

Free childcare entitlements

In England, all children aged 3 and 4 are entitled to free non-compulsory pre-school education for 15 hours a week in approved institutions. In 2017, 15 additional hours of free education for a period of 38 weeks will be possible for working parents. Children aged 2 who come from the most disadvantaged families have the same entitlement. Uptake of these free education entitlements is widespread among children aged 3 and 4 but is less frequent among younger children. Parents must pay for any additional hours of childcare beyond the initial 15 free hours. Prices can decrease according to the number of additional hours. The average monthly childcare fees are £754 (Department of Education, 2015; Eurydice, & Eurostat, 2014). Costs have increased by almost 70 per cent over the last ten years, a rate far beyond that of inflation during the same period (28 per cent) (Department of Education, 2015) (Figure 1).

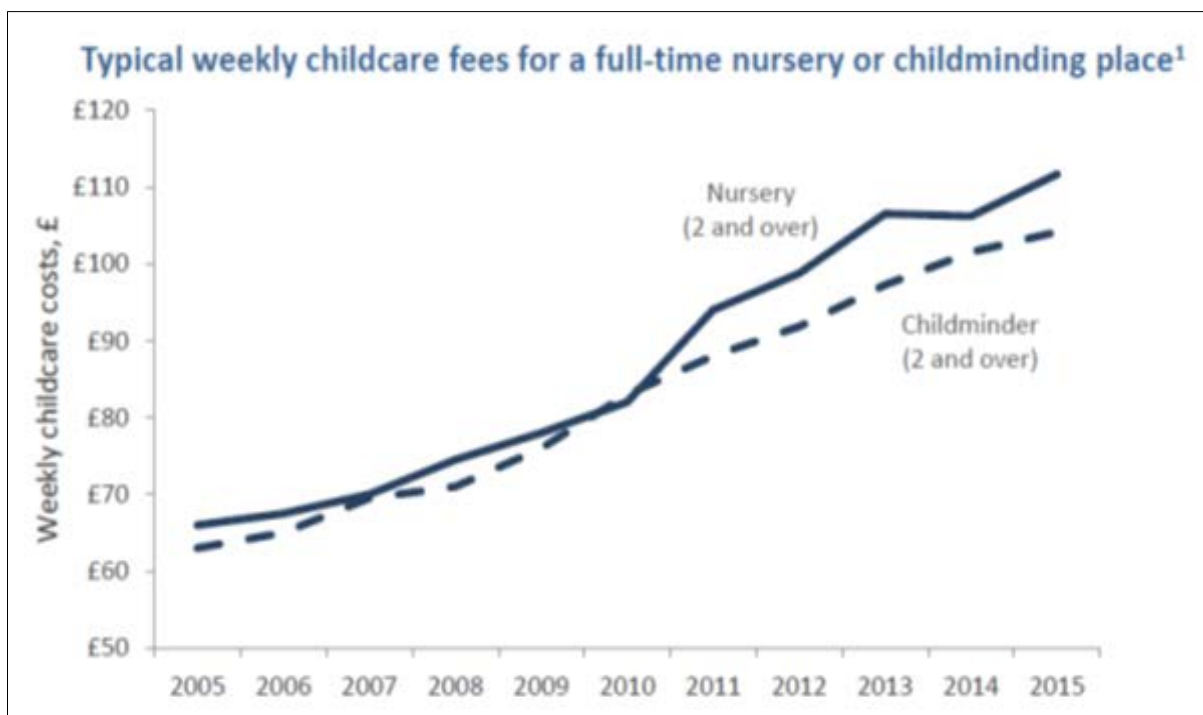


Figure 1. Typical weekly childcare fees for a full-time nursery or childminding place.

Source: Department of Education (2015)

Childcare subsidies

The most significant childcare subsidies are **working tax credits** of up to £122.50 per week for one child, and £210 for two or more children. These are awarded to working parents, dependent on their income; as well as **tax-free childcare** and **childcare vouchers** (Department of Education, 2015; GOV.UK, 2016).

Inequalities in the use of formal childcare

There is a wide and complex variety of formal and informal childcare providers. Among the formal providers there are group- and home-based providers called *childminders*. Economic reasons account for 20 per cent of the choices in different formal providers of pre-school education. In addition, the most common constraint mentioned by those who do not use childcare is its cost (Department of Education, 2015). Formal childcare is often used by working and higher income families, whereas younger or not employed families use informal childcare.

References

Eurydice, & Eurostat. 2014. *Key Data on Early Childhood*.

Department of Education. 2015. *Review of childcare costs: the analytical report*

GOV.UK. 2016. *Help with childcare costs* <https://www.gov.uk/browse/childcare-parenting/childcare> (retrieved 20.01.2016)



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