



**Support for childcare and the early years
Education Select Committee Inquiry**

**Unite the Union
Response**

January 2023

Support for childcare and the early years Education Select Committee Inquiry Unite the union Response

This submission is made by Unite the Union with over one million members across all sectors of the economy including health, transport, manufacturing, financial services, food and agriculture, information technology, service industries, construction, energy and utilities, local government and the not for profit sector. Unite also organises in the community, enabling those who are not in employment to be part of our union.

We would like to make the following points:

Policies to help and support families go hand in hand. Government should provide sufficient well-paid leave for ALL parents as well as free and affordable childcare, carers leave and pay and strong rights to flexible working and not just to request it.

Please also refer to TUC - A new deal for the childcare sector
September 2022

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/new-deal-childcare-sector>

Childcare provisions

- Employers should be encouraged to contribute towards childcare costs through facilities, subsidised places or allowances.
- Universal right to high quality free or affordable and accessible childcare that meet the needs of ALL parents and carers and children including shift workers and those on insecure contracts and disabled children.
- Properly funded childcare provisions.
- Extension of childcare provisions to older children as childcare needs continue to teenage years.
- Properly funded nursery and pre-school education
- Ring-fenced funding to increase the number of Sure Start centres.
- Decent rights for carers including paid time-off.
- As we are facing significant shortages in childcare places, the government should provide substantial funding to increase availability and affordability of flexible childcare.
- We are shocked by government proposal to relax the current ratio of childcare professionals to children. Especially given the shortage of staff; surely it's a

hard enough job and some will leave and also others will not be attracted to the role. Promoting this as a cost saving exercise for parents is appalling as only paying the full rate for funded childcare places would be the answer. The ratio is already too high and is putting pressure on staff and the care of children. Providing staff with decent wages and conditions would be the answer not an increase in their already heavy workload risking health and safety of staff as well as the children.

- Another worrying development is government's plan to allow: childminders to work in a range of locations instead of their own homes and have a flexible child to adult ratio; reduction in Ofsted inspections; reduction of childminder specific early years foundation stage by one-third; and the growth of childminder agencies with less regulatory processes. All this in the name of boosting the number of childminders and address the rising costs.

Tax Credits

- Removal of the two-child limit within universal credit and working tax credit.
- Reinstatement of the Baby Element and introduction of Toddler element.
- Increase the amount of eligible childcare costs paid by tax credits.
- Decrease the hours' eligibility for couples claiming Working Tax Credit.
- Increase in Universal Credit and tax credits for children.
- Universal right to child benefit, at a decent a level, for ALL families and for ALL the children in the family.

Employment Rights

- Day-one right to paid parental leave for ALL parents.
- Strong rights and protection for parents/carers who need to provide emergency childcare.
- A legal duty on employers to consider which flexible working arrangements are available in a role and publish these in job advertisements, with the new post holder having a day one right to take up the flexible working arrangements that have been advertised. If an employer does not think that any flexible working arrangements are possible, they should be required to set out that no form of flexible working is suitable in the job advert and why.
- All roles should be deemed suitable for flexible working unless it can be shown that the unavailability of flexible working is a proportionate means of

achieving a legitimate aim. Flexible working legislation would reflect objective justification as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

- Day one right to request flexible working for all workers, with the criteria for rejection mirroring the objective justification set out above. Workers should have a right to appeal and no restrictions on the number of flexible working requests made.
- When a request is accepted it should not become a permanent change unless it is specifically asked by the employee.
- Employers to regularly review and improve their work-life balance arrangements, and provide training for those managers responsible for the operation of these arrangements. Union reps should also get time off to receive this training.
- Strong social security system for ALL.