

**Policy briefings on
coronavirus and inequalities**

Childcare, Gender and Covid-19

Policy briefing from the UK Women's Budget Group and the New Economics Foundation

High quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education and care is an investment in essential social infrastructure, with long-term benefits for the economy and society. First, high-quality childcare helps to close the attainment gap between low-income children and their more advantaged peers, reducing inequalities and creating benefits that last throughout a child's time in school and beyond.¹ Second, it removes barriers to employment, particularly for women, who are still disproportionately responsible for unpaid care. Third, it creates more (well-paid) jobs in the sector.

Before COVID

- *The childcare system in England was not fit for purpose and was failing to meet the needs of children, parents, and the economy.*
- **High-quality childcare has the greatest benefit for disadvantaged children.** However, access to high-quality education and care is severely constrained by income, with the result that those children who would benefit most cannot access such care. 17% of providers in England's poorest areas were facing closure.²
- *Supply was not keeping pace with demand. **Only just over half (57%) of local authorities in England had enough childcare for the children whose parents work full-time and just a fifth (22%) had enough for the children of parents working atypical hours.***
- **Affordability was a key issue.** Childcare costs were around 30% of the income of dual-earner couples on median incomes and around 20% for 1.5 earner couples.
- *There was **not enough support for children in the most disadvantaged backgrounds**, including for children whose parents are not in employment.*
- **The childcare sector was underfunded by an estimated £662 million in 2019/2020.** Free entitlement hours for under-twos were underfunded by 37% and by 20% for three- and four-year-olds.
- 98% of the childcare workforce is female. Annual staff turnover in 2019 had reached 24%³ and **40% of childcare workers rely on state benefits or tax credits to make ends meet.**

During COVID

- **69% of childcare providers anticipate running at a loss** for at least the rest of the year.⁴
- **25% of childcare providers believe they will close** within a year.⁵
- Sutton Trust research shows that the lack of formal childcare provision during COVID has had '**the biggest impact on the poorest childcare**' with potentially lasting impacts on the attainment gap.⁶

¹ The OECD has identified a range of social benefits that can be derived from 'high quality early childhood education and care', including better health, reduced likelihood of individuals engaging in risky behaviour and strong 'civic and social engagement', with positive 'spill-over effects' for society as a whole. OECD (2011) 'Investing in high-quality childhood education and care (ECEC)

² [Nursery World \(Jun 2019\) Nurseries in poor areas facing closure \(https://bit.ly/2l4zBRD\)](https://bit.ly/2l4zBRD)

³ National Day Nurseries Association (2019) Nursery crisis: Stacking shelves more appealing than educating children (<https://bit.ly/3iVLuGo>)

⁴ [Early Years Alliance \(2020\) Parents set to face childcare 'chaos' as new data shows huge scale of financial losses facing early years sector \(https://bit.ly/2JzFCX1\)](https://bit.ly/2JzFCX1)

⁵ [Early Years Alliance \(2020\) Coronavirus: A quarter of childcare providers fear permanent closure within the year, new Alliance survey reveals \(https://bit.ly/384tvvn\)](https://bit.ly/384tvvn)

⁶ The Sutton Trust (Apr 2020) Social mobility and Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/3jYmAGe>)

They also highlight that **1 in 3 nursery closures will be in poorer areas.**⁷

- **81% of mothers require formal childcare to go to work**, yet in July only half had access to childcare, 33% of employed mums had lost a childcare place since March, rising to 48% for self-employed mothers. **46% of mothers being made redundant said that lack of childcare was a factor in their selection for redundancy and 72% have worked fewer hours** and cut their earnings due to lack of childcare.⁸

Urgent action is required to overhaul the childcare system. This requires emergency support for providers now, moving to a supply-side funding model in the medium term, as well as better training for the workforce and increased support for the most disadvantaged children, who benefit the most from high-quality childcare. In the longer-term, we argue for a universal and free system, in recognition of childcare as a public service on equal footing as school education.

The coronavirus pandemic in 2020 threw into disarray a childcare sector which was already failing to meet the needs of parents, children and the economy as well as grappling with issues of low pay, insufficient training and high staff turnover.

This briefing summarises the key issues – from supply to access, quality and affordability – and analyses the impact of the coronavirus crisis on the short- and longer-term sustainability of the sector.

This briefing refers to childcare in England. As childcare policy is devolved, policy in other nations vary.

What were the key issues relating to childcare prior to Covid-19?

Availability: Only just over half of local authorities in England (56%) report that they have enough childcare for the children of parents who work full-time, and less than a fifth (18%) have sufficient childcare for the children of parents who work atypical hours. Children with special educational needs or disability are

particularly under-served, with only 19% of local authorities having enough childcare for them.⁹

Affordability: Childcare in the UK is expensive and prices continue to rise above inflation. In 2020, the price of childcare rose between 4-6% for different age groups, well above the 1.4% inflation rate.¹⁰ The TUC found that for parents with a one-year-old child, the cost of their child's nursery provision has grown four times faster than their wages, and more than seven times faster in London (2008-2016).¹¹ High childcare costs are likely to leave families where both parents work on National Living Wage in deficit.¹²

A nursery place for children under two costs between 45% and 60% of women's average salaries in England, and between a fifth and a quarter for three- and four-year-olds with the free hours entitlement.¹³

The combination of lack of availability and high childcare costs can block parents' access to employment, with more than half (52%) of non-working mothers in England preferring to be in paid work if they could arrange the right childcare.¹⁴

⁷ The Sutton Trust (Jul 2020) Covid-19 impacts: Early Years (<https://bit.ly/385hm9q>)

⁸ Pregnant Then Screwed (2020) Covid, Childcare and Career (<https://bit.ly/3iUKu5p>)

⁹ Family and Childcare Trust (2020) Childcare Survey 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2MASdrg>)

¹⁰ Coram Family and Childcare (2020) Childcare Survey 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2MASdrg>) p. 17

¹¹ TUC (2017) Press release: Cost of childcare has risen four times faster than wages since 2008, says TUC (<http://bit.ly/2iolyrS>)

¹² Child Poverty Action Group (2019) The cost of a child in 2019 (<http://bit.ly/2WrdCal>)

¹³ WBG (Jul 2020) Crisis of care for women in England as lock down lifts (<https://bit.ly/3iDWJ7p>)

¹⁴ Department for Education (2018) Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents in England, 2018 (<http://bit.ly/331ebKm>) p. 15

Low-paid workforce and high turnover: Staff in the early years sector are low paid, earning £9.64 on average, roughly the same as elementary occupations (£9.55) and much less than the labour market average of £13.27.¹⁵ Recent research for DfE found 70% of childminders have earnings at or below the national living wage.¹⁶ As a consequence, the sector has been losing qualified staff to jobs like retail with improving pay and fewer responsibilities, and has a higher-than-average staff turnover rate.¹⁷

High turnover and low levels of qualification is worrying for the quality of childcare provided. The number of nursery workers qualified to Level 3 has plummeted to low levels in recent years, from 83% of the workforce to 52% currently.¹⁸

Underlying these issues is the core problem of how the childcare sector is structured, owned and funded, which is discussed below.

The marketisation of the sector: England is exceptional within Europe in the extent that it has deliberately shaped the childcare market to promote the provision of services by for-profit companies. 84% of childcare is delivered by for-profit providers, as opposed to 3% in Germany or 4% in France.¹⁹ The nursery sector in England is highly fragmented but international supergroups are now emerging and getting larger and larger as consolidation continues.²⁰

A key structural trend is the steady, continuing corporatisation of the market over time, as many providers have sought to expand their nursery brands locally, regionally and in some cases internationally. Major changes have occurred in recent years. Consolidation within the private market has been rapid. The two top companies – Busy Bees and Bright Horizons – now have 8% of

the market share and provide over 60,500 places.²¹ The childcare market in England was valued at £5.5 billion in 2017/18. Private sector (for-profit) nurseries generated an estimated income of £4.7 billion (85%). This is split between £3.3 billion generated by incorporated companies and £1.4 billion generated by sole traders/partnerships.²²

The rapid privatisation of childcare in England has taken place without any meaningful discussion of the potential risks.²³ But numerous studies of early years provision around the world have concluded that non-profit settings offer better quality care.²⁴ Childcare is a labour-intensive industry and therefore it is impossible to cut costs without cutting staff costs, either by employing fewer or cheaper staff. This in turn increases turnover and lowers the quality of the care provided.

In 2016 the OECD highlighted that a market-based approach to childcare leaves public authorities with less control over fees and less control over when and where services are provided. It identified that market dynamics can result in for-profit providers drifting away from less profitable areas, so that very young children in poorer neighbourhoods are sometimes left without any provision at all.²⁵

This is certainly the case in England, where childcare is of high cost but relatively poor quality, as noted by the OECD. High-quality childcare is often only available to wealthier families, because access to high quality provision is constrained by income and location. Our regulatory framework focuses on how childcare is provided but not on its quality; it does not have a responsibility to ensure equality of access for children and parents or ensure fair terms and

¹⁵ ONS (2020) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings Table 15 (Childcare and related personal services) (<https://bit.ly/3eRiWj6>)

¹⁶ Frontier Economics (2019) Providers' finances: Evidence from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2018 (<https://bit.ly/3gCCWn9>)

¹⁷ Government Business (Jun 2020) Staff turnover for early years sector concerning (<https://bit.ly/35ZgEb3>)

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Barrett-Evans, Dominic and Birlean, Diana (2018) *Childcare UK Market Report; Fifteenth Edition*, London: Laing and Buisson

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Penn, H. (2018) Quality of employment of childcare staff (unpublished)

²² Barrett-Evans, D and Birlean, D (2018) *Childcare UK Market Report; Fifteenth Edition*. London: Laing and Buisson

²³ NEF (2020) Quality Childcare for All (<https://bit.ly/2TPDY5t>)

²⁴ See for example: Cleveland, G., & Krashinsky, M. (2009). The Non-Profit Advantage: Producing Quality in Thick and Thin Child Care Markets. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 28(3), 440 - 462.

²⁵ OECD (2016) *Who uses childcare? Background brief on inequalities in the use of formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) among very young children* (<https://bit.ly/2TSzJpP>)

conditions for childcare workers. As a result, our childcare system is characterised by inequalities of access, poor quality, financial instability and poor working conditions.²⁶

What childcare support is available?

Childcare support for parents is a mix of in-kind support and cash transfers.

Universal Credit: Families claiming UC where one or both parents are in paid work can claim up to 85% of the childcare costs for their first two children. This is paid in arrears through the single UC monthly payment, which means parents have to pay for childcare upfront.

Universal Credit may undermine low-income parents' ability to work. UC is tapered as earnings rise, which means reduced gains to employment or to increase the number of hours worked, since families will be faced with higher childcare costs not covered by UC. The disincentives are particularly strong for 'second earners' – mostly women – who also face employment disincentives due to a single work allowance for the couple before tapering of UC starts.²⁷

Tax-free childcare: Cash transfers that act as a discount on the cost of childcare are available through the recently introduced 'tax-free childcare' scheme. This entitles some families (both resident adults need to be in employment) to 20p of support for every 80p they spend on childcare. Despite the name, this is independent of the tax system and all parents who are not eligible for childcare support under Universal Credit can use it. Parents pay into an online childcare account, which is then topped by the government with 20p for every 80p deposited.

This scheme replaces the similar but much less widely-available employer-based childcare vouchers.

Free hours entitlement: Parents can access in-kind support through the 'free entitlement' to early education. This is available for three- and four-year-olds and the most disadvantaged two-year-olds. All eligible families can access 15 hours per week for 38 weeks per year. Working families in which all adults are in employment are entitled to a further 15 hours per week since 2017.

While the extension of the free entitlement is a welcome move, and early evidence suggests a positive impact in working hours for parents,²⁸ there are significant concerns about equity. The stricter eligibility requirements for the additional 15 hours exclude around half of the poorest families that access the free 15 hours.²⁹

The regressive nature of this policy – with the poorest families excluded from additional hours is likely to widen the achievement gap.³⁰

Subsidised nurseries: Another important form of in-kind support is directly provided services via local authorities, such as Sure Start Children's Centres and free or subsidised nursery schools. However, many centres have been closed in the last decade as funding has fallen sharply.³¹

Underfunding of childcare provision

There are issues with the low rate at which the free hours entitlement policy is being funded.³² Under-funding is likely to undermine the sector's ability to provide care, and may also compromise

²⁶ NEF (2020) Quality Childcare for All (<https://bit.ly/2TPDY5t>)

²⁷ WBG (2018) Submission to the 'Childcare as Barrier to Work Enquiry' of the Work and Pensions Select Committee (<https://bit.ly/2PTpldk>)

²⁸ Department for Education (2018) Evaluation of the first year of the national rollout of 30 hours free childcare Research report (<http://bit.ly/36egJa5>)

²⁹ The Guardian (12 Feb 2017) "Parents on zero-hour contracts 'could miss out on free childcare'" (<http://bit.ly/2lbdPhc>)

³⁰ Education Policy Institute (2016) *Widening the gap? The impact of the 30-hour entitlement on early years education and childcare* (<http://bit.ly/2bkfttz>)

³¹ The Sutton Trust (2018) *Stop Start: Survival, decline or closure? Children's centres in England, 2018* (<http://bit.ly/34dMFKO>)

³² IPPR (2015) *Extending the early years entitlement - Costings, concerns and alternatives* (<http://bit.ly/1KTD10l>)

the quality of care,³³ a concern echoed by the House of Commons Treasury Committee.³⁴

Broader cuts to local government funding are also heavily impacting childcare provision (see below).

Early Years Funding Formula

The Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) is the mechanism through which central government allocates money to local authorities to pay providers for the 15- and 30-hours free entitlement for three- and four-year-olds. Most funds (90%) are distributed using a base rate rather than more responsive supplements, like statutory quality supplements to cover support of children with additional needs. This has a negative impact on local authorities' ability to drive up the quality of local childcare and results in underfunding for the free hours entitlements.³⁵

In 2019, the cost of providing education and care for under-twos was underfunded by 37%, and for three- and four-year-olds it was underfunded by 20%.³⁶ This amounts to a funding deficit of £662 million for the childcare sector in 2019/2020.³⁷ This underfunding is driving the price of parent-paid hours up, as providers try to cross-subsidise the funding shortfall of free hours from parent-paid fees.

Cuts to local government funding

Broader funding trends are heavily impacting childcare. Local authorities have had large reductions in funding for early intervention. Spending fell by a third (33%) on children's centres, from £835 million in 2014/15 to £560 million in 2017/18.³⁸

The impact on Sure Start centres (and other maintained provision and LA-provided services) has been and will continue to be severe across

England. Over 1,000 children's centres closed between 2009 and 2017.³⁹

Moreover, in general the more deprived the local authority the greater the financial retrenchment, leaving those with the highest levels of need the most limited resources.⁴⁰

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on the childcare sector?

The childcare sector has played a key role during the coronavirus pandemic. Over the lockdown, between 33-38% of nurseries and 51-53% of childminders were open for vulnerable children and key workers' families.⁴¹

The sector will continue to be vital now and once the country eases out of lockdown and more families return to work. However, the coronavirus pandemic has dealt a significant blow to the childcare sector and its sustainability is far from guaranteed.

Low occupancy rates: The sector faced minimal occupancy rates during lockdown, with an average of 7 children across settings, compared to 45 in December 2019. This represents an 11% occupancy rate, compared to the usual 77%. Following the easing of lockdown in the summer before the second wave, occupancy averaged 38% in first weeks, with a third of nurseries reporting levels of 25% or less.⁴²

Low occupancy rates result in larger financial deficits because, although nurseries have some flexibility to adjust staff to reflect child attendance, many costs are fixed (e.g. rent, utilities, insurance, admin and management labour). 69% of settings anticipate running at a loss for at least the rest of the year – a situation that is unsustainable for a sector that has faced funding challenges for many years.

³³ House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2016) *Entitlement to free early years education and childcare, Fourth Report of Session 2016–17* (<http://bit.ly/2mCOKLN>)

³⁴ House of Commons Treasury Committee (2018) *Childcare: Ninth Report of Session 2017–19* (<http://bit.ly/2oto98o>)

³⁵ Noden, P. and West, A. (2016) *The Early Years Single Funding Formula: National policy and local implementation* (<http://bit.ly/2mWoddy>)

³⁶ Ceeda (2019) *Counting the cost in spring 2019* (<https://bit.ly/2DD13Dz>)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Action for Children (2019) *Closed Doors: Children's centre usage between 2014/15 and 2017/18* (<https://bit.ly/3ikihZz>)

³⁹ The Sutton Trust (2018) *Stop Start: Survival, decline or closure? Children's centres in England, 2018* (<http://bit.ly/34dMFK0>)

⁴⁰ Ceeda (2019) *Independent research about and for the early years sector - Annual Report 2019* (<https://bit.ly/3gD9eOF>)

⁴¹ Ceeda (2020) *Sustainability of the early education and childcare sector during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond* (<https://bit.ly/3kxfBpo>)

⁴² Ibid.

Lack of government support: The government continued to pay the free hours entitlement to providers, regardless of children attending. Childcare providers were able to access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), but staff paid by the free entitlement hours were not eligible for furlough. This introduced considerable administrative uncertainty for providers since childcare provision is cross-subsidised across ages (see above) and therefore there is no clear division between ‘free hours’ and parent-paid hours.

As exposed above, government funding to cover free entitlements didn’t cover the full cost of delivering them in the first place. Even in the highly unlikely event occupancy rates return to their 2019 equivalent, providers still face a funding shortage of 37% and 20% for funded places for two-year-olds and three and four respectively.⁴³

Accelerated trend of fewer providers: Financial sustainability in the sector prior to the coronavirus pandemic was a concerning problem, with over a quarter of nurseries reporting a financial loss and nearly one in two feeling less confident about their financial performance in the next 12 months.⁴⁴ This has resulted in a downward trend in childcare providers on the Early Years Register and greater concentration in the industry. The primary reason has been an ever larger gap between the delivery cost of a ‘free hours’ place and the hourly rate funded for that place.

In April, during lockdown, a survey found one in four childcare providers expected to close in the next 12 months.⁴⁵

With occupancy rates down and anticipated to continue well below 2019 levels as lockdown restrictions continue, many providers will be at high risk of closure. Many providers will also be unable to provide childcare to a good standard.

Larger providers may be able to resist by cutting costs, but at the expense of quality and local responsiveness. Deprived areas will be most affected, as prospect for future private sector investment is low in these areas and Sure Start centres become increasingly rare.

What the Government should do

Childcare providers are currently facing an impossible situation with the responsibility of delivering a critical public service and enabling key workers to perform their vital roles, whilst facing the financial challenges of a private business. 81% of childcare providers have reopened but average occupancy rates in nurseries are at 60% of usual numbers for this time of year and for childminders this is down to 44%.⁴⁶

The limited support measures introduced by the government so far have been inadequate for children, parents, and childcare providers. Other governments with similar marketised childcare provision have taken more decisive steps to protect this essential sector:

Republic of Ireland: The Irish government put in place a temporary ‘Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme’ to fund childcare workers’ salaries (and lifted to at least living wage where needed). It also made additional contributions towards the ongoing costs and overheads of nurseries (calculated as 15% of staff salary costs). The policy was partly driven by concerns about large numbers of childcare workers moving on to benefits if made redundant and to stop parents being liable for childcare fees during the lockdown. Payments were linked to staff and running costs, not the number of children in settings.

Wales: The devolved government redeployed its ‘free hours’ childcare funding to ensure that key workers received free childcare for their children

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The Guardian (24 Apr 2020) UK childcare industry ‘crushed’ by coronavirus crisis (<https://bit.ly/2MqgN7l>)

⁴⁶ Ceeda (Oct 2020) About Early Years – Covid-19 Tracker (<https://bit.ly/3mY7fHs>)

during the crisis through the Pre-School Children Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme.

Northern Ireland: NI have set up the ‘childcare recovery support fund’ to help to cover the additional costs that childcare providers face and to incentivise reopening. Funding is available to Ofsted registered childminders and group settings and linked to total number of children registered pre & post Covid-19 (not just those that qualify for free hours).

Urgent interventions

As an immediate first step to supporting parents, providers and the wider economics, social and public health recovery, NEF proposes the creation of a new Childcare Infrastructure Fund (CIF).⁴⁷ Through repurposing and building on existing government support schemes, the reforms would present a significant, temporary improvement on the existing funding model for childcare – effectively replacing the free hours entitlement with a larger direct payment enabling all Ofsted-registered providers (including those who currently rely heavily on parental income) to retain staff, meet essential overheads and deliver high quality childcare where it is most needed. The CIF will enable childcare providers to operate with the flexibility that they need during the current period, whilst retaining staff, ensuring continuity of care for children when they return. The scheme will be able to support both Ofsted registered group settings and childminders.

The CIF budget should be held and administered by the DFE with funds diverted from both the existing free hours entitlement and payments made to childcare providers through the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and any subsequent wage support schemes. In return for accessing the CIF childcare providers would have to meet the following conditions:

- Remain open and provide free care for all children aged between zero and five, up

to current total capacity, prioritising vulnerable children and children of key workers, those unable to work from home and those previously eligible for the 15 and 30 free hours childcare scheme.

- Ensure no fees are charged to parents whose children are not presently using childcare.
- Not make any staff redundant and pay every worker at a rate equal to or above the Real Living Wage, and support all staff to access online or practical training to improve skills.
- Provide clarity on tax status (on a country-by-country basis if a multi-national company) and commit to not engage in dividends or share buy-backs during the period while in receipt of financial support through the CIF.

The CIF would enable the government to safeguard the early years education and childcare sector, ensuring that children continue to benefit from access and parents, especially mothers, are able to continue working.

Once this critical time is over, the government will be in strong position to undertake the wider reforms required to address longer term issues including the quality and flexibility of provision, accessibility of childcare to all families and the training and retention of staff.

Medium-term interventions

Childcare and early education must become a universal service, supporting the development of childcare provision that is high quality, accountable and sustainable and generates the best public value from public investment. This requires policy making that is focused on the achievement of social goals.⁴⁸ Childcare must become a service that is accessible to all children, from the end of paid parental leave, and

⁴⁷ NEF (2020) A Childcare Infrastructure Fund - Protecting early years provision in England (<https://bit.ly/361cE26>)

⁴⁸ NEF (2020) Quality Childcare for All (<https://bit.ly/2TPDY5t>)

according to need rather than geographical location or the ability to pay.

The following interventions will enable national and local government to lead the wider reforms required:

Direct funding to providers: Instead of trickling money into the demand side (parents), the state should direct funding into the supply side, investing in providers who meet established standards of excellence and equality. This approach enables local and national government to play a stronger role in driving up standards and ensuring equitable provision. It also makes it possible to introduce fee caps.

Target disadvantage: This could be done partly by reviewing the components of the EYNFF. The government should work to reduce inequality in the childcare system by increasing the pupil premium, so that it effectively targets disadvantage.⁴⁹ This way local authorities would be able to support providers to cover the real cost of providing high-quality childcare in their area, including children with additional needs.

Fill the gaps: Marketised provision can leave poorer neighbourhoods underserved. The government should map gaps in provision and work to fill those gaps. This would include getting a better understanding of how funding falls are affecting provision, including Sure Start, and increase the provision of childcare to those children that are most in need.

Quality: Childcare quality is intricately linked to the working conditions in the sector. Pay scales should be established and minimum pay set at minimum of Real Living Wage. Training should be provided so to improve qualifications and career progression.

Support second earners: The government should rectify the work disincentives under Universal Credit by creating a 'second earner allowance'.

This would improve work incentives for low-earning second earners with childcare costs, who are predominantly women, by making sure they can increase their hours without an immediate benefit penalty.

The case for universal free childcare

High-quality childcare supports children's cognitive and social development. It is particularly effective in improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged children.⁵⁰ It is therefore crucial that children – particularly those from disadvantaged families – are able to access high-quality childcare. Yet at present access to high-quality education and care is severely constrained by income, with the result that those children who would benefit the most from such care not being able to access it. Moreover, recent policy changes exacerbate these inequalities.

The positive impact of childcare means that government investment in high-quality care makes good fiscal sense. The expected return on investing in interventions in the early years is estimated at 6-10% per year.⁵¹

In the long term, the WBG advocates a universal, free childcare system with well-paid and highly qualified staff. Modelling of the employment and fiscal impacts of such system shows that while the upfront investment is significant, almost all of it is recouped through higher tax revenue and reduced spending on means-tested benefits.⁵²

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⁴⁹ As recommended by the Social Mobility Commission (2017) *Time For Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017* (<http://bit.ly/2shbXs1>)

⁵⁰ IFS (2014) *The economic effects of pre-school education and quality* (<http://bit.ly/2ngboeF>)

⁵¹ See various studies by J. Heckman and team (<http://bit.ly/2qgyiEk>)

⁵² See WBG briefing on universal childcare: (<http://bit.ly/2IHHGeH>)

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