

PE2111/B: Fund early learning and childcare from 9 months

Petitioner written submission, 15 October 2024

The case for funding early learning and childcare from 9 months

The average full day of private nursery costs around £80 per day in Scotland, which is exacerbating families' financial pressures, particularly after the recent inflationary period. To manage this cost, women often make the decision to reduce the amount of paid work they do after maternity leave. However, the increase in costs across the board means that a 2-income household is essential for most families. In the absence of this, it is becoming increasingly difficult for families to maintain a decent standard of living¹.

While I started petition PE2111 based on my own life experience and the experiences of those around me, there is ample evidence that shows the benefits of further investing in childcare and the risks of perpetuating the status quo.

Below, I outline some of this evidence as well as the benefits that extending the funded childcare offer would bring about for women and the economy.

(Some of) The Economic Benefits of Funded Childcare

Having access to affordable childcare enables parents, especially mothers, to work more after maternity leave². Working mothers contribute significantly to household income³, improving financial stability and reducing the risk of falling into poverty.

When mothers work, it increases overall workforce participation rates, contributing to economic growth⁴.

The lack of affordable childcare creates significant barriers for women⁵, impacting their employment, financial stability, and overall well-being⁶. Addressing this issue is crucial not only for individual families but also for fostering a more equitable and prosperous society.

Investing in funded childcare can contribute to long-term economic growth. Women attend university in greater numbers, which means that increasing women's

¹ <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/news-events/blogs/caught-in-the-middle-how-middle-income-families-are-managing-the-rising-cost-of-living/>

² https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/WP201622.pdf

³ <https://www.ippr.org/articles/whos-breadwinning-working-mothers-and-the-new-face-of-family-support>

⁴ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9ca9b221-en.pdf?expires=1728642506&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=FD66A86679777A1475FA58FD08453A73>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/mar/07/uk-women-work-childcare-pwc-budget>

⁶ <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/Policy-Briefing---Childcare-Survey-2023.pdf>

participation in the labour market could lead to a more skilled workforce in the future⁷. Not to mention the many benefits early learning settings have on our children⁸.

Having accessible funded childcare will go a long way with stimulating local economies. It will have a ripple effect onto parents who will have more disposable income, which in turn will support local businesses.

Impact of lack of affordable and accessible childcare

The absence of affordable childcare can have significant negative impacts on women. Here are some key points to consider:

1. Reduced Workforce Participation

- **Career Interruptions:** Many women may leave the workforce or reduce their hours due to the high cost of childcare, leading to gaps in employment⁹.
- **Underemployment:** Women may take lower-paying or part-time jobs that offer flexible hours but do not match their skills or qualifications¹⁰.

2. Financial Strain

- **Increased Economic Vulnerability:** Without affordable childcare, families may struggle financially, leading to increased financial strain and rising debt¹¹.
- **Limited Career Advancement:** Women may miss out on promotions or opportunities for professional development due to their inability to balance work and childcare¹².

3. Mental and Emotional Stress

- **Increased Anxiety:** Worrying about childcare can lead to heightened stress and anxiety, affecting overall mental health¹⁴.
- **Isolation:** The struggle to find care can result in feelings of isolation, as women may miss out on social interactions and support networks.

4. Imbalanced Domestic Responsibilities

⁷ <https://www.swbg.org.uk/news/blog/is-investing-in-childcare-worth-it-a-summary/>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/international-experts-highlight-the-importance-of-a-childs-early-years>

⁹ <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/Policy-Briefing---Childcare-Survey-2023.pdf>

¹⁰ [https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/equal-pay-day-](https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/equal-pay-day-2023#:~:text=Our%20data%20shows%20that%20women,UK's%20pernicious%20gender%20pay%20gap.)

[2023#:~:text=Our%20data%20shows%20that%20women,UK's%20pernicious%20gender%20pay%20gap.](https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/equal-pay-day-2023#:~:text=Our%20data%20shows%20that%20women,UK's%20pernicious%20gender%20pay%20gap.)

¹¹ <https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/shocking-new-stats-about-the-cost-of-parenting/>

¹² <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/CtG-and-OPFS---A-childcare-system-for-all-FINAL.pdf>

¹³ <https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/4-in-5-mothers-in-scotland-say-childcare-costs-the-same-or-more-than-their-income/>

¹⁴ <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/Policy-Briefing---Childcare-Survey-2023.pdf>

- **Unequal Burden:** Without affordable childcare, women often bear a disproportionate share of caregiving and household responsibilities, perpetuating gender inequality¹⁵¹⁶.

6. Long-Term Economic Consequences

- **Career Stagnation:** Women who leave the workforce or work part-time may face long-term economic disadvantages, including lower lifetime earnings and reduced retirement savings¹⁷.
- **Perpetuating Inequality:** The inability to access affordable childcare can reinforce existing gender and economic inequalities, affecting future generations¹⁸.

7. Health Implications

- **Neglected Self-Care:** The stress of managing work and family without support can lead women to neglect their own health and well-being.
- **Increased Risk of Burnout:** The dual pressures of work and caregiving without adequate support can contribute to physical and mental exhaustion¹⁹.

Additionally, the lack of ELC can have an impact on children's development as children may miss out on early educational opportunities that foster cognitive and social skills²⁰.

Conclusion

The lack of affordable childcare creates significant barriers for women, impacting employment, financial stability, and overall well-being. Further investing in funded ELC to make this available from 9 months is key to addressing this issue, supporting individual families but also fostering a more equal and prosperous society.

¹⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8406085/>

¹⁶ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(23\)00050-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(23)00050-6/fulltext)

¹⁷ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9517/>

¹⁸ <https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/its-an-unhappy-mothers-day-as-new-data-reveals-that-mums-earn-43-less-per-week-than-dads/>

¹⁹ <https://www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n1972>

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/international-experts-highlight-the-importance-of-a-childs-early-years>