

**UNISON *SCOTLAND***  
**CHILDCARE CHARTER**  
**March 2015**



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| <b>Children</b>  | <b>Free childcare in the public sector</b>            |
| <b>Parents</b>   | <b>Expanded parental leave &amp; flexible working</b> |
| <b>Workforce</b> | <b>Fair pay, training &amp; career paths</b>          |

# UNISON CHILDCARE CHARTER

Childcare should be provided free at the point of use by the public sector. The current system is patchy, complex and expensive. Parents in Scotland pay 27% of their household income on childcare, compared to the OECD average of 12%. We need a radical overhaul of childcare provision to ensure that it provides what families actually want: a safe nurturing environment for their children that doesn't cost the earth.

Workers in Scotland are currently facing a cost of living crisis. Wages are stagnant or falling and, while some costs are now falling, years of price increases for essentials like electricity and food mean that money is still very tight. For many with young children the high cost of childcare is a barrier to work or leaves many women working to only to keep a foot in the workplace. The UK has a relatively low participation of women in the workforce by EU standards. A Mumsnet survey showed that 67 per cent of mothers in work and 64 per cent of those not working say the high cost of childcare is a barrier to taking on more employment.

***Childcare should be provided free at the point of use by the public sector***

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For  
Children

**High quality childcare**  
**Free childcare delivered in the public sector**

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For  
Parents

**Extension of paid parental leave**  
**Improved flexible working rights**  
**Research care parents want and children need**

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For  
Staff

**Fair pay**  
**Training**  
**Preparation time and study leave**  
**Career paths**

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The high cost of childcare is not the only factor which creates a barrier for women trying to return to work. The system is patchy and hard to navigate. Places are hard find. Until you know what specific childcare is available then it's impossible to say what hours you will be able to work and vice versa. This is hard for those hoping to negotiate changing working patterns returning to their job and almost impossible for those trying to find new work.

There is no one place to go to find out what's available: local authorities don't even have to keep a list of what childcare is available, what it costs or monitor what demand for care is in their areas. There is no statutory obligation to provide/organise childcare for under-threes except for those whose parents are in receipt of certain benefits or are "looked after". Many working parents are forced to use private sector nurseries because they cannot buy extra hours on top of their free hours in local authority nurseries.

Public delivery is the most cost effective way forward: money won't be lost to profit, and is where we will be best able to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive service. Public delivery also makes it easier to ensure that the workforce is properly paid and well qualified. Public delivery also gives better protection to childcare workers who need all the same rights and opportunities, for example flexible working, as other workers. Good terms and conditions are how you attract and keep skilled workers.

While childcare should enable parents to work its focus must be on what's best for children and their development. There is already a substantial body of work in this area for example: *Joining the Dots: a better start for Scotland's Children* by Susan Deacon. The government is committed to preventative spending: free at the point of use high quality childcare offers massive future savings and also considerable immediate benefits for Scotland's families.

***Parents in Scotland pay 27% of their household income on childcare***

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Delivering high quality childcare needs a well qualified workforce. This requires decent pay and terms and conditions. This largely female workforce faces all the same challenges as other working women including balancing their own caring responsibilities with work and the high costs of childcare. Childcare workers need access to flexible part-time working. Many choose this work because it fits in with their own caring responsibilities. There needs to be a substantial increase in staff numbers to cope with proposed increase in childcare both the increased extra hours for children and the flexibility will bring changing patterns of demand. As many staff will want to work part-time the number of actual employees will be higher than the full time equivalent figure. We are therefore not convinced that the number of staff required to deliver expanded childcare is being properly calculated either.

***Developing the right childcare cannot be separated from improved maternity leave and flexible working rights***

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The childcare workforce, particularly in the private sector, is poorly paid. The knowledge and skills required, as with much work traditionally done by women, are not widely recognised or rewarded in the market. This needs to be challenged. Pay must reflect the skills, knowledge and reflective practice required to do the job. There has been progress in the public sector and one of the key reasons for our support for ensuring that the public sector delivers childcare is to ensure that this is not pulled back by expanding the low paid private sector.

Qualifications and career progression are essential to attract and keep experienced staff in the sector. This will require training and ongoing professional development. Cuts and centralisation in

further education are impacting on colleges' ability to delivery this training. Meeting the longer term aspiration requires investment, planning and investment in training now.

The degree level early years qualification and the recent clarification that it qualifies holders for leadership roles are welcome. Gender segregation in the workforce and its impact on the gender pay gap is a key issue in Scotland, but just as there needs to be support for girls in schools to consider a wider job options, boys should also be encouraged to consider childcare as a career.



Delivery of the new extra hours will require adequate funding. Working with children is not just about the time spent with each child. Workers also have to plan, evaluate, and monitor learning and keep detailed records of each child's progress. There needs to be wider recognition of what these jobs involve and adequate funding for the staffing levels and hours of work required to do the job.

**D**eveloping the right childcare cannot be separated from improved maternity leave and flexible working rights. Families need time to look after their own children and a fair work/life balance. The workplace penalty for motherhood is substantial. The answer is to change workplaces: a year's paid maternity leave, flexible working, part-time work and extended paid paternity leave will reduce the impact of motherhood on women workers and reduce the gender pay gap. Those who look after their own children full-time should also have that work and the skills required recognised when they attempt to return to work.

***Parents use private sector nurseries because they cannot buy extra hours on top of their free hours in local authority nurseries.***

For further information contact  
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