The government needs to get a grip on childcare [1]

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EXCERPTS

Childcare is really important for our future economic success and for ensuring a level playing field for all children before they reach the school gate. All the evidence shows that high quality childcare can help families get to work or to work more hours and give children a solid foundation to help them succeed in later life.

However, despite ministers' crowing unbelievably that we're in a "golden age of childcare" the reality is very different. The shine is coming off the Tories' childcare plans and it is children and their parents who will pay the price.

Tax free childcare promised by Autumn 2015 is now delayed well into 2017 due to ministerial bungling; the 15 free hour offer for disadvantaged two year olds is undersubscribed and failing to deliver for children in many areas; childcare places have fallen by 40,00 since 2010 with 10,000 childminders leaving the profession. Childcare costs have rocketed under the Tories with the Family and Childcare Trust Annual Childcare Survey reporting today that the price of a part-time nursery place for a child under two and an after-school club for a five year old is now £7,933 a year. This is more than a third of the pre-tax salary of a nurse, and 22 per cent of a soldier's.

The government's pledge of 30 hours childcare for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds building on the 15 hours that Labour delivered for parents and children is in real trouble as well. A third of working families who were promised this help before the last election will now not get it because ministers can't make their sums add up. Independent analysis for the Pre-School Learning Alliance has revealed there is a £480 million shortfall in funding for the Government's childcare plans over the course of this Parliament. At the same time, the Institute for Public Policy Research has warned that any shortfall in the childcare offer could drive down childcare quality and leave the needs of working families unmet, with worse outcomes for children and less choice for parents as the market shrinks.

The National Day Nurseries Association says that over half of childcare providers will not be able to deliver 30 hours free childcare putting a further question mark over the deliverability of the scheme. On top of this the Family and Childcare Trust report today highlights significant gaps in provision with more than a third of councils reporting a lack of free childcare places for three and four year olds up from 23 councils last year.

Childcare is a major barrier to our economic success yet all we get is talk from ministers that everything is golden when time and again experts warn of serious problems.

Taken together, these difficulties will be devastating for families up and down the country already feeling the squeeze in their household budgets.

We need a bigger vision for childcare: a system that delivers flexibility, price and stability for parents, while providing the very best start for children and closing the developmental gap that already exists in pre-school. Good quality childcare is an investment in our country's future - it is too important to get wrong. You can't fix a problem you don't acknowledge exists yet ministers are blind to the problems families, and our childcare system, face.

The government needs to get serious on delivering on childcare; it is the very least hardworking families deserve.

-reprinted from Newstatesman

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