

**The Best Start for Children,
the Best Deal for Families:
*Proposals for Parental Leave and Universal
Childcare for Under 5s***

Policy Paper 88



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Executive Summary

In the UK today, childcare for the under 5s is in a mess. The patchwork of government funded provision, which is often applied differently in each town, has left many parents missing out on what they are entitled to or unable to hold down even a part time job. With the credit crunch upon us, families are harder pressed than ever before. As unemployment soars and parents lose their jobs, childcare becomes even less affordable, but without it parents will struggle to return to work or training.

The children's workforce remains underpaid and under-qualified. Good quality childcare and early years education can help to give children the very best start in life, but studies have shown that inadequate childcare can lead to aggressive behaviour and other difficulties. All too often, parents are left unable to afford good quality care, while nurseries are forced to close due to volatile funding arrangements. Families with disabled children are at an even greater disadvantage as places are more expensive and even harder to find.

The Liberal Democrats would revolutionise childcare provision by investing up to £3 billion to introduce a universal system providing:

- Up to twenty hours of free quality childcare per week, embedded with early years education for all children from 18 months to when they start school, available to all parents regardless of working status or income;
- Nineteen months paid parental leave to be shared between parents¹, to ensure that for the first time seamless state support is available for families from birth to the start of school;
- Highly qualified staff offering the best standards of early years care and education to all children;
- Flexibility, allowing families to make the choices which best suit their circumstances;
- Support for informal carers through the Children's Centres;
- Direct funding to registered childcare providers to ensure stability of funding.

The policies in this paper build upon the wider policies on family life and parental leave in Policy Paper 72 "*Stronger Families, Brighter Futures*". This paper looks specifically at childcare and parental leave for the under 5s and does not attempt to cover childcare for over 5s or reform to the childcare tax credit system.

¹ In this paper, references to mothers and fathers also apply to civil partnerships and same sex couples where both parties have parental responsibilities.

Introduction

1.0.1 Liberal Democrats value the role that families play in society and recognise that most succeed in providing children with a good and loving start in life. Whilst we are wary of state intervention in the lives of families we recognise that government has a role to play in creating an environment which enables them to flourish.

1.0.2 With the introduction of nineteen months of paid parental leave and up to twenty hours of free quality childcare from eighteen months, Liberal Democrats will give struggling families the opportunity to make real choices about balancing work and family life. As the credit crunch hits, these policies will put more money into the pockets of families and help to make work pay.

1.0.3 We recognise that modern families come in all shapes and sizes. As a result, government policy to support families needs to be flexible and shouldn't attempt to force people to conform to any particular models. Although in this paper we make references to mothers and fathers, our proposals equally apply to civil partners and other same sex couples where both parties have parental responsibilities.

1.0.4 This paper focuses on how families with children from birth to school age can be better supported and builds on *Stronger Families, Brighter Futures* (Policy Paper 72). Our thinking has been guided by two key principles:

- Ideally parents should have a genuine choice in finding the right work-life balance for their family, particularly in the first years after the birth of a baby;
- Suitable high quality provision for integrated day care and early education should be accessible to all.

1.0.5 Liberal Democrats recognise that the first years of a child's life are incredibly important in terms of emotional, social, cognitive and physical development and therefore impact upon future life chances. It is therefore our priority to ensure that every child gets the very best start in life and we are committed to supporting all families to make this happen.

1.0.6 Liberal Democrats have consistently argued for increased parental leave during the first months of a child's life, and are frustrated by the failure of successive governments to promote properly the role of fathers in the early months. The introduction of shared parental leave would give both parents a real opportunity to take meaningful time away from work to bond with and care for a new child. Above all, it would also properly recognise the role that so many fathers want to play in raising and bonding with their children.

1.0.7 In today's society a child's life chances are too often determined by their socio-economic background. Research suggests that by the age of three, children living in poverty are often already falling behind in terms of being ready to start school. In order to enable our children to reach their full potential, we have always recognised the importance of quality pre-school education. Accessing such services beyond the current entitlement of 12.5 hours for 3-4 year olds can be difficult and costly for parents.

1.0.8 Liberal Democrats want all young children to be able to attend quality pre-school education to aid their development and prepare them for formal schooling.

1.0.9 Whilst we understand that many parents want to take time out of work to spend time with their young children we also want to support those parents who wish to return to work, particularly

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on a part-time basis. The government has presided over a complex system which disadvantages workless families, including those wanting to get back into work or enrol on a training course. We believe that quality preschool education can also function as quality part-time childcare which is much sought after by many parents. This would have the dual effect of giving all children, regardless of background, the very best of starts in life and also give rise to a system of universal high quality childcare for all our preschool children.

Parental Leave

2.0.1 Liberal Democrats believe that children have the best start in life when both their parents have the option to spend quality time with them when they are young. Psychologists have emphasised the importance of children developing a strong attachment to their mother or primary carer to enable them to feel safe and secure. Studies have also shown that children particularly benefit from more individualised care when they are very young and that longer paid maternity leave is linked to lower infant mortality rates and improved child and maternal health.

2.0.2 Liberal Democrats also believe in the huge benefits of active fatherhood. Recent research has shown that fathers who bond with their child at an early age and are involved in raising them can lead to their children having better peer relationships, fewer behaviour problems, lower criminality and substance abuse, higher educational and occupational mobility relative to parents' employment and higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction.² Vulnerable children from disadvantaged backgrounds stand to gain even more from a strong father-child relationship and to suffer more when this is lacking, emphasising the key importance of enabling all fathers to play a full role in the life of their children.

2.0.3 Maternity leave has been extended in recent years, but by being attached only to the mother has prevented fathers from playing a fuller role in early years parenting. It has also exacerbated the gender employment divide, as women of childbearing age are seen as too risky to employ by businesses due to the cost of their enhanced maternity benefits and the perceived organisational demands caused by their rights to take leave.

2.0.4 Liberal Democrats would replace maternity leave with parental leave, which could be shared between parents, and would increase this to nineteen months³, to enable both parents have the full opportunity to help provide care for their babies. While mothers will obviously need to take some parental leave around the time of the birth, the remaining time could be taken by either parent, subject to neither parent taking more than one year. This would enable both parents to take at least seven months off if the full entitlement was taken up, with the precise amount of time taken by each parent to be a matter of choice for the family. Both parents would benefit from the protection against discrimination and employment rights currently attached to maternity leave for the full parental leave period. Entitlement to leave would be based on the current government guidelines⁴.

2.0.5 In Sweden the so called 'Daddy months' of dedicated paternal parental leave has resulted in over eighty per cent of fathers now taking leave, compared to less than fifty per cent prior to specific time being allocated. Survey evidence suggests that nearly half of fathers⁵ are unhappy with their work/life balance and other anecdotal evidence suggests that parents want more sharing of parental roles. Our flexible parental leave package would empower fathers to have a greater

²Adrienne Burgess, *The Costs and Benefits of Active Fatherhood*, (Fathers Direct, 2008).

³ Providing the leave for nineteen months is to provide cover for women starting maternity leave before their baby is born and ensuring the joint parental leave can continue until the child is eligible for our early years educational entitlement at eighteen months.

⁴ The parents entitled will be those currently entitled to take parental leave ie

- are a parent named on the child's birth certificate or
- are named on the child's adoption certificate or
- have legal parental responsibility for the child

⁵ In a recent mini poll on *Mumsnet* 46% of dads said they were unhappy with their work/life balance -

<http://www.mumsnet.com/HomeFront.html>

Spring Conference March 2009

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role in caring for their children in the early years, helping to give both father and child the best start to their relationship and recognising the key role that fathers can play.

2.0.6 Because each family is unique, Liberal Democrats would support the extended parental leave being as flexible as possible in order to best meet the needs of each one. Consequently the parental leave could be taken consecutively or concurrently or even a bit of both. We would expect that both parents are likely to choose to take time off around the birth, leaving approximately eighteen months of leave to share before their child was entitled to start early years educational provision at eighteen months.

2.0.7 Parents might typically choose for both to have time off around the birth and then for one parent to have a year and the other the final six months. Other parents might prefer to split the time equally with around nine months each. Parents would also be able to work part-time and claim a proportionate part of the benefit, and could for example both choose to work part-time and care for their child part-time for the full nineteen months. Alternatively, parents could decide to both have nine and a half months off at the same time, although this would mean they would use up their paid leave nine months prior to the beginning of the extended early years provision we are proposing. Parents would normally be expected to give at least 2 months notice before taking a period of extended parental leave in order to give their employer time to make the necessary arrangements. We expect that a flexible approach like this will benefit employers as well as families, but the rights remain those of the parent.

2.0.8 It is important to Liberal Democrats that our policies do not discriminate and offer the very best opportunities to all. We would consequently offer the full nineteen months of parental leave and Statutory Parental Pay (SPP) or Statutory Parental Allowance (SPA) to single parents, as is the case in Sweden. After twelve months, the single parent would have the option to either return to work and use the payment towards the cost of childcare, or remain at home. If the single parent chose to remain at home, for logistical reasons they would have to lose their entitlement to return to their old employer.

2.0.9 Liberal Democrats recognise that parental leave can be difficult for small businesses, which rely on the stability of their small workforce. We would continue to use the current structure for notices and negotiation as is already in place for maternity leave and extend it to cover parental leave, requiring for example a minimum 8 weeks notice for early return to work. As the current bureaucracy is quite cumbersome and can be a minefield for smaller businesses without personnel expertise, we would seek to streamline the processes involved in parental leave entitlements to make them more accessible to businesses, by moving towards a system of basic rights entitlements for parents which can be met flexibly by employers. We would also seek to minimise the administrative burden on small businesses by arranging for parental pay to be paid directly from Revenue and Customs. SPP and SPA would be paid at the same rate as the current Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) and Statutory Maternity Allowance (SMA).

Twenty hours early years education from eighteen months

3.0.1 If we are to give our children the very best start in life, they need the very best early years education. Liberal Democrats believe this means the early years entitlement should start earlier and run for longer to give every child a meaningful early years educational experience. This early years entitlement would not be compulsory, and parents will be free to choose how long and from what age their children use the provision.

3.0.2 If we want to truly help struggling families, we need to help them balance family and work responsibilities. At the moment, quality care is expensive, often inflexible and in too short supply. Many parents would like to work part time, but are unable to claim the childcare element of working tax credits unless they work at least sixteen hours a week, often meaning part time work is a luxury they cannot afford. Our twenty hours of free provision would enable such people to return to work with no childcare expenses.

3.1 Universal Childcare

3.1.1 At the moment, there is a black hole in government support for young families. Even after paid maternity leave is extended to a full year in 2010, there will remain two years when most families receive little if any support for the care and education of their children until the free early years entitlement begins the term after they turn three⁶. Three is an arbitrary age for the free entitlement to start. The Millenium Cohort Study has recently reported that at aged three, children from disadvantaged families are already a year behind their more advantaged peers in both social and educational development⁷.

3.1.2 Liberal Democrats propose starting the early years entitlement much earlier to bridge this gap. Studies such as EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) have shown that children who attend good quality pre-school settings benefit from better cognitive and intellectual outcomes than those who do not, and particularly benefit disadvantaged children. Evidence also suggests that enrichment programmes in the early years for all children can have more of an impact on long-term life chances than later remedial programmes.⁸ EPPE also shows that starting at age two is associated with better cognitive development and improved peer relationships. Liberal Democrats believe that in the interest of providing seamless support for families as parents return to work from their new shared eighteen months parental leave, this is a desirable age to start.⁹ We believe that a younger start is particularly beneficial as neurological research is beginning to show that even by eighteen months the brain can be permanently affected by experience, making it imperative that all children benefit from positive stimulation and connections from a young age.

3.1.3 If the early years entitlement is to be effective, it must not only be of high quality, but it must also truly be free and accessible to all families, particularly the most disadvantaged ones.

⁶ Childcare element of tax credits is claimed by approximately 281,300 out of 5.3 million families with children under the age of five. CTC & WTC Statistics April 2008. A number of pilots are currently running extending early education to some two year olds - estimated to include 20,000 by January 2009 which represents a mere 3% of two year olds.

⁷ Hansen & Joshi (eds) (2007) *Millenium Cohort Study second survey - a user's guide to initial findings*. Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, University of London.

⁸ ICan <http://www.ican.org.uk/upload2/chatter%20matter%20update/mcm%20report%20final.pdf>

⁹ We estimate that the net cost of this total package, after taking into accounts savings such as those from the childcare element of working tax credit, will be just under £3 billion. We will produce more detailed and updated figures closer to the General Election.

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During our consultation period we have heard countless tales of parents being required to pay ‘top-up fees’ for the ‘free entitlement’ or being unable to find provision flexible enough to meet their needs. Although the overall take-up of the free entitlement is high (94% in 2004) the 6% not benefitting are almost entirely from disadvantaged families - including 11% of children in workless households and 17% of children in households earning less than £20,000 per annum.¹⁰ The Liberal Democrats would ensure that the provision of the early years grant was sufficient to cover the real cost of provision, ring-fencing it if necessary to ensure that the 20 hours provision is genuinely free and flexible at the point of use, ‘top-ups’ would be neither necessary or allowed for the free entitlement. Such funding would be conditional on settings meeting the quality requirements outlined later in this paper, particularly employing suitably qualified staff at an appropriate rate of pay. We would investigate introducing the New Zealand model of early years funding which provides higher rates of pay for settings with quality indicators such as high ratios and staff qualifications.

3.1.4 In providing children with early education, we boost their social and cognitive development, and are also able to identify and support children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) before they start school, with the consequence that many need no additional support later in their school careers. The Early Years Transition and Special Educational Needs Project (EYSEN) found that children who did not go to pre-school were more likely to be at risk of having SEN when they started school¹¹, while children identified at risk of SEN on entering pre-school were less likely to be still at risk as they moved on to primary school¹².

3.1.5 The EPPE findings have also shown that full-time early years education does not confer a greater benefit than part-time provision, although there are some indications that 20 hours is a desirable amount. Liberal Democrats consequently propose to extend the early years entitlement to 20 hours a week for all children from eighteen months until they start school. This commitment would run for a full 48 weeks a year, meaning there would be no additional costs for parents outside of the typical 38 week ‘school term time’ over which the current early years provision is provided.

3.1.6 There have been some suggestions that group care can lead to behavioural problems, but the latest UK report (the EPPE studies) suggests that these difficulties are linked almost entirely to poor quality provision, with some increased risk for children who have very long hours from a very young age. This small increased risk has to be balanced against the many positive benefits outlined above and it is our consideration that, on balance, our proposed twenty hours of high quality education represents the best start for pre-school children.¹³

3.2 Childcare for Work-life Balance

3.2.1. Our concern in developing this new pre-school education policy has been primarily to provide the best start in life for young children, rather than simply a childcare policy to force parents back to work. However, we appreciate that in the UK today most families feeling the effects of the credit crunch often need parents to work and we hope that the flexibility of our proposals will enable them to do this. To this end, we would permit the 20 free hours to be taken flexibly according to the needs of the families concerned.

¹⁰ Sarah Butt, Kate Goddard and Ivana La Valle with Maxine Hill, *Childcare nation? Progress on the childcare strategy and priorities for the future*, (Daycare Trust/ National Centre for Social Research, 2007) p72.

¹¹ Sammons, Taggart, Smees, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, & Elliot (2003) *The Early years transition & Special Educational Needs (EYSEN) Project*. DfES.

¹² Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart & Elliot (2003) Technical Paper 8a: Measuring the impact of pre-school on children’s cognitive progress over the pre-school period. London: Institute of Education.

¹³ Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report A Longitudinal Study Funded by the DfES 1997-2004*, Institute of Education, University of London (2004).

3.2.2. Families today come in all shapes and sizes, and we would not prescribe how the early years entitlement had to be taken and would support local providers to offer the sessions as flexibly as was feasible. It could, for example, be taken in shorter sessions over five days or longer sessions over only a few days. Parents would also be free to split the hours across different providers if this met their needs better.

3.2.3. Our twenty hour provision would be enough for some mothers and fathers to return to work part-time around their caring responsibilities, while reducing the overall cost of childcare for families in full-time work. For those parents who prefer the informal care of grandparents and other relatives, the early years entitlement would provide the informal carer with support and the opportunity to share the care-giving by enabling the child to socialise and learn with other children by attending a setting on a part time basis. The twenty hours would be in no way compulsory, and we would expect that some families, particularly those with younger children, might use only a portion of the entitlement, perhaps increasing the hours as their child grows. For those mothers and fathers who choose to be full-time parents, the early years entitlement would provide the opportunity for them to work or study or spend quality time with any younger children. Alternatively, for those parents who are both in full-time employment, the twenty hours of free provision would equate to up to 50% discount on the cost of full time childcare, depending how many hours a week their children attended for in total.

3.2.4. Beyond the obvious educational benefits to children and employment assistance to parents, society is likely to benefit far more widely from such an increase in quality early years education. US studies into the effective provision of pre-school education suggest that each \$1 spent could later return almost \$13 in savings (with less need for remedial education and reduced healthcare and criminal justice costs)¹⁴ and while it is unlikely that savings would be as high as this in the UK context, it shows how effective well spent money in the early years can be.¹⁵ Further to this, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has argued that early years education can be seen as a 'public good' contributing to the nation's social cohesion with health, educational and labour market benefits¹⁶.

3.2.5. By facilitating parental employment, one of the most tangible additional benefits of the early years entitlement is likely to be a contribution to a reduction in child poverty and the gender pay gap. Previous research has suggested that maternal employment patterns reflect patterns of childcare provision¹⁷. The Parents' Childcare Survey 2004 confirms this, reporting that 50% of non-working parents with pre-school age children would prefer to work if good quality childcare was convenient, reliable and affordable¹⁸.

3.3 Building Capacity

3.3.1. Such an expansion in early years provision cannot happen overnight. We realise that it is likely to take at least five years to expand the capacity of the sector and ensure professionals are suitably qualified. Our initial priority would be to extend the provision down to younger children who may currently be missing out on the benefits of early years education. The hours which all received would then be extended in line with capacity. There is some evidence that there is currently some over-supply of childcare places¹⁹ which should help to speed the expansion. It is also worth noting that the provision of the early years entitlement to four year olds earlier this

¹⁴ http://www.highscope.org/file/Research/PerryProject/PerryApril_20052.pps#277,2,Experimentaldesign

¹⁵ PricewaterhouseCoopers, *Universal early education and care in 2020: costs, benefits and funding options*, (Daycare Trust, 2004), p4

¹⁶ Butt et al op cit, p10.

¹⁷ Ibid, p56

¹⁸ Ibid, p63

¹⁹ Ibid, p49

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decade was delivered ahead of schedule, illustrating the capacity of this industry to respond to demand²⁰.

3.3.2. We currently have a mixed economy of provision, including private and maintained nurseries, childminders and pre-schools and we would plan to use this in the expansion of provision, recognising that such a mixed system can help to provide the flexibility and choice which families need. Nannies and childminders can, for example, often provide care at the more unsocial hours that many parents work - we would ensure that unnecessary bureaucracy would not put them off, as has often been the case recently. We would expect that the increased funding, reliably provided by government, would also help to attract new providers, as well as enabling existing providers to expand. We would also enable suitably qualified and registered nannies, prepared to deliver the early years foundation stage, to register to provide the early years entitlement. Guaranteed supply-side funding, set at the proper market rate, would help to ensure the long-term viability of providers who are all too often struggling under the current mishmash of schemes. This is consistent with the fact that countries with well developed systems of early years education and care (like those in Sweden, Denmark and New Zealand) predominantly use supply-side funding.

3.4 A truly universal provision

3.4.1 In order for our expanded early years entitlement to provide the best start for our children, it is crucial that coverage is universal and take-up is high. Currently it is disproportionately the more disadvantaged children who miss out on early education, sometimes because impoverished or immigrant parents are unaware of the opportunity. The Daycare Trust has identified a lack of information to be a key barrier to parents and carers from black and minority ethnic communities accessing childcare and early years services.

3.4.2 To ensure that parents have the information they need about childcare and early years services, and that children are able to take advantage of the opportunities which these bring, Liberal Democrats would seek to make Children's Centres the true hubs of their communities, with an increased number of health visitors also acting as childcare and parenting outreach workers ensuring that local families are aware of the services available, much in the way they also educate parents about health services and immunisations. Support should be non-stigmatised, and not just aimed at problem families. Targeting beyond mainstream support for all should be to engage those who are hard to reach such as those in rural communities, in poverty, or who do not speak English; or those who require specialised support such as families where a parent or child has a disability, or the children of asylum seekers. It is important that such targeting does not have the effect of stigmatising.

3.4.3 The Children's Centres will be expected to focus their efforts on families that find it hard to access services and identify children most at risk of falling behind before they start school. We know that a child from a deprived home will hear, on average, just 13 million words by the age of four compared with a child from an affluent home who will hear around 45 million. Workers at the Children's Centres will work with these disadvantaged families and help them to find suitable pre-school childcare so they don't miss out on the opportunities available. We would also give them a role in coaching and supporting parents seeking to return to work, particularly with information about flexible working. We would make this key work a priority within the funding for the Centres.

²⁰ NAO (2004), *Progress in Developing High Quality Child Care and Early Education Accessible to all*, (London, The Stationary Office).

Quality - Improving the Skills of the Workforce

4.0.1. All the research makes clear that the positive benefits of early years education follow from high quality settings. There is evidence that poor quality provision for young children does more harm than good, and that the best quality is to be found where teachers are closely involved with children and parents. Lasting and cumulative improvements in children's social as well as their cognitive development are seen, partly because other staff can contribute more effectively when they work alongside specialist early years teachers.

4.0.2. Quality provision in the early years is increasingly being seen as that which is led by a graduate leader, with the EPPE research showing that children had improved learning and social behavioural outcomes when they spent more hours with highly qualified staff²¹. We support the goal of at least one graduate leader in every setting and would like to see this increased as funding allows. Such graduate leaders should be appropriately trained as early years specialist teachers. Along with suitably qualified leaders we believe that the prescriptive Early Years Foundation Stage should be replaced with a minimum curriculum guarantee (in line with our policy for Schools) which will free staff to exercise their professional judgement.

4.0.3. Investment in training and continuing professional development is therefore crucial. Over time, all staff will be qualified to a minimum of L3. Liberal Democrats will build on current arrangements to upskill the workforce, ensuring that there are accessible pathways leading to qualified teacher status for those who are able to progress to this level. The aim will be to ensure that every group is led by a suitably qualified graduate, and that teachers will be employed to work directly with children and families in ratios of at least 1:24. The TDA will be required to account for the numbers of teachers specialising in work with children from birth to seven separately from primary teaching so that accurate targets for the numbers needed can be set.

4.0.4. Effective staff are not simply qualified staff. The EPPE studies have shown that sensitive and responsive care is also important²². Liberal Democrats believe that to this end, the key person policy, where children are given time to bond with a specific staff member is of key importance and that pay and conditions should be improved for staff to encourage retention rates and ensure that children do not have to adjust to frequent changes in their key person. As the government cannot set national pay rates within our mixed economy system, we recommend locally negotiated wage floors for workers to ensure a fairer balance of pay across the sector.

4.0.5. We restate our commitments to high quality childcare that parents can trust and inspection and registration schemes as outlined in *Stronger Families, Brighter Futures* (Policy Paper 72), in particular the setting up of a professional body for all early years professionals. We would seek to prioritise funding for training and staff development within the early years budget to reflect the importance we place on staff quality.

4.0.6. In addition to qualifications, there is a need for continuous professional development for early years workers. Liberal Democrats will develop the role of the existing maintained nursery schools and Children's Centres as examples of leading practice, and enable them to function as training institutions similar to teaching hospitals, hubs to train and spread best practice amongst the early years workforce. Childminders in particular are often disadvantaged when it comes to professional development, as all too often weekends and evenings are given over to training after

²¹ Butt et al, op cit, p31.

²² Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: findings from the early primary years, (DfES, 2004)

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long days of caring for children. We would encourage Children's Centres to provide a venue for childminder training during the day, with crèche facilities available for the children childminders are caring for, something which has been successfully piloted in a number of centres. We would also encourage childminders to form networks, facilitated by the centres, to provide support, to share best practice and to foster continuity for children.

4.0.7. Children's Centres already have a role in providing parenting training. We would encourage them to expand this by opening up relevant training to informal carers as well as parents. This would enable grandparents in particular to gain confidence with new ideas and techniques.

4.1 Disabled Children

4.1.1. At the moment, disabled children are often excluded from childcare settings because staff are not properly trained. In order to ensure disabled children can access our enhanced early years entitlement we would ensure that childcare workers should have training in:

- **Disability equality** - to overcome attitudinal barriers, and create a welcoming ethos and 'can do' attitude, which parents and children describe as vital;
- **Specific skills** - as needed to support some children. These include alternative methods of communication, moving and handling;
- **Individual techniques** for use with particular children. For example, the administration of a particular medicine or a particular feeding technique.

4.1.2. Such training should be included in the NVQ and degree qualifications for early years workers with additional courses available through the Children's Centres for staff who are already qualified as either initial or refresher training as appropriate. More closely integrated working between education, specialist health and social services would be supported through continuing professional development. For some children, higher staff ratios and physical adaptations to the setting may be required and funding would be made available for this.

4.1.3. As new childcare provision comes on stream, we would ensure that this additional care would be adapted to meet the needs of disabled children and put in place monitoring to ensure this is the case. What was developed would vary from area to area, according to the needs of the local children but would be considered to be a high priority for available funding. We hope that our twenty hours of free quality childcare would help to transform the lives of families with disabled children, who currently face a huge struggle to find appropriate, affordable care.

Appendix - Reference figures

Economic activity of individuals in family units with dependant children, split by sex, April-June 2008

thousands

	In Employment		Unemployed (ILO definition)	Inactive	Total
	Full Time	Part Time			
Females of Working Age (16-59)					
Youngest child in family 0-4	661	1,067	126	1,268	3,122
Youngest child in family 5-11	752	1,086	97	665	2,600
Youngest child in family 12-18	850	721	56	364	1,990
With dependant children	2,264	2,873	279	2,296	7,712
Males of Working Age (16-64)					
Youngest child in family 0-4	2,216	130	115	144	2,605
Youngest child in family 5-11	1,723	80	62	132	1,997
Youngest child in family 12-18	1,335	71	35	128	1,569
With dependant children	5,273	281	213	403	6,170
All of Working Age (16-59/64)					
Youngest child in family 0-4	2,877	1,197	242	1,411	5,727
Youngest child in family 5-11	2,475	1,166	159	797	4,596
Youngest child in family 12-18	2,185	792	91	491	3,559
With dependant children	7,537	3,154	491	2,699	13,882

Notes: As with any statistical survey, estimates are subject to sampling error, particularly at low levels

Based on family units and the age of the youngest dependant child.

Only includes the head of the family unit or spouse/partner of the head of the family

All numbers are rounded, totals may not sum to their individual parts

Source: ONS, Labour Force Survey (LFS)

Economic activity of individuals in family units with dependant children, split by sex, April-June 2007

thousands

	In Employment		Unemployed (ILO definition)	Inactive	Total
	Full Time	Part Time			
Females of Working Age (16-59)					
Youngest child in family 0-4	611	1,054	105	1,287	3,057
Youngest child in family 5-11	760	1,086	102	635	2,583
Youngest child in family 12-18	875	737	57	396	2,065
With dependant children	2,246	2,877	264	2,317	7,704
Males of Working Age (16-64)					
Youngest child in family 0-4	2,224	110	97	144	2,575
Youngest child in family 5-11	1,728	90	44	148	2,009
Youngest child in family 12-18	1,385	65	41	138	1,630
With dependant children	5,337	265	182	430	6,214
All of Working Age (16-59/64)					
Youngest child in family 0-4	2,835	1,164	202	1,431	5,632
Youngest child in family 5-11	2,487	1,175	146	782	4,592
Youngest child in family 12-18	2,260	803	97	534	3,695
With dependant children	7,583	3,142	446	2,748	13,918

Notes: As with any statistical survey, estimates are subject to sampling error, particularly at low levels

Based on family units and the age of the youngest dependant child.

Only includes the head of the family unit or spouse/partner of the head of the family

All numbers are rounded, totals may not sum to their individual parts

Source: ONS, Labour Force Survey (LFS)

The Best Start for Children, the Best Deal for Families

Population aged 1 - 5 in England, 2006 - 2015						
	Ages					<i>thousands</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	Total 1-5
2006	605	596	575	558	557	2,892
2007	620	605	596	576	559	2,957
2008	651	620	606	597	577	3,051
2009	652	651	621	607	598	3,129
2010	663	653	651	622	608	3,196
2011	671	663	653	652	623	3,262
2012	677	671	663	654	653	3,319
2013	680	677	672	664	655	3,348
2014	680	680	678	673	665	3,375
2015	680	680	680	678	673	3,393

Source: ONS, 2006-based principal population projections for England

The Best Start for Children, the Best Deal for Families

Policy Paper 88

This paper started as a Spokesperson's initiative on the part of Susan Kramer MP. Following several meetings with the Federal Policy Committee and a consultation session at the Bournemouth Federal Party Conference 2008, the Federal Policy Committee decided to adopt it as a full policy paper. This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas. The Party in England has chosen to pass up policy-making to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence.

Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.

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