

Holiday childcare costs survey 2012



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This is the 11th Holiday childcare costs survey conducted by Daycare Trust, the national childcare charity.

Summary

Each year Daycare Trust conducts a survey of Family Information Services in England and Wales and Childcare Information Services in Scotland to find out about the cost and availability of holiday childcare. We use this information to monitor changes in childcare costs and provision on a yearly basis and identify differences between countries and regions in Britain. Our 2012 Holiday childcare costs survey found large gaps in the supply of childcare across Britain. Despite the obligations of the Childcare Act 2006 only a third (36 per cent) of local authorities in England and none in Wales reported that they had enough holiday childcare for working parents. While the average weekly cost of holiday childcare in Britain has not changed significantly since last year, the 2012 survey shows that parents are not always aware of the financial help that they may receive to make holiday childcare more affordable. Only 22 per cent of Family Information Services who replied to our survey were aware of whether holiday childcare providers accepted childcare vouchers.

Key findings

- Despite the obligations of the Childcare Act 2006, covering England and Wales, just 36 per cent of local authorities in England and none in Wales reported they had enough childcare for working parents.
- Significant gaps in holiday childcare provision persist across Britain, particularly for older children, disabled children and children in rural areas.
- The average cost of one week of holiday childcare in Britain is now £99.87.
- The South East is the most expensive region in Britain for holiday childcare with an average weekly price of £110.06.
- The most expensive holiday childcare provider identified by this year's survey charged £400 for one week of childcare.
- Holiday childcare costs have increased by three per cent since last year. However, there have been significant regional and national increases in costs, particularly in Wales and Yorkshire and Humberside.
- Childcare vouchers can make holiday childcare cheaper, but not all employers offer them and not all holiday childcare providers accept them. Just 30 local authorities across Britain could confidently say that they were aware of whether a holiday childcare provider accepted vouchers. Not all local authority Family Information Services provide information about childcare vouchers to parents.
- Half of local authorities in England have had their holiday childcare budget reduced with just over one third in Wales suffering the same fate. Around one fifth of authorities in Scotland have had their budget reduced.

Introduction

Thirty years ago, at the end of July 1972, two young boys of seven and nine drowned in the Regent's Canal in London. It was the start of the school holidays and these boys died because they had nowhere safe and supervised to play. Their deaths led to a campaign initiated by Bishop Trevor Huddleston, among others, to increase the amount of safe play space and school holiday childcare. Much has been achieved since 1972, but for many families across Britain school holiday childcare is either not available, or is unaffordable. While parents resort to different strategies to find childcare in the holidays – informal childcare from grandparents, or splitting annual leave – these options are not open to everyone. For many families holiday childcare is essential if parents are to remain in work.

Every year since 2002 Daycare Trust has undertaken a survey of holiday childcare to monitor its availability and cost. This report presents the findings of our 2012 survey.

Our 11th Holiday childcare costs survey shows that despite the obligations of the Childcare Act 2006 in England and Wales, and the Early Years Framework 2008 in Scotland, there is insufficient holiday childcare for working parents in many parts of Britain. Holiday childcare for older children and those with disabilities can be particularly difficult to find. Holiday childcare provision in rural areas is also patchy. Moreover, holiday childcare is also expensive – well over £90 per week in most areas – and costs much more than term-time childcare. For a family with two children, this could mean a cost of more than £1,000 over the course of the long summer holiday.

The findings of Daycare Trust's Holiday childcare costs survey need to be set against many policy changes that have been implemented in recent years. In England and Wales '*Choice for*

parents: the best start for children', the ten-year Childcare Strategy, set out ambitious objectives and aimed to increase women's labour market participation and the opportunities for flexible work. It also aimed to extend the availability, choice and quality of childcare and to ensure that it was affordable to all parents that needed it. The ten-year Childcare Strategy paved the way to the Childcare Act 2006, covering England and Wales. This placed responsibility on local authorities to ensure that there was sufficient childcare for working parents and those studying with the intention of returning to work. Undoubtedly, this legislation did result in a substantial increase in holiday childcare. Between 2003 and 2010 the number of holiday clubs in England more than doubled, increasing from 2,800 to 7,700. Over the same period, the number of registered places at holiday clubs more than tripled, increasing from 121,700 to 368,100 (Department for Education 2010; Department for Education, 2011).

In Scotland there is also a legal obligation for local authorities to ensure that parents can access childcare services. However, it is less prescriptive than in England and Wales: under the Single Outcome Agreement 2008, local authorities are expected to follow the Early Years Framework 2008. In doing so, they must pursue the long-term objective of ensuring that families have 'access to integrated preschool and childcare services in every community matched to an assessment of local demand'. The framework also states that access to services should not be restricted 'by disability or additional needs' or 'where people live'.

Action has also been taken to make childcare more affordable. Today parents on low incomes can have some of their holiday childcare costs met through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. But recent changes have reduced the level of this subsidy. The decision to reduce the maximum percentage of childcare costs that

are covered by the childcare element back to 70 per cent in April 2011 has resulted in an average loss of £546 per year for families (HMRC, 2011a; HMRC 2011b). This change may make holiday childcare unaffordable for families on modest incomes.

Faced with the financial burden of holiday childcare, many parents set up complex childcare arrangements during the holidays, using a mixture of formal and informal providers to suit their needs. Parents also use large portions of their annual leave entitlement or, if they are fortunate, utilise the option of term-time working. Despite the best efforts of parents a recent survey from the Department for Education shows that 21 per cent still find it difficult to obtain holiday childcare that meets their needs, while 29 per cent of families find it difficult to acquire holiday childcare they can afford (Department for Education, 2011).

The importance of accessible and affordable holiday childcare cannot be overstated; it is a vital service that allows parents to work and contribute to the economy through tax revenues. A recent study by Daycare Trust and Mumsnet (2012), which surveyed over 1,000 parents, found that 38 per cent had considered leaving their job due to the cost of childcare, while a further 12 per cent had actually left their job. It is therefore important that we monitor the changing shape of the holiday childcare landscape and ensure that local authorities and central government do more to improve the situation for parents.

As a consequence of these impacts of insufficient holiday childcare, Daycare Trust has long campaigned to increase the availability and affordability of this form of childcare. Our annual Holiday childcare costs survey enables us to gather evidence to feed into our advocacy.

Methodology

Between May and June 2012, Daycare Trust sent surveys to every local authority Family Information Service in England and Wales and every Children's Information Service in Scotland. The survey asked questions about the cost of holiday childcare and whether local authorities believed that there was sufficient holiday childcare available for specific groups of children. We asked costs to be broken down by ownership of the holiday childcare project, requesting information on childcare costs in the maintained sector (mostly school and local authority-run schemes) as well as in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors. We also asked questions about local authority budget cuts for holiday childcare. This year, too, we also asked questions about childcare vouchers, as we wanted to find out how many holiday childcare schemes accepted them, as well as how much information parents received about this form of financial help.

We received responses from 134 local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales. This is equivalent to a 66 per cent response rate. All regions enjoyed a response rate of 60 per cent or higher. Freedom of Information requests were sent to local authorities in regions with low response rates.



The cost of holiday childcare

The average weekly cost of holiday childcare across Britain is £99.87. This is an increase of 3 per cent from last year and just above the inflation rate of 2.8 per cent for May 2012 (ONS, 2012).¹ Generally speaking, holiday childcare provided by the PVI sector is more expensive with an average weekly cost of £108.25, compared with £88.24 in the maintained sector.

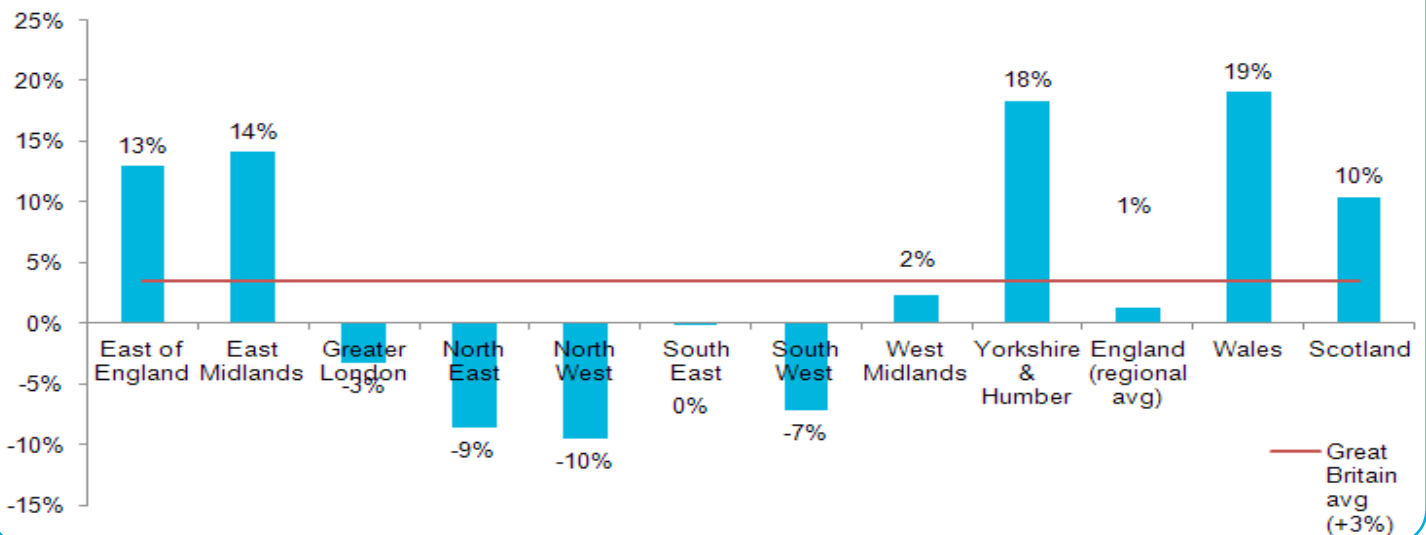
This may be explained by the fact that PVI providers tend to open for slightly longer hours than maintained providers and that maintained provision may be subsidised in order to provide low cost childcare for less affluent parents. PVI providers may also have higher costs as some have to rent their premises.

1. The measure of inflation used here is the Consumer Price Index. The CPI measures changes in the price of goods and services purchased by households.

Table 1: The cost of holiday childcare across Britain per week

Region	Maintained	PVI	Overall
East of England	£88.83	£108.24	£99.92
East Midlands	£96.00	£117.26	£106.63
Greater London	£82.22	£97.26	£90.95
North East	£81.43	£109.45	£96.99
North West	£84.87	£104.68	£96.30
South East	£93.47	£124.28	£110.06
South West	£90.09	£116.03	£105.66
West Midlands	£97.45	£94.17	£95.48
Yorkshire & Humber	£81.66	£100.05	£94.80
England (Regional Average)	£88.45	£107.93	£99.64
Wales	£78.54	£118.05	£102.25
Scotland	£96.11	£101.32	£99.58
Great Britain	£88.24	£108.25	£99.87

Figure 2: The changing cost of holiday childcare across Britain



England

The average weekly cost of holiday childcare in England is £99.64, although there is significant variation across regions in England. Greater London has the lowest average holiday childcare cost in England at £90.95 per week. This is the opposite of the trend observed for nursery care which sees London as the most expensive region in Britain. London's relatively low holiday club costs are likely due to a greater number of subsidised services in London that provide an affordable service for less affluent families, who would otherwise struggle to cope with spikes in their childcare bills during the school holidays. In contrast, the neighbouring South East region has the most expensive holiday childcare with an average cost of £110.06 per week.

Since 2011, the average cost of holiday childcare in England has increased by one per cent, although there is a great deal of variation between regions. In Yorkshire and the Humber, which had the lowest average costs in 2011, costs increased significantly, by 18 per cent – the biggest rise in England. In contrast, costs fell by nine per cent in the neighbouring North East region and ten per cent in the North West. Figure 2 (on the previous page) shows the changing price of holiday childcare across regions in England in more detail.

In England, the average cost of a week's holiday childcare in the PVI sector (£107.93) is more expensive than that provided by the maintained sector (£88.45). However, this is not the case in all local authorities or regions.

Wales

The average cost of holiday childcare in Wales is £102.25 – a substantial increase of 19 per cent from last year. Due to this large increase, holiday childcare in Wales is now more expensive than in England and Scotland. The rise in the average cost has mainly been driven by an increase in the cost of local authority/maintained childcare which has increased greatly by 32 per cent since 2011. We believe that this may be a result of local authority childcare in Wales being less heavily subsidised than in previous years.

Scotland

The average weekly cost of holiday childcare in Scotland is £99.58, making it less expensive than Wales and the English regional average. As with England and Wales, holiday provision in the PVI sector (£101.32) is more expensive than that in the maintained sector (£96.11).

The cost of holiday provision in Scotland has increased by 10 per cent in the last year, reversing the trend from the previous year when costs fell by 10.6 per cent. The increase in cost has been driven by a 22.3 per cent increase in the cost of maintained provision, up from £78.60 per week last year to £96.11 this year.

In contrast to maintained provision, the cost of PVI provision in Scotland (£101.32) has remained relatively stable, increasing by just 0.2 per cent.

Holiday childcare gaps

The Childcare Act 2006 states that local authorities in England and Wales must ensure there is enough childcare available locally to enable parents to take up or remain in work, or undertake education or training that may help them move into work.

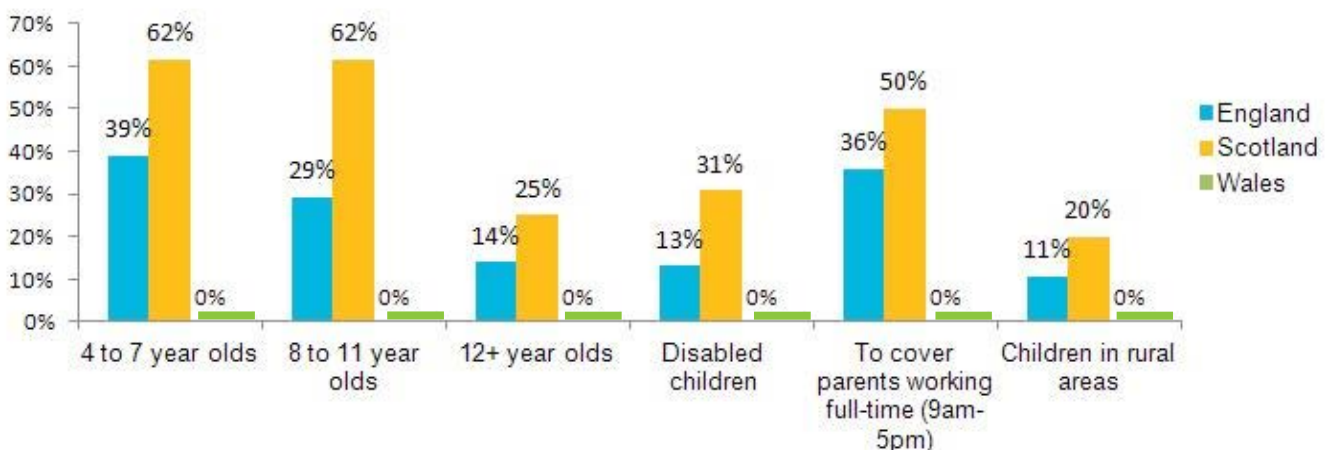
Holiday childcare is a vital service that enables parents to work during the school holidays. However, parents' needs differ depending on things such as their family work status and the amount of time it takes them to travel to and from work. Parents also want childcare that keeps their children occupied, entertained and stimulated. This is evidenced by the fact that 72 per cent of parents send their child to a holiday club because they enjoy it and it is good for their educational development – by far the most common reason for using holiday childcare (Department for Education, 2012). Much like their parents, children's needs and interests are also varied. We therefore asked local authorities about the sufficiency of childcare in their area for

different groups of parents and children, including older children, those with disabilities and children who live in rural areas.

Despite the obligations of the Childcare Act 2006 just 36 per cent of local authorities in England reported that they had enough childcare for parents working full-time. As Figure 3 shows there are other gaps in provision in England, most acutely for older children, children with disabilities and families living in rural areas. In many parts of rural Britain there is so little childcare that parents are almost entirely reliant on relatives for holiday childcare.

While holiday childcare provision has increased in Wales over the past two years, no Welsh local authorities that responded to the survey felt they had enough childcare across the entire authority for any of the groups of children. Despite much goodwill by the Welsh Government there is still much work to do there to ensure that all families have access to the childcare they need during the school holidays.

Figure 3: Percentage of local authorities with sufficient childcare across the whole authority for specific groups of children



In Scotland, too, there are many local authorities that do not have sufficient childcare for all children in their area. Even for children aged 4 to 11, where provision is most complete, more than a third of authorities in Scotland did not believe they had enough provision to cover all children in their area. More starkly, less than one third of authorities in Scotland said they had enough childcare to meet the needs of all disabled children, thereby failing to meet the target set by the Early Years Framework 2008 to ensure that no child is restricted access to a childcare service because of disability or additional needs. Our finding that just 20 per cent of local authorities in Scotland have sufficient childcare for children in rural areas also shows that more needs to be done to ensure families are not deprived of services because of where they live.

Local authority budget cuts

The cuts to local government budgets have resulted in many local authorities reducing their spending on childcare services. To understand the impact the cuts have had on holiday childcare services, Daycare Trust once again asked local authorities about changes to the holiday childcare budget for their area.

Last year, Daycare Trust found that a significant number of local authorities in England (62 per cent), Scotland (71 per cent) and, to a lesser extent, Wales (23 per cent) had cut their holiday play service budgets. Figure 4 shows that this trend has continued this year with 50 per cent of local authorities in England, 36 per cent of local authorities in Wales and 18 per cent of local authorities in Scotland reporting cuts to their holiday play service budget.

Figure 4: Changes to local authority holiday play service budgets 2011-12

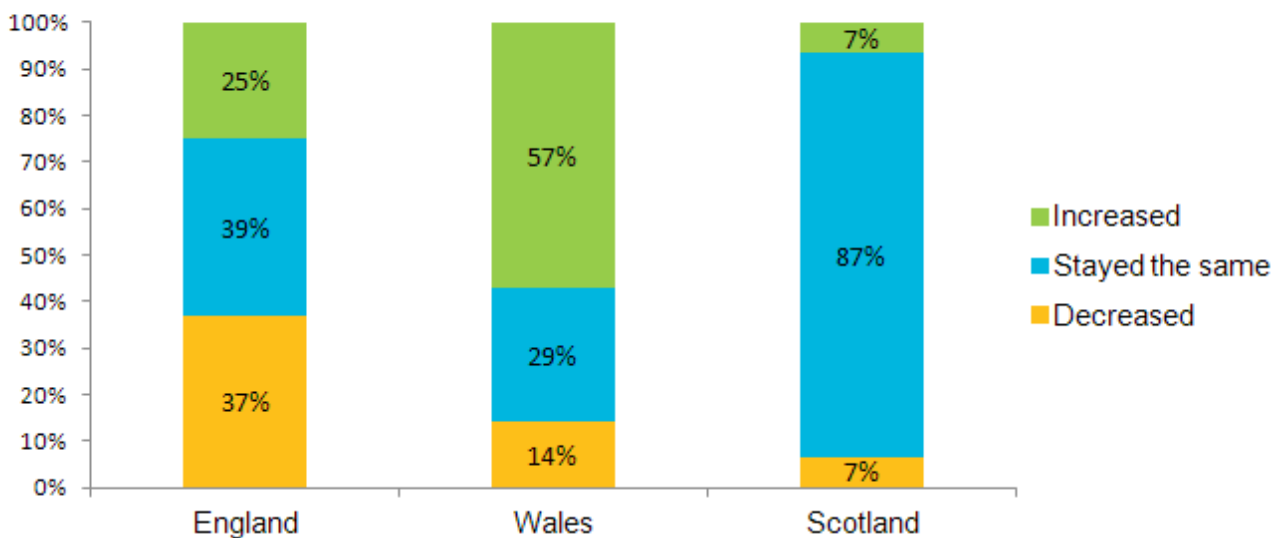


To better understand the impact of these budget cuts, we asked local authorities about changes in the number of holiday childcare places available compared to last year. Figure 5 shows that, in England, some 37 per cent of local authorities have fewer places available than in 2011. However, 25 per cent said they actually had more places available despite the fact that 96 per cent of budgets were either reduced or remained the same.

While these figures provide some evidence of the impact of budget cuts, we collected no data on the wider impact of cuts to holiday play service budgets, such as the quality range of activities on offer. It will not be until such data is made available in the future that we can truly assess the full impact of these cuts on holiday childcare services.

In Wales, fewer local authorities reported cuts to their holiday childcare budgets. Fifty-seven per cent of local authorities said they had more holiday childcare places this year than they did in 2011. In Scotland, the number of places has remained unchanged in the majority of local authorities, mirroring the fact that the majority of holiday play service budgets have remained the same.

Figure 5: Changes in the number of holiday play service places available



Coping with the school holidays

Many families 'shift parent' or split their annual leave in order to look after their children during the school holidays. Daycare Trust (2012) research has shown the important role that informal childcare (friends and family members) plays in helping parents manage the high cost of childcare. It also helps parents to fill gaps where formal provision is not available by providing a wraparound function. Grandparents are a particularly valued form of childcare for some parents. Indeed, 16 per cent of school age children receive childcare from their grandparents during the school holidays making them by far the most commonly used form of holiday childcare (Department for Education, 2012).

Family-friendly work practices can also play an important role in helping parents over the school holidays. As well as offering childcare vouchers (see below) family-friendly work practices include flexible working practices such as job-share, part-time work, home working or compressed hours. Term-time only work contracts are another option that can help parents over the school holidays.

Research has shown the benefits of family-friendly work practices, which include positive impacts on employee motivation and commitment, workplace relations, productivity and absenteeism (Budd and Mumford, 2006). Most working parents now have the statutory right to request flexible working. There has also been some growth in the number of workplaces where flexibility is accepted over the last decade, or parents are helped with childcare costs. However, there are still many workplaces which have seen little change in traditional patterns of working. Research also shows parents in lower income groups are much less likely to benefit from family-friendly work practices: the 2010

Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents suggested that 73 per cent of parents who received help with childcare from their employer had a household income of £45,000 or more. Only 5 per cent of families with an income of less than £20,000 a year received help from their employer. The same survey suggested that 33 per cent of mothers in managerial and professional occupations reported that flexi-time helped them work, compared with 13 per cent of mothers in elementary occupations (Department for Education, 2012). This trend is supported in other research that argues that better qualified parents have greater power when it comes to negotiating work practices compared to parents with fewer qualifications (Vincent and Ball, 2006). This is a major inequality that needs to be addressed if more parents are to be able to work.

A small number of children – largely those attending the new free schools in England – have shortened summer holidays of four weeks. There has been increased media debate about the merits of reconfiguring the school year to shorten the summer holiday period. There are educational reasons to support this, but it has been argued that such a move may make it easier for parents who have to find childcare. Daycare Trust believes that further research on the views of parents is needed – merely reducing the length of summer holidays risks just spreading the childcare challenge more evenly across the year. If the school year was reconfigured, this would have to be a national decision applied to all schools, as school holidays that vary from area to area risk creating even more challenges for parents.

Parents may also turn to more formal types of care for their children. Some parents increase their use of registered childminders during the school holidays. This is however, dependent on the childminder's capacity to take on the extra work. Parents may also use a range of open-access play schemes. These are often free for

children to attend, although small fees may be charged for trips and food. They typically provide children with a supervised environment where they may play freely or take part in supervised activities and outings. They offer children an opportunity to play, socialise and learn during the school holidays and are available to a broad range of children. However, many of these schemes do not operate for the entirety of the working day or for the whole holiday period. As such, they may be unsuitable for working parents that want full childcare for their children.

Parents that want to keep their children engaged

and active during the school holidays can also access leisure activities that are available in their local area. Sports clubs, arts and crafts clubs, dance clubs and drama clubs are available in most local authorities. In many instances these clubs may be free although more specialist clubs can be more expensive. Much like open access play-schemes, these activities may not be suitable for working parents requiring full-time childcare during the school holidays. Additionally, there is evidence that both open-access play schemes and the range of sports and leisure activities have suffered as a result of budget cuts.



Financial support

Parents also need to ensure that holiday childcare is affordable. Both the childcare element of Working Tax Credit and childcare vouchers are means by which holiday childcare can be made more affordable.

Working Tax Credit

Low income families can claim up to 70 per cent of their childcare costs back through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, although the actual amount of help available depends on family income. Table 6 shows the maximum amount of help per week that parents can get towards their childcare costs through Working Tax Credits.

The childcare element of Working Tax Credit has also been subject to recent changes which have reduced the amount of support for childcare that parents can claim. The level of support was cut to 70 per cent in April 2011 – prior to this up to 80 per cent of costs could be claimed. This cut means an average loss of £546 per year for a family with two children and could mean a loss of up to £1,500 for parents with the highest claim.

Tax credits and out-of-work benefits such as Jobseeker’s Allowance are being merged into a single Universal Credit between 2013 and 2017. The structure of childcare support under

Universal Credit will be very similar to the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, with a percentage of costs covered up to a maximum weekly limit, and a taper applied based on earnings. Although the rates for Universal Credit have not yet been announced by Government, during the passage of the Welfare Reform Act the Government indicated that it would keep the current parameters, that is support for up to 70 per cent of childcare costs, with a weekly maximum of £175 for one child and £300 for two or more children.

Precise details on the process for claiming Universal Credit are yet to be decided as regulations are still to be laid, but there are a number of positive developments which the Government has announced. First, the ‘hours rule’ which currently requires parents to work 16 hours or more per week to be eligible for childcare support will be removed. In the future, under Universal Credit, parents working fewer than 16 hours per week will be able to receive help with their childcare costs. This change, which removes the hours ‘cliff edge’ came about following significant campaigning from Daycare Trust and others in 2011. It will mean that around 80,000 more people will be eligible for childcare support, including parents working fewer than 16 hours because of job availability, caring responsibilities or health reasons.

Table 6: The maximum amount of help available towards childcare costs through Working Tax Credit

Number of children	Weekly limit on costs	Maximum percentage of costs you can get help with	Maximum amount of support
One child	£175	70%	$£175 \times 70\% = \underline{£122.50}$ per week
Two or more children	£300	70%	$£300 \times 70\% = \underline{£210}$ per week

Source: HMRC <www.hmrc.gov.uk/calcs/ccin.htm>

The Government has also announced that the maximum limits will be calculated monthly, which will enable greater flexibility for parents whose costs may fluctuate during the year for example, during school holiday periods. This is very welcome.

Childcare vouchers

Childcare vouchers are another form of financial support for childcare that some employers offer, either as a salary sacrifice or as an additional benefit on top of their wages. Parents receiving vouchers as a salary sacrifice receive tax free vouchers to pay for childcare. This can save parents up to £933 per year if they are a basic rate tax payer or £623 per year if they are a higher rate tax payer. These savings can be made by each parent, so a family with two parents on the basic tax rate could save up to £1,866 per year on their childcare bills.

One of the advantages of childcare vouchers is that they may be 'banked' during the year, thereby allowing parents to steadily save a significant sum towards expensive childcare

costs during the school holidays. Parents that use very little formal childcare during term-time but have large childcare bills during the school holidays may find that childcare vouchers are more suited to their situation because they can be 'banked' from when their child is born. However, not all employers offer childcare vouchers and not all childcare providers accept them. This year we asked some specific questions about childcare vouchers. We asked Family Information Services/Children's Information Services if they knew how many holiday childcare providers in their areas accepted vouchers. Out of those who replied, just 22 per cent of local authorities across Britain could confidently say that they were aware whether holiday childcare providers in their area accepted vouchers.

We also asked Family Information Services/Children's Information Services about the information they gave out to parents about childcare vouchers. Not all of them provided this information and some explicitly said that they did not.



Moving forward: our recommendations

Despite the expansion of the holiday childcare market over the past decade Daycare Trust's 2012 Holiday childcare costs survey has found persistent gaps in holiday childcare provision that breach the obligations set out in the Childcare Act 2006 and Scotland's Early Years Framework 2008. These gaps, coupled with the high cost of holiday childcare – at nearly £100 per week on average – and cuts to Working Tax Credit are placing a great deal of pressure on families during the school holidays, making it extremely difficult for many parents to find and maintain employment.

Daycare Trust believes that all levels of government can help make holiday childcare more accessible and affordable by:

Increasing the supply of holiday childcare

- All local authorities in England and Wales should fulfil their obligations set out in the Childcare Act 2006 and its statutory guidance in relation to ensuring there is sufficient childcare for working parents and those making the transition back to work. In Scotland local authorities should fulfil the obligations of the Early Years Framework 2008. Where private and voluntary sector providers are unwilling or unable to fill significant gaps in childcare provision, local authorities should do so.

- The Department for Education, as well as the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, should hold local authorities to account for failures to uphold legal obligations to provide sufficient childcare.

- The Department for Education, as well as the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, should map the provision of school holiday activities for older children and work with local authorities to ensure a sufficient range of activities for older children in all parts of Britain.

- Local authorities should calculate the impact of cuts to childcare and play service budgets, and not implement cuts that increase levels of child poverty in their area or risk children being left unsupervised.

Tackling childcare affordability

- The Government should reverse the cuts to the childcare element of Working Tax Credit so that up to 80 per cent of registered childcare costs are covered.

- The Department for Work and Pensions should ensure that the process for claiming the new Universal Credit works effectively for parents who need to pay for holiday childcare, for example by releasing payments quickly when costs rise suddenly during school holidays.

- Local authorities should collect information on which childcare providers accept childcare vouchers and use this information to encourage all childcare providers, but particularly holiday clubs and after-school providers, to accept them. Providers should also be able to register with the relevant regulator, even if they are only providing childcare for children aged eight and over, so that parents can use childcare vouchers and the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, to help pay for their childcare.

Promoting family-friendly practices

- Ministers should promote the business case for family-friendly work practices including term-time working and the use of childcare vouchers.

- Central government should research whether a reconfiguration of the school year would make it easier for parents to find childcare.

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www.computersharevoucherservices.com

For over 25 years, Daycare Trust has been championing childcare – campaigning for quality, accessible, affordable childcare for all. We do this because children are our future. We lead the national childcare campaign by producing high quality research, developing credible policy recommendations through publications and the media, and by working with others. Our advice and information on childcare assists parents and carers, providers, employers and trade unions and policymakers.

Daycare Trust offers a range of services which include:

- Professional consultancy service
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We also offer childcare information for families via an email service info@daycaretrust.org.uk.

To find out more about these services visit www.daycaretrust.org.uk.

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