

Family Friendly Report Card

Name: Government

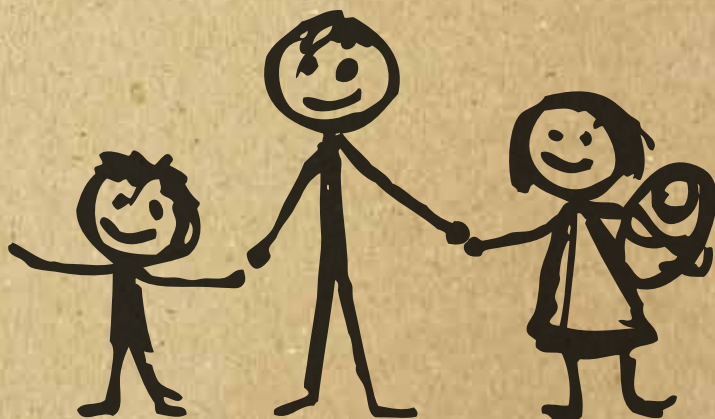
School Year: 2014

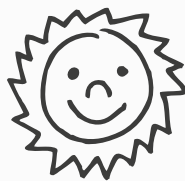
Good effort
but room for
improvement



Family and
Childcare Trust

Creating a family friendly UK





INTRODUCTION

This Report Card looks at how well we are doing as a country to support family life. Most families do a great job raising and caring for children and older relatives and they are where most people turn for help in a crisis. Although most families do well, we know that families need certain resources to withstand stress and thrive, including:

- ▶ A decent income
- ▶ Family-friendly work
- ▶ High quality public services, such as nurseries, schools and healthcare
- ▶ Family friendly infrastructure, including housing, transport and childcare

We have drawn on our own analysis of policy and official statistics, as well as the real experiences of families, through an online survey of parents. We asked their opinions on wellbeing, income, work, public services and their living environment. We also asked them to grade the Government on its effort to support families and to give suggestions for what would make Britain more family friendly.

Our Report Card is timely, as the Government has recently announced that it will introduce a family test for all new policies. We welcome this move and the Government's recognition of the importance of supporting families. We hope the Family and Childcare Trust's Report Card is a valuable starting point for debate about making this country more family friendly.

PARENTS' VERDICT:



By and large parents are satisfied with public services but they are feeling the squeeze on income and too many children live in poverty. These economic pressures impacted on the quality of family life and on children's outcomes.

Subject One:

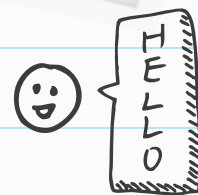
Income and poverty

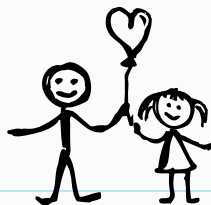
What families said

Parents told us that housing costs, childcare and food bills were all squeezing family finances. 72 per cent of parents said that their mortgage or rent was the main financial pressure on the family, with food and household bills coming second.

These financial pressures had a major impact on family life. Not only did some parents struggle to pay for food and other essentials, but many families could not afford days out, books and activities that enrich their children's lives and help them develop the soft skills that employers value. Our survey showed that:

- ▶ 15 per cent of parents struggled with the cost of school uniform
- ▶ 11 per cent struggled with buying books and materials for school
- ▶ 22 per cent of parents struggled with the cost of school day trips that are part of the curriculum





- 36 per cent of parents struggled with the cost of extra-curricular school trips

"I'd like to earn better wages so I do not have to do two jobs to keep up with inflation and so I can spend more time with the family."

How are families faring?

Income and expenditure

Real household incomes remain significantly below their pre-2008 level and show little sign of a recovery in living standards¹. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission says that today's children will face the prospect of having lower living standards when they become adults than their parents².

The main pressures on family incomes are food and household goods, rent or mortgage payments, clothing and utility bills³. For many working families with pre-school children, childcare is one of their biggest expenses. Low income households have been hit harder by price inflation than better-off households and benefitted less from low interest rates on mortgages.

Food banks continue to report increased numbers of users. Debt also remains a concern for families. There were more people with payday loan debts in 2014 than in 2013 and household debt is again rising after falling for a period during the economic downturn⁴.

Poverty

Families with children are the biggest social group in poverty. Of those living in poverty, 53 per cent are families with children⁵ and a quarter of children (25 per cent) live in poverty.

Patterns of poverty have changed in the last five years. In 2013, for the first time ever, there were more working families living in poverty than non-working ones. This is a consequence of real wages going down and reductions in support to working families. While unemployment has fallen, there has been a greater expansion in low paid jobs than higher paid work. The National Minimum wage was £6.31 per hour in 2013, but there were 24 local authorities in England and Wales where the hourly pay for those on the lowest income decile was below minimum wage levels in that year⁶.

Low pay impacts significantly on the quality of family life by increasing parental stress and forcing families to go without essential items. Parents on low incomes may also take on overtime work or a second job in order to increase their wages, which in turn further impacts on the quality of family life.

Government policy has been directed at incentivising work and addressing root causes of disadvantage through education policy and interventions targeted at disadvantaged families. All 5-7 year olds now receive free meals in English primary schools and early education has been extended in England, Scotland and Wales. These are important steps towards breaking down inter-generational patterns of disadvantage, but do not address low pay and rising living costs.

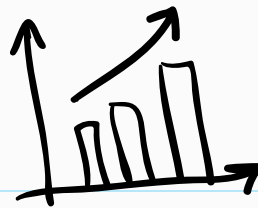
While families have benefitted from increases in tax allowances and higher income tax thresholds, many families with young children also rely on in-work benefits through the tax credit system. Some of these benefits have been reduced in recent years and many of these will remain frozen until 2016.

PARENTS' VERDICT:



The Government should be applauded for pursuing free childcare, extending the pupil premium and free school meals, but welfare reforms and stagnant wages have exposed many families to poverty and declining living standards. We feel that the Government can do much more to address these issues and help more families to move out of poverty.





Subject Two: Access to family friendly work

What families said

The majority of parents (61 per cent) were satisfied with their work-life balance but one in five parents wanted to change their work schedule, while keeping their overall hours of employment, in order to spend more time with their family. Greater access to flexible work opportunities was high on the list of parents' suggestions for making Britain more family friendly.

"We want more flexible working hours for men. My husband is in a male dominated industry and he is expected to work overtime every day, which means in the week he does not get to spend much time with the children."

How are families faring?

Employment

Over 90 per cent of couple families with children have at least one parent in work and 56 per cent of single parents with children are in work. Over the last ten years there has been a significant rise in employment among women with children under three (from 52 to 60 per cent) and lone parents (from 53 to 60 per cent) for whom childcare affordability is a significant factor in work decisions. There are significant regional differences in maternal employment, with only 63 per cent of mothers with dependent children working in London, compared with 73 per cent in the rest of the UK⁷.

Parental leave

Paid parental leave now stands at 39 weeks (with 26 weeks reserved for the mother), and an additional 13 weeks of unpaid leave for the mother or the father. From April 2015 parents will be able to share 50 weeks of leave between them, of which 37 can be paid.

The government estimates that a relatively small proportion of fathers—two to eight per cent—will use this shared parental leave⁸. There are financial barriers that prevent fathers from taking parental leave, but there is also a stigma attached to fathers taking leave⁹. A 2013 survey showed that fewer than 10 per cent of new fathers took over two weeks paternity leave, with the majority (58 per cent) feeling that their organisations did not support men taking time away from work after the birth of a child¹⁰.

Flexible work

Almost all research about parental employment highlights the importance of flexible work opportunities in helping parents balance work and childcare, a view endorsed by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, which sees it as being crucial to helping families move out of poverty. Children also benefit, with emerging evidence suggesting flexible work arrangements have a positive impact on children's learning, giving working parents more time with their children.

Since 2002 parents have also had the right to ask for flexible working, which has now been extended to all employees. Despite the legislation, a minority of employees have access to flexible work opportunities which include part-time employment, flexi-time, term-time working, job shares and opportunities to regularly work from home. Only a third (34 per cent) of workplaces allow flexi-time working in Britain¹¹.



Part-time work is the most frequent flexible work option, with 56 per cent of workplaces offering this¹². But many part-time jobs are of a lower status than full-time employment and less likely to lead to promotion. Official statistics show there are large differences between the wages of part-time workers and those who work full-time. In 2013 the median gross hourly pay for part-time female worker was £8.42 in England, but for a full-time female worker it was £12.32¹³. The lower status and pay of part-time work impact negatively on women's career prospects, leading to the 'motherhood penalty'.

Employees who request flexible work are also sometimes seen as being less committed, with a third of respondents (31 per cent) in a 2013 survey reporting that they have heard derogatory remarks made about flexible work in their workplaces¹⁴.

From flexible work to family friendly

Family friendly employment is about more than flexible work opportunities, and there are many other work practices that impact on the quality of family life. The UK has a long hours work culture, with employees working longer than their peers in most EU countries. Commuting time can also eat into family time, with some parents forced into long journeys to work.

Some 1.4 million UK workers are now employed on zero hours' contracts, with evidence suggesting that type of employment has become more prevalent in the last five years¹⁵. Zero hours contracts make childcare difficult to arrange, as work is often allocated at too short notice to arrange formal childcare.

PARENTS' VERDICT:



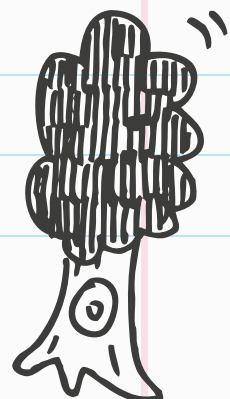
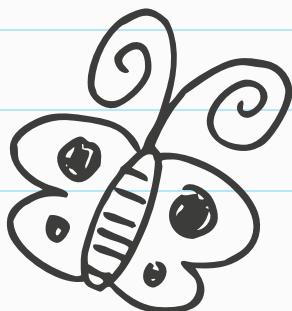
Often the family friendly work agenda is framed in terms of work-life balance and does not address pay and conditions. This is an omission that needs to be addressed if we are to move towards employment that is truly family friendly. The low status of part-time and flexible work and the role of fathers in family life also need to change.

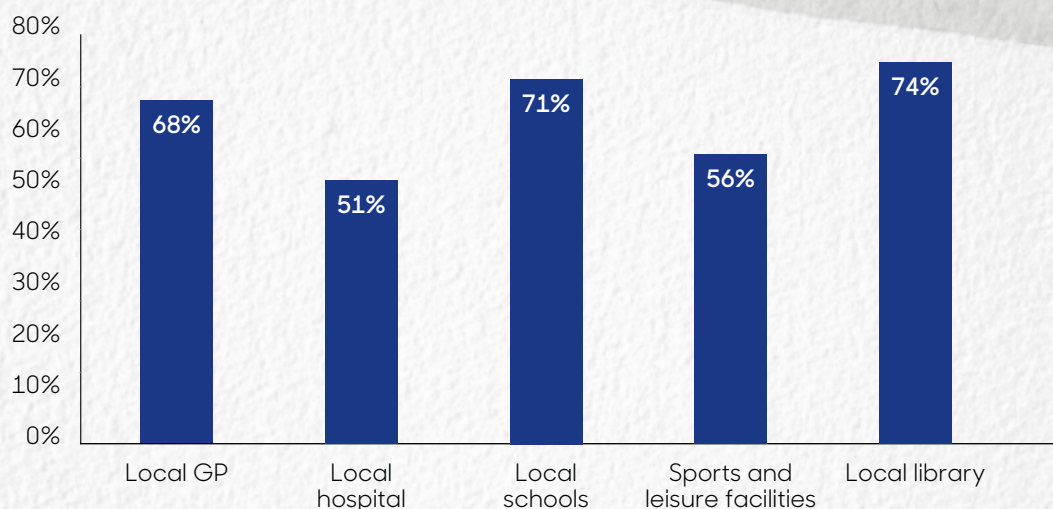
Subject Three:

High quality public services

What families said

Parents expressed the greatest satisfaction with their local public services and this aspect of 'family friendly' secured the highest mark. When parents were asked to rate their local public services, public libraries scored the highest marks, with 74 per cent of parents believing that they provided a good service for families.





Source: Netmums/Family and Childcare Trust survey of parents, October 2014.

The survey did highlight some issues of concern. Some 11 per cent of families had no open space, playground and park within walking distance and many parents wanted their GP surgeries to be open at the weekend, to make sure children did not miss school and parents work because of appointments.

How are families faring?

"Less pressure on homework so children can enjoy out of school time."

Education

For families, the main concerns about education are access to a good school and the quality of teaching. Variation in school performance puts pressure on parents to get their children into good schools. This is particularly the case in disadvantaged areas where there are fewer good schools.

The gap between GCSE performance for the poorest children and their peers remains wide. In 2013, some 60.6 per cent of pupils in England gained five grades A*-C at GCSE, including in English language and maths, but for boys in receipt of free school meals this was 33.5 per cent. There are similar gaps in outcomes in Wales. In Scotland not all local authorities keep equivalent data.

Some 97 per cent of three and four year olds now receive part-time free early education. There are similar levels of uptake in Scotland and Wales. The Family and Childcare Trust also welcomes the commitment in England, Scotland and Wales to provide free early education to targeted groups of deprived two year olds. In England, the 40 per cent most deprived two year olds became entitled to part-time free early education in September 2014, although there have been some challenges finding enough nursery places for them, particularly in London¹⁶. This extension of early education now means that disadvantaged children start compulsory education 'school ready' at five.

The Family and Childcare Trust also welcomes the Pupil Premium which in 2014 was extended to cover three and four year olds. This targets extra funding to schools who educate specific groups of disadvantaged children; primary schools receive an extra £1,300 for a child eligible for free school meals and £1,900 for a child who is looked after by a local authority. This money is meant to be spent on interventions to improve their educational outcomes.

We have concerns that the ending of AS Levels in England narrow the sixth form curriculum. The opportunities families are able to give their children outside schools also have an effect on educational outcomes. Sports, music and arts activities are vital for children's wellbeing and help them develop social skills that are valuable in the workplace.



"Costs of extra curriculum activities if they were cheaper more children could do them and parents would be less stressed."

Unequal access to extra-curricular activities was a major issue highlighted by parents in our survey, where 36 per cent of parents could never afford extra activities such as music lessons, and another 44 per cent sometimes unable to pay. Research by the Sutton Trust also found that disadvantaged children were less likely to receive private tutoring and engage in extra-curricular activities. Some 84 per cent of parents in the top social grades say their children regularly participate in an extra-curricular activity compared to 69 per cent in the bottom half.

Healthcare

The UK is a country of major inequalities in health outcomes between different sectors of society. These span a wide range of indicators: premature death, hospital admissions, lifestyle factors such as smoking and the uptake of preventative measures such as immunisation.

Infant mortality, hospital admissions for conditions such as asthma, accident and emergency attendance are all higher in the most deprived groups. Just 73 per cent of mothers in the most deprived income quintile (20 per cent) group start breast-feeding, compared with 89 per cent in the least deprived group¹⁷.

This Government has pledged to improve child health outcomes. There is a commitment to recruit 4,200 extra health visitors by 2015 to improve early support for new parents. The Government has also committed to weekend access to GPs surgeries by 2020, a move that was welcomed by parents. But international comparisons and worrying long-term trends demonstrate there is room for improvement, with poor health outcomes for too many children and young people. More than 30 per cent of 2-15 year olds are overweight or obese and this trend is worsening in all parts of Britain¹⁸.

Social care

The adult care system was under financial pressure before the economic downturn. Transfers of funding from the NHS have mitigated the impact of local government funding cuts but spending on social care has nevertheless fallen by 12 per cent in real terms between 2010 and 2014¹⁹. These cuts have led to a postcode lottery of care across the UK and have particularly impacted on women in their 50s who may be juggling work, caring for grandchildren as well as their elderly parents.

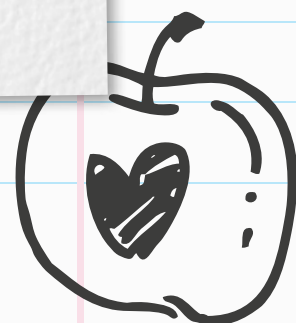
We welcome the Government's continued commitment to early intervention programmes targeted at the most disadvantaged families. There are 69,000 looked after children in care in England, 3,000 in Wales and 16,000 in Scotland. This group of children have poor health and educational outcomes. However, governments have tried to address this and in England there have been measures introduced to speed up the adoption process and improve the quality of care homes. These interventions are welcome, but they are long overdue and there is still much to be done to increase the life chances of this group.

Physical activity, play and green space

"Make family days out more affordable."

The UK has enjoyed a modest long term rise in participation in sport²⁰. However, sports and leisure services have been vulnerable to local authority budget reductions, which may mean that participation is put at risk. While the government's investment in physical education in primary schools is welcome, teenagers and young adults are not helped by this step. Older disabled children are particularly likely to find it difficult to participate in sport and leisure activities outside school²¹.

Unlike England, both Wales and Scotland have national play policies and duties on local authorities to ensure sufficient play opportunities for children. These help to protect valuable services but ensure reductions in spending are managed within a coherent strategy.





Our research with families shows that that they value green space: gardens, municipal and pocket parks, as well as open green space in the countryside. But the majority of local authorities have cut their park and playground expenditure over the last three years, with a 2013 survey by Heritage Lottery suggesting 86 per cent of them had cut their revenue funding and 56 per cent reducing capital funding.

It is also important to consider who uses green space and how they use it. The Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment's most recent survey showed that 41 per cent of adults in England had made a visit to open green space in the last seven days, although those from minority ethnic groups, urban areas and lower socio-economic groups were less likely to have done this. While 20 per cent of visits to open green space are accompanied by children overall, those who live in urban areas (22 per cent), minority ethnic groups (40 per cent) and lower socio-economic groups are more likely to include children²². While these sectors of the population make fewer visits, their use of open green space is more family orientated.

PARENTS' VERDICT:



There is a high level of satisfaction with the quality of public services, although more can be done to narrow gaps between the most disadvantaged children and their peers. The Government also needs to acknowledge the desire of families for a broad school curriculum and out-of-school activities.

What families said

Our survey showed that housing costs were the biggest pressure on family finances, although in 23 per cent of families, childcare came first or second as their largest item of expenditure. A car was a necessity for many families, with 47 per cent of parents spending more than 30 minutes taking their children to and from schools and nurseries.

The availability of childcare provision generated many comments from the parents in our survey, with out-of-school and holiday childcare being particularly difficult to find.

"We need better access to breakfast and afterschool care at a reasonable cost. My children's school hasn't got a club and that restricts the hours that me and my husband can work."

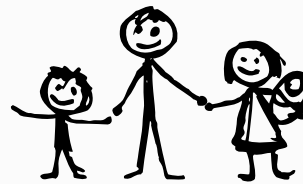
How are families faring?

Housing

Stable, decent housing is vital to families. The last decade has seen significant changes to patterns of housing. Many more families live in privately rented accommodation, with proportionately fewer owner occupiers and social tenants. In 2013 one in five families were private renters, this was one in 10 in 2007. The reason for this is simple – social tenancies are unavailable and buying a home is financially out of reach of many families, particularly in southern England.

Too much privately rented housing is of poor quality and regulation of this type of housing is weak. In England 33 per cent of private rented homes do not meet government's Decent Homes Standard compared with 20 per cent of owner-occupied homes and 15 per cent of social housing²³. Six months is the *de facto* length of a tenancy agreement for private renters and as a consequence many families in this type of accommodation are forced to move home frequently. This can disrupt children's education and social lives.





Whether owned or rented, the UK's homes are often overcrowded, which places stresses on families, as well as affecting children's health and educational outcomes. There is a shortage of family-sized social housing, although the proportions of three bedroom homes being build has increased to 29 per cent in England in 2011/12 from 17 per cent in 2006/07²⁴. Data from the 2011 Census showed that 8.7 per cent of households in England live in housing where they have one or more fewer rooms than they need, with 9 per cent of households in Scotland and 5.2 per cent in Wales not having enough rooms.

How we treat homeless families is an indicator of a family friendly nation. Compared with the 1990s there are now fewer homeless households in temporary accommodation, although in England, this long-term downward trend has now halted. At the end of June 2014 there were 58,430 households in temporary accommodation in England, 10,281 in Scotland and 2,180 in Wales.

Subject Four: *A family friendly infrastructure*

Transport

Families who have limited access to public transport and cannot afford a car can find it more difficult to find and keep work, their shopping options are reduced and put extra pressure and stress on family lives. Transport poverty may prevent children from taking up free early education or attending after-school enrichment activities.

Outside big urban areas, a car is a necessity for most parents, but data from the 2011 Census showed that 26 per cent of households in England and Wales do not have their own transport. In many rural areas nearly one in five households do not have access to their own transport.

Some public transport routes are subsidised by local authorities, but in many parts of Britain services have been reduced as a result of cuts to local authority budgets. In England, subsidised bus mileage has fallen by 23 per cent since 2009²⁵. This has left some families without easy access to work, shops and public services.

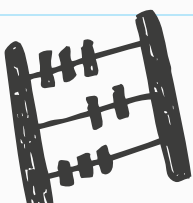
In 2013 some 1,926 children under 16 were killed or seriously injured on roads in England, Scotland and Wales, of whom the majority were pedestrians. While there has been a year-on-year decline in child road casualties in recent years, there are differences between social groups in the rates of child casualties, with boys, from the lowest socio-economic classes more likely to be killed as pedestrians.

Childcare

"Having more childcare available if you have to work shifts."

In Britain nearly 70 per cent of families with children under 15 years use childcare, with two thirds of them using formal – regulated – provision provided by childminders, nurseries, sessional crèches, pre-schools, out-of-school and holiday clubs. Many parents receive help with their childcare costs, including free nursery provision. At present working parents on low incomes can receive up to 70 per cent of their childcare costs through Working Tax Credit. Parents not in receipt of tax credit help are entitled to help with their childcare costs through employer supported vouchers and tax relief on workplace nursery costs.

Despite help with childcare costs, childcare remains expensive for families. The cost of sending a child under two to nursery part-time (25 hours) is now £109.89 per week in Britain or £5,710 per year²⁶. An after-school clubs cost an average of £48.19 per week in 2014²⁷. Over the last five years nursery costs have risen 27 per cent in cash terms.



The Government has acknowledged the impact of high childcare costs on families and announced new and welcome sources of help. In 2016, families receiving Universal Credit will see the level of childcare support increased to cover 85 per cent of costs. For families who do not qualify for tax credit or Universal Credit help, the present employer-supported childcare voucher will be phased out from 2015 and replaced with a tax free 'voucher' worth up to £2,000 per year.

The Government has also continued to take action to improve the quality of childcare. There has been a steady improvement in qualifications profile of early years staff, with the proportion of graduates working directly with three and four year olds rising from 34 per cent in 2010 to 48 per cent in England in 2014²⁸.

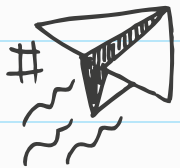
Less progress has been made to fill gaps in childcare provision. In 2014 just 54 per cent of local authorities in England and 28 per cent in Wales had enough childcare for working parents²⁹. Gaps in provision are most acute for disabled children and those living in rural areas.

"Keep children's centres open and have activities there for children, especially in the holidays."

VERDICT:



Costly childcare is still a major problem for families and prevents some parents returning to work after having children. Housing costs also put big pressures on family budgets.



Conclusion

Making the UK more family friendly

All of us – individuals, the Government, business and civil society – all have a role to play in making this country truly family friendly.

We asked parents for their ideas to make Britain more family friendly. We had over 1,000 ideas from parents, covering many different policy areas. The top ten suggestions were:

1. Dealing with the high cost of childcare
2. Providing more after-school clubs
3. Ensuring more affordable extra-curricular activities for children
4. Enabling all parents to have access to family-friendly and flexible work
5. Dealing with high housing costs
6. Providing better public transport
7. Better facilities for disabled children
8. Cleaner and more child-friendly parks
9. Introducing the Living Wage
10. Better childcare for parents who work shifts

We call on the Government to listen to parents and work with business, charities, families and individuals to make Britain the most family friendly nation.



Endnotes

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HAPPY!

