

Melted Parents NI Briefing Paper

Who we are

- Melted Parents NI (“MPNI”) was set up by three working mothers in March 2023 who were frustrated by the lack of childcare support in Northern Ireland.
 - MPNI is a grass-roots campaign focused on sharing human stories on social media behind the current childcare crisis and calling for urgent childcare reform Northern Ireland.
 - The movement has quickly gained support from families and individuals across Northern Ireland in the short period since it was established, with thousands of followers across a range of platforms.
 - The core group behind MPNI is expanding with a developing network of skilled volunteers and ambassadors all passionate about childcare reform.
 - In addition to engaging with affected parents, MPNI has quickly developed relationships with a number of relevant charities and stakeholders, including business groups, with the message that childcare is a critical aspect of economic infrastructure and should be treated as such.
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What are Melted Parents NI’s Strategic Goals

- The escalating level of crisis for working parents is recognised by politicians and addressed as a priority.
 - Short term measures are implemented to bring immediate support for childcare costs to working families.
 - Wide scale reform of the childcare support and infrastructure is a key government priority.
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Current Situation

- Northern Ireland ranks last in the UK in terms of access to childcare support for working families.
- All other parts of the UK can access 30 free early learning and childcare hours for three and four years old during term time. This will be extended to children over nine months in coming years as outlined in the Spring Statement. Despite Stormont receiving Barnett Consequential which would enable delivery of such a scheme in Northern Ireland, the absence of an existing scheme – or indeed any childcare strategy means this will not transfer to Northern Ireland.
- Working parents in Northern Ireland can only access 12.5 hours of pre-school education for all four year olds (and some eligible three year olds) during term time.
- Our evidence shows that the current 12.5 hours provided doesn’t work for many working parents and is failing both children and parents on a number of levels.
- Firstly, children of working parents are frequently bottom of the list in terms of access to places and in many cases are not allocated their preferred place – or in some cases, any place at all.
- In addition, our research highlights that for children of working parents 2.5hrs a day is not sufficient. Frequently children have to be dropped to creche before pre school starts, then transported from creche to preschool and back, then finally back home, resulting in a level of disruption which is very stressful for small children to deal with each day.
- In many cases, the 2.5 hours “free” pre school doesn’t reduce costs for working parents, as childcare providers often charge a full day’s rate with a surcharge often applied for pre-school transportation.
- On top of this, parents are often expected to pay snack funds to pre- school despite already often already paying for children’s food at creche.
- It is clear that many parents actually end up paying more when accessing their “free” preschool entitlement.
- Therefore many families cannot afford to access these “free” early learning places.
- The out-workings of the current childcare system is disproportionately impacting women, forcing many working mothers out of the workplace.
- Evidence shows higher levels of economic inactivity levels amongst females than any other part of the UK (30.7%¹ v 24.9%²).

- The cost of living crisis has put additional pressures on households budgets, with the average household weekly disposable income for families is £93 in Northern Ireland versus £209 in other parts of the UK with household income in Northern Ireland falling at a faster level than any other part of the UK.³

Why it Matters

- Economic growth is a key priority as outlined in the Programme for Government, however successive strategies have failed to make the connection between childcare and economic growth.
- MPNI represent working parents in Northern Ireland, working in a range of sectors, from IT to the NHS; manufacturing to professional services; the civil service to law; hospitality to engineering, and everything in between. We are contributors to the economy, and bring with us thousands of people who want to continue to manage working with raising children, and we want our politicians to understand that childcare is a key part of our economic infrastructure.
- Parents and families are struggling every day to afford childcare and stay in the workplace. Many are getting into debt, and countless rely on family members for support. It is clear that childcare reform needs urgent action, and so we have short, medium and long-term asks to support the immediate needs of families right now, as well as proposals for a sustainable system that reflects the needs of families as well as economic ambition of the region.

How You Can Help

- **Help families right now:** sign our letter to the Chancellor calling for an immediate increase to the cap on tax-free allowance and extending tax from 20% to 30% as per [Ministerial request to Chancellor](#)
- **Put parents at the centre of designing a new childcare system:** All parties agree that future reform of childcare provision should not happen in a vacuum. Parents need to be a central voice in the childcare discussions and consulted with as childcare provision evolves.
- **Establish a sustainable childcare system:** it is not good enough that a childcare strategy has been in the making for over ten years. Our new Executive must make childcare a political priority, and so we are asking that parties commit to the development and publication of a childcare strategy within the first month of office, accompanied by a timeline for delivery.
- **Honour Barnett formula allocations:** the funds that Stormont receives for childcare and early learning provisions for the children of working parents through the Barnett formula should be allocated to the provision of childcare and related services accordingly. In the absence of an existing strategy, this could include a cost of living style payment for parents to help with childcare costs or an ongoing allocation of funds whereby the Barnett formula allocations are passed through directly to parents to spend on registered childcare providers.

1. [Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey – Women in NI | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

2. [SN06838.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

3. [Spending power falls in every UK region \(asda.com\)](#)