

# Levelling the playing field: Equal access to childcare for disabled children <sup>[1]</sup>

One year update

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## AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF <sup>[2]</sup>

## Overview

Access to high quality, flexible childcare is important for children's educational and social development. It also supports parents to work. For disabled children, childcare is vital to help them and their families to thrive.

It is widely acknowledged that disabled children, including children with special educational needs, health conditions or developmental delay<sup>1</sup>, are more likely to fall behind their peers and experience social exclusion. To improve outcomes for disabled children and their families over the long term, effective support and intervention must begin in the early years.

Childcare is key to achieving these goals. Unfortunately, access to suitable high-quality, affordable childcare remains an insurmountable struggle for many families with disabled children.

In July 2014, the independent Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children brought to light the serious problems and failings across the childcare system for disabled children. Parent carers are asked to pay excessively high fees, which many cannot afford. The choice of suitable settings is limited at best. There is a significant shortfall of knowledge, skills, and confidence in the childcare and early years workforce.

This report sets out how policy has developed since the Inquiry. We focus on the Government's decision to expand free childcare for three- and four-year-olds in England to 30 hours each week. Our recommendations focus on how Government can ensure disabled children can access high quality, affordable childcare in the early years.

The doubling of the free childcare offer to 30 hours per week is welcome. However, it is imperative that the Government tackles the extra costs and challenges associated with providing quality childcare for disabled children. Unless sufficient funding is made available and structural reforms are made, the 30 hour offer will exclude and disadvantage disabled children in relation to their non-disabled peers.

This report is supported by new research that the current free childcare offer for three- and four-year-olds does not work well enough for disabled children. The research indicates that parents face issues of cost, availability and discriminatory exclusion. This, along with an inability to access top-up funding from local authorities and a lack of confidence in the quality and safety of care, contributes to undermining many families access to their free childcare offer.

Over £2 billion of new investment will be put into childcare provision in the near future through the expansion of the free childcare offer, the roll out of the tax-free childcare scheme in 2017, and additional support through the childcare element of Universal Credit from 2016. The Government must make a proportionate investment to dramatically improve access to childcare for disabled children once and for all.

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

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

special needs <sup>[5]</sup>

training <sup>[6]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/16/02/levelling-playing-field-equal-access-childcare-disabled> <sup>[2]</sup>

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