

Should we increase childcare fees or increase parents' ability to stay at home?

Early childcare/education in the UK: a brief history

'Monitorial' schools were set up from the end of the 1700s by the Quaker, Joseph Lancaster, and the New Lanark worksite elementary school was set up by Robert Owen in the early 1800s. The National Society was founded on 16 October 1811, its aim:

- That the "National Religion" should be made the foundation of National Education, and should be the first and chief thing taught to the poor, according to the excellent Liturgy and Catechism provided by our Church.

It was the development of industry which first prompted schooling for young children, and discussion about the age at which compulsory schooling should begin. The view was put forward in parliament during the enactment of Forster's Education Act (1870) that:

- Sending children to school a year earlier than other countries in Europe would give them some sort of advantage in educational achievement.

A further reason, put forward in the Hadow Report (1911) for supporting an early start to schooling was the desire to prevent childhood ill-health by the introduction of medical inspections of young children whilst at school.

Government involvement

Nursery Schools

Legislation for the introduction of nursery schools for 2–5-year-olds was passed by Lloyd George's coalition government in 1918.

- However, the early start to compulsory schooling was paralleled by early leaving too, a view supported by:
 - The industrialists who needed young workers,
 - Many families who needed their children to work to earn enough to put food on the table.

The war years

The war years did give an impetus to nursery education:

- There was some expansion because of the demand for married women in the labour force.
- The expansion of nursery education became a high priority and resources were found.

For example in 1941 a new joint circular was sent out to set up special war nurseries financed by the Ministry of Health and the Maternity and Child Welfare Department.

- The full-time nurseries were open in some cases for 12–15 hours and only for children of working mothers.
- Part-time nurseries also gave priority to evacuated children and those of working mothers.
- In the emergency situation of the war, where married women were needed to work, the care of the children had been met by the nursery school.

- The idea that only mothers can look after children, lost its force during the war.

The 1950s and 1960s marked a decline in state provision for a variety of reasons:

- Economic pressures
- Demand for space and teachers
 - For the over fives during the 'bulge' years.

Private provisions

In 1960s, however, the Pre-school Playgroup Movement was formed:

- The lack of nursery places having given mothers the impetus to make their own provision.
- The continuous expansion of the movement and the commitment and dedication of those working in it has contributed significantly to greater awareness of the needs of the under fives.

Plowden Report in 1967

Interest in the state provision of nursery education came to the fore once again when stimulated by the Plowden Report in 1967.

- It recommended that nursery classes should be extended
- An immediate start on building of new nursery schools should be made in 'educational priority areas'
 - The idea being that good nursery schools could begin to offset the consequences of social deprivation.

From 1900's

The "Early Years Development and Childcare" provisions faced a number of challenges:

- Diminishing resources
- High-profile, funded activity
- Increasing expectations during the early 2000s
- Savage cuts to public spending
- Progressive closure of provision since 2011

"However" policy continued to claim progress on quality.

Current Childcare Provisions

Eligible Families can get up to:

- £500 every 3 months (up to £2,000 a year) for each of their children to help with the costs of childcare.
- This goes up to £1,000 every 3 months if a child is disabled (up to £4,000 a year).

If you get Tax-Free Childcare:

- You'll set up an online childcare account for your child.
- For every £8 you pay into this account, the government will pay in £2 to use to pay your provider. (favours the better off)

You can get Tax-Free Childcare at the same time as 30 hours free childcare if you're eligible for both.

Eligibility

Your eligibility depends on:

- If you are working
- Your income (and your partner's income, if you have one)
- Your child's age and circumstances
- Your immigration status

For families in England, receiving some forms of support:

- With 2-year-old children
- Free childcare or early education is:
 - 15 hours a week
 - For 38 weeks

Percentage of households by combined economic status

Not seasonally adjusted, UK, April to June, 1996, 2019 and 2020

	All households			Excluding student households		
	April to June 1996 (%)	April to June 2019 (%)	April to June 2020 (%)	April to June 1996 (%)	April to June 2019 (%)	April to June 2020 (%)
Working households	51.7	59.7	59.6	51.9	60.0	59.8
Mixed households	27.4	26.7	27.3	27.5	26.7	27.4
Workless households	20.9	13.6	13.1	20.6	13.3	12.9

Source: Office for National Statistics – Household Labour Force Survey

Universal Credit

Universal Credit aims to introduce:

- Greater fairness to the welfare system by making work pay. It will help to ensure that people are better off in work than on benefits.
- Being better off in work and makes it easier for you to start a new job or work more hours.
- As your take home pay increases Universal Credit will reduce gradually so you won't lose all your benefits at once if you're on a low income.
- There are no fixed hours thresholds, such as the 16 hours a week rule.

- Even working just a few hours a week will make a difference, as you move towards financial independence.

Historical Drivers for Childcare

- Religious education
- To prevent childhood ill-health
- Demand for married women in the labour force (high priority)
- Good nursery schools could begin to offset the consequences of social deprivation
- Increasing expectations of provisions from the early 2000s
- To decrease workless households (high priority)

Barriers to Childcare Provisions

- Fluctuations in the labour needs (1930s and 1970s high unemployment)
 - High unemployment low provisions
- Economic downturns when budgets are cut

Increase parents' ability to stay at home?

The literature has not revealed any policy to help non-working families.

Past policies have been directed towards:

- Supporting working families
- To encourage/motivate families to seek work

Universal basic income

Universal basic income (UBI)—defined as a transfer that is provided universally, unconditionally, and in cash—holds an attractive promise of change across many lines and it could offer support to all families. At present there is no indication that it could become a policy.

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