"But we are not complacent, we have committed to raising the average hourly rate providers receive – a move that has been welcomed by the industry - and are undertaking a review of childcare costs to set a new average hourly rate that is fair for providers and delivers value

for money for the taxpayer."

-reprinted from Mirror

**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** affordability <sup>[4]</sup>

federal programs <sup>[5]</sup>

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