



Childcare Bill Second reading in the House of Commons – 25 November 2015

Quality in free early education and childcare – Briefing from the National Children's Bureau and Family and Childcare Trust

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Introduction

The Childcare Bill places a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to secure the provision of 30 hours per week of free childcare over 38 weeks of the year for three and four-year-olds of working parents. This includes the 15 hours of free early education currently available for *all* children aged 3 and 4 and therefore doubles provision for eligible children.¹ The National Children's Bureau (NCB) and Family and Childcare Trust (FCT) welcome an expansion of free childcare to 30 hours per week. We are working with the government to ensure that provision is inclusive, high quality and supports good outcomes for *all* children.

The quality of early education and childcare has a long-term impact on children's future development, influencing how well they do at school, the quality of their health and well-being, and their achievements later in life.² Evidence shows that current funding does not cover the full cost of delivering the current 15 hours of free early education and childcare. Research by Ceeda for the Pre-School Learning Alliance estimated that Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers face a *total funding deficit of £177 million* for the provision of the universal free entitlement for three and-four-year-olds.³ In order for early education and childcare to be of the highest quality, there must be sufficient funding for childcare places and significant investment in the early years workforce, to ensure that all who work with young children are well-qualified and experienced.

During the passage of the Childcare Bill in the House of Commons, we will be seeking to secure:

- Clarification from the Minister on the level of quality that will be required of persons providing the additional free childcare, including in relation to Ofsted inspection judgements, workforce qualifications, and the Early Years Foundation Stage

¹ Regulations are expected to set out that only families where both parents, or the lone parent, are in work, and where household income is less than £150,000, will be entitled to this extra provision.

² HM Government (2011) [Early Intervention: The Next Steps](#).

³ Ceeda (2014) [Counting the cost](#): an analysis of delivery costs for funded early years education and childcare.

- A commitment from the Minister that the government will put in place measures to increase the quality and capacity of the early years workforce
- A commitment from the Minister that new childcare funding rates, to be announced following the government's Childcare Funding Review, will sufficiently cover the cost of providing *high quality* childcare that meets the needs of *all* children, including for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Securing the quality of early education and childcare

Only early education and childcare that is of a high quality and delivered by well-qualified staff has a positive impact on children's learning and development and helps narrow the gap in attainment for the most disadvantaged.⁴ Whilst the quality of childcare is gradually improving⁵, there are still insufficient numbers of high quality free entitlement places for three-and-four-year-olds and disadvantaged two-year-olds, resulting in many children attending poor quality settings or being unable to access provision that meets their individual needs. 15% are attending settings that have not been judged good or outstanding by Ofsted.⁶ This situation is particularly stark for:

- *children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)* – 60% of parents of disabled children do not believe that childcare providers can cater for their child's disability;⁷ and
- *disadvantaged children* - childcare provision in deprived areas is less likely to be good or outstanding than in more affluent areas.⁸

The government is yet to announce the quality standards that will be set out in regulations underpinning the Act, leaving many early years providers and local authorities confused about what will be expected of them. In practice, all sources of funding will affect the quality of care providers deliver, whether it comes from free early education or the new 15 hours. NCB and FCT believe that robust quality standards should be maintained so that young children can access high quality care across both the existing free early education entitlement and additional 15 hours. Without this, there is a risk that a dual track funding system will be put in place, resulting in lower quality childcare and poorer outcomes for young children.

Questions for the Minister:

What framework will be used to assess whether a provider can deliver the additional 15 hours of free childcare?

Will only settings rated good or outstanding by Ofsted be able to deliver this provision?

Will providers delivering the additional 15 hours of free childcare need

⁴ Sylva K, Melhuish E, Sammons P, Siraj I, Taggart B (2014) The Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project: [Students' Educational and Developmental Outcomes at Age 16](#) by for (EPPSE 3-16+)

⁵ Figures released by the Department of Education in June 2015 show an improvement in the quality of free entitlement places. It will be important to ensure that the expansion of free childcare to 30 hours does not undermine recent progress in improving the quality of the free entitlement.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-numbers-benefiting-from-thriving-childcare-market>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-numbers-benefiting-from-thriving-childcare-market>

⁷ Family and Childcare Trust/Every Disabled Child Matters/Contact A Family (2014) [Parliamentary Inquiry into childcare for disabled children](#)

⁸ Ofsted (2014) [The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills Early years](#)

**to meet the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage?
Will regulations stipulate the hours within which providers must deliver flexible childcare?**

Improving the quality and capacity of the early years workforce

The Department for Education stated in its recent policy statement on the Childcare Bill that '*the main driver of quality in a setting is its workforce*'. Research shows that a well-qualified, confident and experienced workforce is central to the delivery of care that improves young children's outcomes. Ofsted has identified that settings with at least 75% of their practitioners qualified to Level 3 achieve better inspection results. Furthermore, the evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund showed that settings employing a graduate leader improved the quality of provision compared with settings which did not.

The effectiveness of the expansion of free childcare will be dependent on ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of highly qualified and experienced staff to work directly with all three-and-four-year-olds, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. However, a significant proportion of practitioners do not hold Level 3 qualifications, the minimum recommended by the Nutbrown Review into Early Education and Childcare qualifications (a third of childminders and 15% of nursery staff); and only 13% of staff in private and voluntary settings have a graduate level qualification compared to 35-40% in maintained settings.⁹

The House of Lords Affordable Childcare Committee and the Nutbrown Review into Early Education and Childcare Qualifications found that low qualification levels in the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector are having a significant impact on the quality of childcare.^{10,11} Whilst we welcome the government's commitment to review progression routes within the early years sector, we believe that more needs to be done to attract new entrants and retain experienced practitioners. NCB and FCT are calling on the government to put in place an action plan which would support practitioners to work towards a Level 3 qualification, increase the number of graduates leading practice in PVI settings, and ensure that every setting has access to a fully qualified SEND Coordinator. A similar plan to boost the quality and capacity of the health visitor, implemented by the Department of Health, has been very effective at recruiting and training 4,200 new health visitors.

Questions for the Minister:

Can the Minister provide clarification on the measures that will be put in place by the government to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of well-qualified and experienced staff to deliver free early education and childcare. Will this include a commitment to increase the number of Level 3 qualified practitioners, graduate leaders and qualified SEND Coordinators?

Can the Minister confirm whether the review of progression routes will encompass entry routes and funding for qualifications and training?

⁹ Department for Education (2014) [Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2013](#)

¹⁰ House of Lords (2015) [Select Committee on Affordable Childcare: Report of Session 2014-15](#)

¹¹ Nutbrown, C (2012) [Foundations for Quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications](#)

