



All Party Parliamentary Group for Families in the Early Years

Chair: Lucy Powell MP

Vice Chairs: Bishop of Durham and Tim Loughton MP

Secretary: Ian Mearns MP; Treasurer: Earl of Listowel

Secretariat: Family and Childcare Trust

Meeting topic: How best to spend £6bn?

Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House, 30 January 2018 2-3pm

Lucy Powell MP who chaired the meeting, welcomed the guests and speakers, and introduced the topic drawing on evidence on how best to invest in early years to achieve the dual goals of supporting children's development and parental employment.

Lucy spoke on the Lost Generation report, which she wrote with the Social Market Foundation, looking at how early years policy needs to prioritise child development and focus on disadvantaged children. The current myriad of different schemes is less than the sum of its parts and providing poor value for money. She would stop tax free childcare and divert the funding to support lower earning households.

Kayte Lawton, Head of UK Policy at Save the Children spoke about upcoming work they have coming out on childcare and the findings of the *Lost Opportunities, Lost Outcomes* report. From talking to low and middle income families about their use of childcare, they found that the current childcare system is too complicated and there are gaps in support.

They found that government websites and childcare providers were the most trusted sources for information on childcare. There was generally a poor awareness among parents of tax free childcare and universal credit, but free entitlements were more easily understood.

James Scales, Head of Education at Centre for Social Justice spoke about their upcoming work with Save the Children on childcare policy, building our understanding of why parents do or do not use free entitlements. They found that there was significant variation in both how much parents knew about free entitlement and how actively they sought out information. Many parents were put off accessing the extended entitlement because they expected a complex system or struggled to get information. Their study also found that there was a limited supply of free childcare available and the addition of top up fees used by some providers were a problem.

They are considering possible solutions both around how to improve the system and the information to parents. They found that there was not enough clear information on how childcare support affects other benefits and that the application process needed to be refined, for example receiving advanced and direct payments for your childcare fees. They are now

looking at where best to provide information to parents, particularly those who are looking to move into work.

June O'Sullivan MBE, Chief Executive of London Early Years Foundation then discussed a broader argument regarding the confusion on what childcare is for. She feels that we need to prioritise pedagogy in the early years that is ambitious for outcomes for all children and effectively engages parents to be advocates for their children's education.

She felt that the sector is facing a recruitment crisis because there are not enough graduates and many of the qualifications are not of a high enough standard, meaning that the talent pipeline is dry. June called on the government to have an actual free education offer to avoid the current additional charges that many families are facing.

The meeting then opened up to questions from the floor to speakers. Some of the points that were raised were:

- The constant change in policy is going to have negative effects on the childcare system because they cannot keep up
- There are too many different qualifications for early years professionals and some are not recognised and do not prepare early years staff for settings
- There is a need for better support for children with SEND to access and afford childcare

Tracey Brabin MP, Shadow Minister for Early Years, then shared her view on the failings of the 30 hours offer and the two tier effect that is being created in nurseries as they have no choice but to prioritise the parents they know who can afford the extra charges and top up fees.

Lucy thanks the speakers and guests and drew the meeting to a close.