

Lucie Stephens Submission to the Commission on a Gender Equal Economy Call for Public Services Evidence

Please find attached some links to reports and publications that may be relevant to your Commission on a Gender Equal Economy.

This paper contains a review of how childcare policy has evolved in England, the opportunity for and benefits of co-produced childcare and some practical examples from the UK and overseas.

https://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/c142e402b391ed2097_z7m6ibzpa.pdf

This interview on BBC World Service speaks in more detail about the parent-led approach <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04y7sv9>

This video, prepared by BBC World service features interviews with parents at Scallywags, a parent-led nursery in Bethnal Green, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04xlk2d>

This Guardian article provides more information about the parent-led approach at Grasshoppers in the Park in Hackney, <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jan/18/affordable-childcareindustry-london-hackney-co-produced-nursery-working-parents-grasshoppers-new-economics-foundation>

Our paper, '[Quality Childcare for All](#)', positions childcare as a universal basic service that has the potential to transform the lives of children and parents. It cautions that extra money alone will not tackle the underlying structural problems of our broken childcare system: a funding model which incentivises marketisation and an inadequate regulatory framework. Whilst more funding is clearly needed, before investing this we need to ask where that money is going. 84% of early years provision is now run by private providers, as a consequence of government policies with the express intention of accelerating the marketisation of childcare. From inequalities of access to the risk of collapse from debt-fuelled expansion, the evidence shows that we cannot trust the care of our children to unaccountable, profit-driven companies. Change need not entail a top-down restructuring led by central government. In the paper we argue for an approach that meets this shared need by exercising collective responsibility. This requires policy interventions that

- ensure true universality by approaching childcare as a universal basic service
- increase investment in childcare and shift funding to subsidise supply rather than demand
- support a democratic childcare sector by increasing the role of local authorities, co-operatives and not for profit providers
- ensure better pay, protections and a collective voice for childcare workers

The current approach to childcare means that the state is subsidising the private sector significantly. The likely trajectory of policy is that this subsidy will increase. This creates an opportunity for profit making that is at odds with the social purpose of childcare. It is time for childcare to be recognised as a universal basic service. At the very least the state should be driving a much harder regulatory bargain with providers to ensure that all those receiving subsidies deliver a clear social mission. The aim of future childcare policy should be to reshape the sector so that the extraction of private profits (and therefore of public subsidy) is, over time, removed altogether and replaced with a partnership approach in which the state, childcare workers and parents interests are aligned in new types of ownership structures to deliver a clear social mission.

Parent-led childcare models offer an opportunity to

- shift childcare from a transactional 'service' into a relational one, bringing together local families as a core part of its mission
- ensure that parents and childcare professionals can work together to design and deliver the affordable and flexible childcare that parents want
- ensure greater accountability and transparency in how childcare is delivered and the terms on which childcare professionals are employed

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