

Who gets it? Where is it provided? The full details of Welsh Labour's free childcare pledge explained ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Carwyn Jones has revealed the full details of Welsh Labour's pledge to offer 30 hours a week of free childcare to working parents.

The Labour leader insisted the pledge – which will provide childcare for all working parents for 48 weeks a year – would resonate with families. He was speaking after joining youngsters' playtime at Sam's Learning Tree Nursery in Rhyl, Denbighshire.

Party delegates are gathering in Llandudno, Conwy, for the party's conference this weekend.

Welsh Labour says its childcare policy would make Wales home to the most generous arrangement anywhere in the UK.

How is the 30 hours a week comprised?

It is made up of the 10 hours' Foundation Phase plus an extra 20 hours in a childcare setting.

Who is entitled to it?

Any parents working 16 hours a week or more with children aged three or four.

Who will provide the childcare?

There will be a wide range of providers, Welsh Labour say, including schools, childminders, playgroups and day care.

Arrangements in rural parts of the country differing from those in urban areas.

How many parents would benefit?

Labour's figures are that this would have an impact on more than 24,000 Welsh families.

It says the policy would also encourage parents to continue working when they might otherwise have been put off by high childcare costs.

What is the cost?

An extra £84m a year.

Why 30 hours a week for 48 weeks?

Mr Jones told WalesOnline: "We know for a lot of people that childcare is a big issue when they are trying to get back to work - either it's not available or they can't afford it.

"So what we are doing is going to put money aside so that parents who work 16 hours a week or more, if they've got children three or four years old, then they'll get 30 hours of free childcare a week for 48 weeks a year.

"We think that covers most of the year for people apart from the time that people might be on holiday and it takes a huge burden off the backs of people who are looking to get back into work.

How does this compare to the rest of the UK?

In England currently parents can get 15 hours a week for 38 weeks a year of free early education or childcare.

But the Conservative Government at Westminster, which takes charge of childcare issues in England only, has already announced it will double that total to 30 hours a week - delivering on a 2015 Tory manifesto promise.

Welsh Labour's plans would match that 30 hours a week but make it available for 48 weeks a year, rather than the 38 to be implemented in England.

In Scotland there are 600 hours a year available to parents of three and four-year-olds - 16 hours a week during term time. Local councils can also give parents other options.

In Northern Ireland parents of children aged three or four can make use of 12.5 hours a week free preschool education during termtime.

Is this separate to tax free childcare vouchers?

Yes. The UK Government currently offers all families in which both parents work and have children under the age of 12 20% of their childcare costs up to £2,000 per child per year.

This leaflet explains more about the UK Government's scheme, which is unaffected by separate promises to parents of three and four year olds in any of the UK nations.

Why are they spending so much money on it?

Labour insist providing that much free childcare would help mums and dads get back to work - which in turn would have a positive impact on the economy.

Mr Jones also said childcare had frequently been raised with him by parents.

The First Minister said: "For a lot of people it's a big decision whether to go back to work and pay childcare costs, or not go back to work at all.

"We have all been there with young children and we want to make sure that people are able to access the childcare that they need.

"In some parts of Wales childcare isn't there; this will help to stimulate the demand for childcare and create jobs, working with the existing system, not looking to set up something completely different in competition with what already exists.

"But we know that it will be a huge help for people when they are looking to go back to work."

Why not sooner?

Asked why Labour had taken until three months before the election to unveil the policy when it had been in office since the Assembly was created, Mr Jones said the pledge was the result of studying what else had worked.

"You learn as you go on," he pointed out. "We know that Flying Start has been a huge success and you look at schemes like that and think to yourself how can we build on that and extend childcare even further, and that's what we're doing with this pledge.

"Of course we want to make sure we appeal to as many people as possible, but that's not all that we do - we want to be able to help people as well.

"We know that for many, many people childcare is a big issue. For the wider family quite often people need help from grandparents and that's not always there because they might have moved away from where they were from originally."

What about policies for older people?

The Labour leader admitted the childcare policy had the most resonance of any of the six pledges unveiled at Labour's election launch last week.

But he insisted older voters were not missing out at the expense of young families, saying: "For older people, the pledge we have made is that we are doubling the capital limit for when people move into residential or nursing care.

"One of the things people have always said to me is 'Well, I have somebody and I'm going to sell their home when they move into a home and at the moment people can keep just around £23,000. We're going to increase that to £50,000.

"It means people will be able to keep more money when they go into nursing or residential care so they can then pass it on to their families - and it will be much higher than the case in England."

What else do Labour want us to know?

As well as the extra free childcare and doubling the capital limit for those going into residential care, Labour launched its election campaign with four additional key promises.

They said they would cut taxes for small businesses, introduce a treatment fund for life-threatening illnesses, spend £100m on improving school standards and fund 100,000 apprenticeships.

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