

Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2019

Executive Summary



Average cost of a full-time place is

£166
per week

50%

of families report spending more than **20%** of their income on childcare

this rises to

63%

of lone parent households

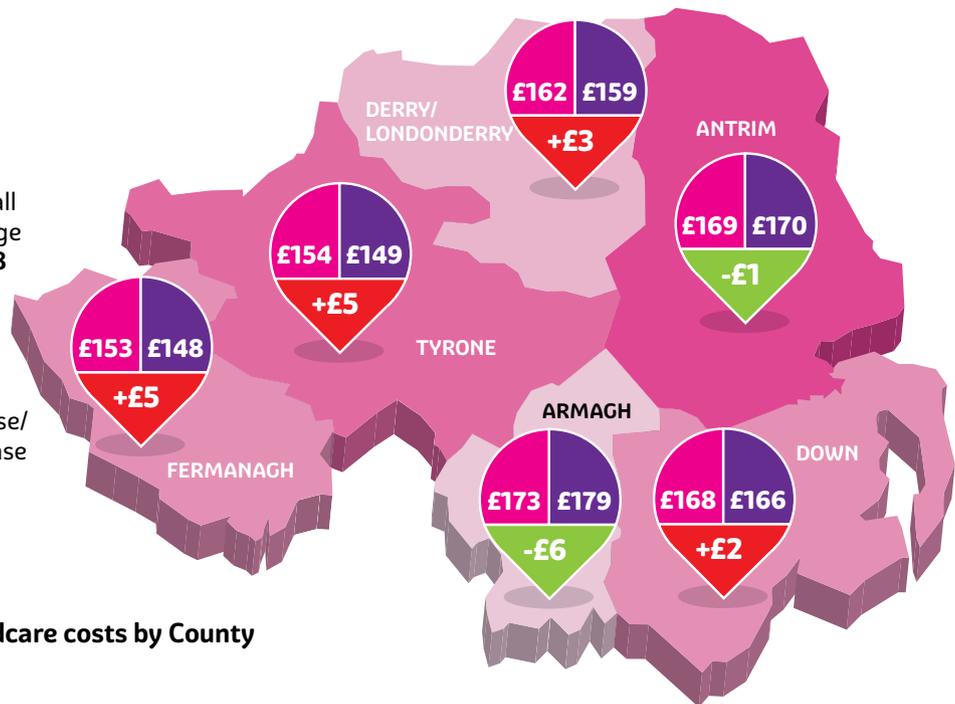
Key:

Overall average 2019



Overall average 2018

Increase/decrease



Change in average full-time childcare costs by County

The average cost of a week at a holiday scheme has increased by **56%** since 2010

87%

of parents think the quality of childcare provision is good or very good

73%

of childcare providers reported an increase in expenditure

Key findings

Ten years of research with parents and childcare providers

- The average cost of a full-time childcare place is £166 per week or £8,632 per year. This is an increase of 11% since 2010.
- Ten years on from our first Childcare Survey, Northern Ireland remains without a Childcare Strategy. Parents and childcare providers continue to call for greater investment in our childcare sector.



What are families paying for childcare?

- Families report spending an average of £137 per week on childcare. Rising to £178 where they use formal childcare only.
- 50% of all families report spending more than 20% of their overall household income on childcare. This rises to 63% of lone parent households.
- 41% of families resorted to means other than their income to pay for their childcare bill, including savings, an overdraft, loans and credit cards.
- Nearly half of respondents have had to cut back or go without another expense to pay their childcare bill.



Lone parents can experience greater challenges



- More than one in ten lone parent households report spending over half of their overall household income on childcare.
- 51% of lone parent households report using means other than their income to pay for childcare. They are more likely to report having used a payday loan.
- 63% of lone parent households report having had to cut back or go without to meet their childcare bill.

Challenge of accessing holiday childcare

- Half of respondents with school age children reported an increase in childcare costs during the summer holidays. The average cost of a week at a holiday scheme has increased by 56% since 2010.
- Where parents report there is insufficient childcare in their area, 45% say there is a lack of holiday scheme provision.



27%
Overall families whose childcare costs increase during school holidays



50%
Families with a child age 5 and over whose childcare costs increase during school holidays



Impact on work and career progression

- Almost half of all parents represented in the survey experienced a change in their working hours. One in five mothers decreased their hours of work or left work altogether last year, compared to 6% of fathers.
- Parents told us they feel:
- 45% of mothers attributed this change to the cost of childcare.

3 They are forced out of the workforce

2 There is no financial incentive to remain in work

1 They are sacrificing their career opportunities



Experience of childcare providers

- Almost three quarters (73%) of childcare providers reported an increase in their overall expenditure, compared to 29% who reported an increase in overall income.
- 32% anticipate their economic situation will get worse compared to 17% who feel that it will improve in the next 12 months.



Experience of accessing childcare provision

- Over half of parents think there is a lack of sufficient childcare in their area.
- One quarter of families report they are not currently accessing the childcare they need. The main reasons given for this are linked to childcare – cost of care, opening hours and availability.
- The majority of parents – 87% – think the quality of childcare provision in Northern Ireland is good or very good.



Conclusion

The first Northern Ireland Childcare Survey in 2010 found parents and childcare providers calling for greater investment in the childcare sector. For the tenth year in a row, we are hearing the same message from parents and childcare providers - frustratingly, it seems that little has changed.

Families continue to struggle to afford the childcare they need, with many telling us about the financial hardship they experience as a result.

At the same time, childcare providers emphasise the difficulties they face with many reporting making a loss or just breaking even. This is not sustainable.

It is clear the childcare system requires fundamental and urgent reform. There is no time to waste, families and childcare providers cannot financially afford to wait any longer. At a time of political instability and ongoing changes to family benefits and entitlements, we are concerned that Northern Ireland is falling behind other UK jurisdictions, where greater attention has been paid to investing in childcare. This is a situation which we believe is unacceptable and lets down everyone using and working in the childcare sector.

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“A Childcare Strategy is urgently required in Northern Ireland to financially support families and investment in nurseries to ensure there is a sustainable framework in place that provides affordable, quality care for our children.”

Childcare provider

“Childcare costs are crippling us... Our childcare bill is more than three times our mortgage.” Parent

“As a single parent, I had to leave work because I couldn't afford formal childcare” Parent

“During school holidays I have to ask for unpaid leave as I don't have any other childcare options” Parent

“If we're supposed to be helping women stay in work and progress, the existing system is completely inadequate.” Parent

“Standard of service from current provider is excellent and knowing your child is being well cared for gives us peace of mind.” Parent

“Government needs to do more to help working parents. We are basically paying an expensive second mortgage to enable us to send our children to childcare and allow us to continue in our careers.” Parent

“Massive increase in costs over last 12 months to get significantly worse as pension and minimum wage costs increase this year.” Childcare provider

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Our key ask:

Based on our research, we are calling on Government to invest in our childcare infrastructure by: developing a costed Childcare Strategy with a legal framework that is informed by learning from other jurisdictions.

A shared vision

Our Government needs to recognise that childcare is as vital a part of our infrastructure as transport, education and healthcare. It is a key to unlocking barriers to getting parents into, and staying in work, particularly women. It can also open up a child's potential, providing an opportunity for early intervention, and nurturing development.

Just as we expect our roads and our schools to be there for us, we can redesign our childcare infrastructure to work for all of us. We can do this by removing the barrier that affordability poses, protecting the sustainability of the sector and ensuring access to quality care is always an option for families – this will give our children and young people the best start in life.

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**Employers
For Childcare**

