

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a
Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol
Gofal plant a chyflogaeth rhieni: y
pandemig a thu hwnt
CPE(07)
Ymateb gan Pregnant Then Screwed

Welsh Parliament
Equality and Social Justice Committee

Childcare and parental employment:
the pandemic and beyond
CPE(07)
Evidence from Pregnant Then Screwed

1. About Pregnant Then Screwed

- Pregnant Then Screwed (www.pregnantthenscrewed.com) is a charity which protects, supports and promotes the rights of mothers who suffer the effects of systemic, cultural, and institutional discrimination through our various schemes and activities, including: A free legal advice service, a mentor scheme that supports women who are considering legal action against their employer, lobbying and campaigning for legislative change and creating experiences for mothers which help them rebuild their confidence and find work that works for them.*

3. Response To Terms Of Reference

- The extent to which current childcare provision in Wales sufficiently supports parents, particularly mothers, to enter, remain and progress in employment, and what changes might be needed to improve the effectiveness of childcare provision in doing this.
 - In September 2021, Pregnant Then Screwed, alongside a coalition of leading parenting organisations commissioned a landmark [survey](#)¹ of 20,000 parents on the impact of childcare costs on parents - particularly mothers - and children.
 - Whilst the sample size of Welsh respondents was small (549 respondents), it provided some clear indicators of the impact of Early Years infrastructure in Wales on parents ability to enter, remain and progress in employment.
 - 50% of Welsh respondents said that they had not applied for promotions that they would have applied for if they were not a parent as a result of their caring responsibilities
 - 20% said that they had taken work that is less well paid than the work they did pre-children
 - 33% said that their employer had either said or implied that their childcare responsibilities were incompatible with their job or position.

¹ <https://www.mumsnet.com/news/mega-survey-of-uk-parents-shows-that-childcare-is-failing-families>

4.6. We would ask the Government to commit to commissioning an independent review into the Early Years sector. We believe that this is the only way to really get to the bottom of how you can build a provision that is effective, sustainable, good quality and accessible to all.

4.7. We propose that the review covers the following six areas

4.7.1. Is the current funding model working?

Are we heading for a crisis in availability?

Is our childcare system affordable for parent employees?

Could further investment in the childcare sector improve outcomes for children?

Could further investment in the Early Years have a positive impact on our economy over the next 20 years?

Staff qualifications, pay and recruitment

5. What impact the Childcare Offer in particular has had in achieving the Welsh Government's objective of "helping parents, particularly mothers, to return to work or increase the hours they work".

5.1. Whilst we do not have data from before the Childcare Offer to compare against, we do know that 96% of Welsh respondents to our survey believe that childcare is too expensive.

5.2. It is also important to acknowledge that although the Childcare Offer benefits parents of children over three, it has not provided assistance to parents of children under three.

5.3. Coram Family and Childcare reported that in 2021 the cost of full time nursery place in Wales for a child under two now stands at [£227.64 per week](#)² and the Office For National Statistics (ONS) reported in November 2021 that the average weekly earnings for full time workers in Wales is [£571](#)³. This means that the average full time worker of a child under two can expect to lose 39.9% of their earnings to nursery fees. This calculation does not account for the [Gender Pay Gap](#)⁴ which currently stands at 7.9% for full time workers and 15.4% for all employees.

5.4. We recently spoke to Hannah, a midwife in Wales and mother of two who is unable to return to full time hours after maternity leave as childcare fees for

² <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Resource%20Library/Childcare%20>

³ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8456/>

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghour>

both of her children would cost almost double the household mortgage payment.

6. The impact of limited childcare availability on Wales' productivity levels.
 - 6.1. 73% of Welsh respondents to our survey said that difficulty obtaining childcare that met their needs was a factor in their decision to change their working commitments.
7. How childcare arrangements have affected parental employment during the coronavirus pandemic, particularly in relation to mothers. What lessons might be applied to provide better support during any future lockdowns or increased restrictions.
 - 7.1. Our recommendations for providing better childcare support in any future lockdowns, restrictions or pandemics include
 - 7.1.1. A review of the legal rights of parents to pause payment for unused nursery hours as a result of job loss, furlough or nursery closure in a pandemic without losing their childcare place as soon as they are able to use it again. Sufficient consideration would need to be given to Government financial support for nurseries on pre-pandemic attendance levels to ensure they are able to remain open after temporary periods of low attendance or closure.
 - 7.1.2. Higher consideration for the wellbeing of childcare workers who are unable to social distance in their roles. We would recommend that they are included on priority lists for PPE, testing and vaccines to better protect them, the children they care for and the wider families of both.
 - 7.1.3. Greater consideration for the children of key workers who could not access their usual nurseries during lockdowns. These families often had to travel much further to temporary settings at personal cost as well as facing new settling in protocols which can be distressing for both parents and children and often require time out of the workplace for parents.
 - 7.1.4. For the 50% business rates discount offered to the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors in the October 2021 spending review to be extended to childcare providers as well as proper consideration given to the Early Years sector in any further business recovery support programmes.
8. The impact of high-quality formal childcare provision on reducing the attainment gap, and the potential benefits of extending childcare provision to tackle inequalities.

- 8.1. According to research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2021 [31%](#)⁵ of children in Wales live in poverty. And according to the Welsh Government's own research in 2020 children who lived in households where the youngest child was aged 0 to 4 accounted for [half of all children](#)⁶ that were in relative income poverty in 2017 to 2020.
- 8.2. It is vital that any childcare provision with a fundamental aim of tackling inequalities does not further contribute to the percentage of children in child poverty by relying on a high percentage of household income having to be spent on childcare, particularly for families of children under three. The Government's own research concluded that [71%](#)⁷ of all children in Wales living in poverty had one or more working adults in their household.
- 8.3. The provision must also ensure that it does not potentially lock out some of the most disadvantaged children by creating barriers to accessing support for example where parents do not meet specific work criteria or where the child is not at a specific age.
- 8.4. With regards to the benefits of extending high-quality childcare provision to reduce inequalities and the attainment gap, a [study](#) by the Department for Education noted that "at school entry (age 5), attending pre-school improved children's academic and social outcomes with an early start (before 3) and attending a high quality setting being particularly beneficial...The pre-school influence continued during secondary school. Those who attended high quality pre-school had higher attainment and better social-behavioural development at age 14 (KS3)"
- 8.5. The key findings concluded that "at a range of time points, disadvantaged children gained from high quality pre-school. It reduced the risk of anti-social or worried behaviour and improved attainment. It was particularly important for children who had a less stimulating home learning environment or who were from families where parents had poor or no qualifications."
9. What Wales can learn from other models of childcare provision operating in the rest of the UK and internationally and emerging practice in terms of supporting parental employment, and the extent to which these models might be transferable to the Welsh context.
 - 9.1. In Sweden, the childcare model is based on access and affordability for all children, so the cost is never more than 3% of a parent's earnings. This

⁵ https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/poverty_in_wales_2020_0.pdf

⁶ <https://gov.wales/relative-income-poverty-april-2019-march-2020-html>

⁷ <https://gov.wales/relative-income-poverty-april-2019-march-2020-html>

means that [84%](#)⁸ of pre school children (aged 1 - 5) go to a formal childcare setting every day.

9.2. According to the latest OECD data, Sweden has the highest labour force participation rate standing at [89.2%](#)⁹. Sweden also ranks second in the PwC Women in Work [Index](#)¹⁰ which considers the following criteria: the gender pay gap, female labour force participation, the gap between male and female labour force participation, female unemployment and female full-time employment rate.

10. How financial and practical implications such as availability of childcare would need to be considered by the Welsh Government in any future policy developments to extend childcare provision.

10.1. We strongly recommend that the Welsh Government commit to commissioning an independent review of the Early Years sector as detailed in our response to question one, paragraph four. It is only through such a review that the Government can accurately assess financial and practical implications of future policy developments.

⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13603116.2020.1758805>

⁹ <https://data.oecd.org/emp/labour-force-participation-rate.htm>

¹⁰ <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2020/women-in-work-index-2020>