

# **PE2112/C: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland**

## **University of the West of Scotland written submission, 27 September 2024**

I am writing to bring to the Committee's attention recently published research, 'Juggling childcare and work: the challenges facing mothers-performers in Scotland'<sup>1</sup>, which I believe will be useful in your consideration of PE2112.

This research explores the challenges faced by working mothers in balancing childcare responsibilities with their professional commitments. While it specifically focuses on women working in the performance arts and entertainment sector, its findings and recommendations are relevant to a wider range of industries with atypical or non-standard working hours. A summary of the key findings and recommendations is provided below.

### **Expensive and inflexible childcare**

- Childcare that is both costly and inflexible is incompatible with non-standard work patterns, negatively impacting personal and financial wellbeing.
- Interviewees reported significant childcare expenses, with annual costs ranging from £10,000 to £12,500 per child. These high costs often force difficult decisions and 'professional sacrifices', such as opting out of work when childcare expenses outweigh the benefits of employment. Additionally, oversubscription of less expensive public nurseries leads to a reliance on more costly private options.
- There is frustration over the lack of flexibility in traditional childcare, which does not accommodate irregular or after-hours work schedules typical of non-standard arrangements. Funded childcare hours are rarely available outside the standard 'nine-to-five' window, meaning parents have to rely on informal childcare from friends and family or to pay private childminders to cover evening and weekend needs.
- Many interviewees found themselves paying for childcare they could not use due to work commitments, where they had to pay both for their child's nursery spot and for temporary childcare arrangements while working away.

### **Family-friendly workplace policies and practices**

- The research highlights shortcomings in family-friendly workplace policies and flexible work practices, which create significant barriers for parents who wish to remain in their chosen career path.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Aleksandra Webb. (December 2023). 'UWS-Oxfam partnership Report No: 13, Juggling childcare and work. The challenges facing mothers-performers in Scotland'. Available at: <https://www.uws.ac.uk/media/7123/report-no-13-juggling-childcare-and-work-the-challenges-facing-mothers-performers-in-scotland.pdf>

- Interviewees described employers as being “unaware of – or worse, disinterested in – mothers’ needs”, with a perceived “culture of silence” over motherhood and childcare.
- In practice, there is little support for mothers returning to work, including a lack of appropriate facilities at workplaces and limited flexibility in working hours to align with available childcare provision.

## **Recommendations**

The report provides a set of recommendations to shape policies and practices that support sustainable childcare solutions. Implementing these recommendations will help create an environment that meets the needs of parents and promotes inclusivity across the creative industries and beyond.

1. Increase financial investment: Ensure universal, high-quality, wraparound childcare by prioritising measures that make it more affordable for parents’ return to, and sustained engagement in, paid employment.
2. Improve access to flexible childcare: Expand childcare options to accommodate non-standard work patterns, including evenings, nights, and weekends, with special consideration for freelancers.
3. Recognise diverse needs: Promote greater recognition of the unique needs and experiences of parents working in non-standard employment within childcare policy and practice.
4. Co-design and co-evaluate childcare solution: Collaborate with parents to co-design and co-evaluate childcare solutions that align with the specific needs of those in non-standard forms of paid employment.
5. Promote and champion family-friendly working practices: Advocate for family-friendly practices, particularly within sectors characterised by non-standard forms of paid employment, such as the performance and entertainment sectors.
6. Support employers: Encourage employers to enhance visibility and value of caring responsibilities in the workplace, fostering environments that drive changes to provide improved and tailored support.
7. Implement evaluation mechanisms: Establish robust and transparent evaluation mechanisms to identify successful initiatives and areas requiring further progress.
8. Introduce a new National Outcome for Care: Create a new National Outcome for Care within Scotland’s National Performance Framework, supported by clear National Indicators to track progress in childcare provision.