Post Pandemic Childcare

postpandemicchildcare@gmail.com Monday 22 February 2021

Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall Westminster London SW1A 2AS

Dear Vicky Ford MP (Minister for Early Years), Gavin Williamson MP (Secretary of State for Education), Mims Davis MP (Minister for Employment), Elizabeth Truss MP (Minister for Women and Equalities), and Rishi Sunak MP (Chancellor of the Exchequer),

Re: Early Years Policy – Protect All Childcare Workers and Support All Children – directly fund nurseries and guarantee provision for all disadvantaged children

We are parents, early years workers, childminders, lone parents, and guardians. We are childcare providers, babysitters, nursery school teachers, SENCos and nannies. We are grandparents, key workers, NHS workers, critical support. We are citizens and we are undocumented. We are people that care.

We write because early years policy now impacts public health. We write because early years policy has always impacted public health.

Successive governments have failed women – who undertake the majority of unpaid or underpaid childcare work, and right now are once again shouldering the burden of a public health crisis and papering the gaps created by the lack of a coherent early years policy.

Schools have closed but early years settings remain open to all. No evidence has been published to show that early years age children transmit the virus less. Early years workers health is being put at risk. Yet both parents and childcare workers fear closures because there is inadequate support for them to stop work.

Key workers who are parents, often earn under minimum wage, and have been required to work throughout the pandemic. Yet with the early years sector fragmented, and increasingly dominated by multinational chains, providing little flexible and affordable support, they are forced to rely on "informal" (unpaid) childcare arrangements. These arrangements now put family members — frequently grandparents — at risk. With increased transmission rates and covid-19 cases leading to whole nursery closures, the situation only gets worse.

Likewise, the importance of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support at the earliest age, and the exploitations resulting from the hostile environment, are too often overlooked in terms of sector demands to address what is not a singular childcare crisis, but a number of crises.

The remaining quality early years infrastructure, the small, non-profit, community and cooperative nurseries, council-run day nurseries, and maintained nursery schools are at the point of complete collapse. These settings provide affordable childcare, support for disadvantaged children, children with SEND, and children learning English as a second language. They are struggling due to the

culmination of years of underfunding, and insufficient support from government in the face of the pandemic.

If these organisations shut their doors forever, it will cause redundancies of predominantly female workforces, increase unjust employment practices, and mean children lose out on education during the most important stage of their development. There will be dire consequences for the human rights of disabled children, gender equality and the economy.

We call on you to:

- 1. Close Early Years settings to all but key workers' children, vulnerable children, and allⁱ children identified with SEND, during this new national lockdown, in line with schools.
- 2. Prioritise Early Years and Special Educational Needs staff for vaccinations in the next round.
- 3. Stop relying on parents (especially lone parents) to get us through the public health crisis by working two, or more, jobs at once.
- Ensure a legal right to shared and flexible furlough for all parents/carers in case of childcare due to school or early years settings closures, or because of the need to shield (for worker, or member of worker's household). Currently this is at the employer's discretion, and TUC research shows 71% of requests from women during this recent lockdown have been refused.
- Adjust furlough so that it doesn't fall below Real Living Wage (80% of minimum wage is a starvation wage).
- Make furlough a legal right for allⁱⁱ nannies/childcare workers based in the home, as for setting-based workers (unless supporting vulnerable children, children with SEND, or key workers families), if larger early years settings are closed for public health.
- Clearly communicate these rights, to all employers.
- 4. Improve the Self Employment Income Support Scheme so that all parents (including those who are recently self-employed, a limited company, or have recently taken maternity leave) are properly supported when they can't work due to school and early years closures, and so that childminders stop falling through the gaps.
- 5. Change and increase the funding of Early Years entitlements so all Ofsted-registered childcare providers (including childminders, public nurseries: nursery schools and council-run nurseries, private and voluntary day nurseries), get a direct payment from DfE (as schools do) to cover the actual costs of staff and overheads. Instead of the current system of payments attached directly to children and allocated based on inadequate costs per childcare place.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 6. Quickly roll out a significant, urgent, and conditional, funding injection for the whole early years sector, which increases local democratic control of settings, with no bailouts of big childcare chains, unless they ensure Real Living Wage, and no dividends or share buy-backs while in receipt of funding. iv
- 7. End No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) or we will continue to see migrant workers forced to choose between risks to their health and putting food on the table.

- 8. Improve the rights of those on an Overseas Domestic Worker visa to enable them to renew after six months and change their employer. Many on this visa are victims of ill treatment and these adjustments would stop them from having to stay with bad employers and from becoming 'overstayers' undocumented and at a greater risk of exploitation and abuse.
- 9. Increase Child Benefit. This benefit used to be universal and once functioned as a small acknowledgement of unpaid childcare work. It is now means-tested and has not risen with inflation since 2011, despite the fact it is a crucial income source for many families.
- 10. Remove the two-child cap for Child Tax credits and Universal Credit. Stop making parents on Universal Credit pay for their childcare costs up front. Or completely scrap it and come up with a system that actually works for people.

Yours sincerely,

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Veronica Deutsch, nanny, co-founder of Nanny Solidarity Network

Louise O'Hare, parent campaigner, SEND Crisis Tower Hamlets

Lee Shannon, parent campaigner, National Public Day Nurseries campaign and Fight For The Five, Salford

Miranda Critchley, nanny, co-founder of Nanny Solidarity Network

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Sara Reis, Head of Research and Policy, UK Women's Budget Group

Fallon Clemans, Blackley and Broughton

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Allayha Banfield, Early Years worker, Day nursery worker, Bristol South

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Laura Turner, Parent/Guardian, Key worker, Parent, Hackney North and Stoke Newington

Bronwen Evans, Key worker, Teacher, Tottenham

Ilaria Vecchi, Lecturer, Leeds North West

James Found, Parent/Guardian, Stafford

Patricia Gulley, Southend West

Rebecca Grainger, Early Years worker, Day Nursery Worker, Bradford South

Leah Alexander, Early Years worker, Early Years practitioner, Darlington

Rosa Kurowska, Parent/Guardian, Key worker, Secondary Teacher, Holborn and St Pancras

Dave Kirby, Grandparent, Hackney North and Stoke Newington

Laura Jones, Early Years worker, Day nursery worker, Ellesmere Port and Neston

Hilda Palmer Health and safety campaigner and adviser, Blackley and Broughton

Rosie Freeman, Parent/Guardian, Montgomeryshire

Abi Mills, Early Years worker, Childminder, Lancaster and Fleetwood

Hamish Mills, Early Years worker, Childminding Assistant, Lancaster and Fleetwood

Lorna Bryce, Grandparent, Rainbow Smiles Nursery, Weston Super Mare

Alison Payne, Retired Physiotherapist, Basildon and Billericay

Martin Payne, NHS workers, Physiotherapist (retired), Basildon and Billericay

Jane McLean, Parent/Guardian, Parent and preschool committee member, City of Chester

Katie Lyttle, Stay at home mum, City of Chester

Helen Gould, Parent/Guardian, Freelance Dance Director, Lancaster and Fleetwood

Harpreet Paul, Parent/Guardian, Oxford East

Debbie Kersley, Occupational therapist, Cheltenham

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Courtney Sheridan, Early Years worker, Early Years practitioner and 1:1 support, Vale of Clwyd

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David Corcoran, Twickenham

Amanda Sylvester, Early Years worker, Nursery practitioner, Camberwell and Peckham

Catherine De Sousa, private teacher & lone parent, Eddisbury

Elizabeth Bennett, Early Years worker, Folkestone and Hythe

Siobhan Kohli-Lynch, Parent/Guardian, Bristol West

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 $\hbox{Lindsey Dupler, Early Years worker, Parent/Guardian, Parent \& Early Years teaching assistant, } \\$

Brentford and Isleworth

Yukiko Munemoto, Parent/Guardian

 $\hbox{Lindsay Watson, Early Years worker, Preschool Early Years practitioner, The Cotswolds} \\$

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Caroline Basnett, Early Years worker, Parent/Guardian, Key worker, Childminder, Delyn

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Laylah Hough, Luton South

Gillian Andrew, Oldham East and Saddleworth

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Molly Talbot Vine, Parent/Guardian, Brighton, Pavilion

Rachael Murray, Parent/Guardian, Brighton, Kemptown

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Freya Llewellyn, Parent/Guardian, Brighton Pavilion

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Catherine O'Donovan, Enfield North

Stefania Chiariello, Early Years worker, Bristol West

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Paula Stevens, Early Years worker, Pre-school Manager, Southern Cross Pre-school, Hove

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Jonathan Grinham, Halifax

Chris Taylor, Unite member, Manchester Central

Simon King, Manchester Central

George Baker, Blackley and Broughton

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Astrid Everall, Bethnal Green and Bow

Andy Bush, Parent/Guardian, Winchester

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Analee Lazarito, Early Years worker, Cities of London and Westminster

Yolanda Santos, The Voice of Domestic Workers, Nanny and cleaner, East Ham

May Belen Untalan, The Voice of Domestic Workers, Carer/ Old Widower, Hendon

Renera Ichon, The Voice of Domestic Workers, Key worker, Nanny, Bethnal Green and Bow

Demie Masupil, Brent Central

Rose Canares, The Voice of Domestic Workers, North East Bedfordshire

Genevive Martin, The Voice of Domestic Workers, Early Years worker, Key worker, Carer, Ealing Central and Acton

Yvonne Needham, Harborough

Tom O'Hare, Parent/Guardian, Leicester

Mitos Piluden, Domestic worker, Kensington

Anne De guzman, The Voice of Domestic Workers, Nanny, Harrow East

Vanessa Ochondra, The Voice of Domestic Workers, Domestic worker, Sevenoaks

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David Wilson, Lewisham, Deptford

Khadija Badri, Dulwich and West Norwood

Minnie Rahman, Islington South and Finsbury, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

Ferly Delantar, Parent/Guardian, Cities of London and Westminster

Fatime Jadallah, Cheltenham

Members of Parliament:

Apsana Begum, MP for Poplar and Limehouse

Bell Ribeiro-Addy, MP for Streatham

Claudia Webbe. MP for Leicester East

Zarah Sultana, MP for Coventry South

Diane Abbott, MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington

Rebecca Long-Bailey, MP for Salford and Eccles

Kate Osborne, MP for Jarrow

Paula Barker, MP for Liverpool, Wavertree

John McDonnell, MP for Hayes and Harlington

Richard Burgon, MP for Leeds East

Grahame Morris, MP for Easington

Mick Whitley, MP for Birkenhead

Ian Lavery, MP for Wansbeck

Ian Byrne, MP for Liverpool West Derby

Ian Mearns, MP for Gateshead

Lord John Hendy QC

Baroness Christine Blower

Organisations:

SEND Crisis, Tower Hamlets

Nanny Solidarity Network

Fight For The Five, Salford

United Childcare Workers, United Voices of the World

Greenwich NEU

The Voice of Domestic Workers

Kalayaan – UK's leading charity supporting migrant domestic workers Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

John Council for the Wellare of Illingia

New Economics Foundation

UK Women's Budget Group

Institute for Public Policy Research

*All signatories are signing in personal capacity, unless organisation is listed.

Last updated: 21 February 2021. This letter remains open – we continue to seek signatories from individuals and organisations who wish to join the coalition and campaign for these demands. Signups will be invited to our open meeting (online) in the coming weeks, where we will welcome new input and discuss next steps.

Please fill out the form here:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Ma6DLOOc2ro3YdwVnIPYoIUUdIv22A5XsXrMYHSXs6g/

About the campaign: This open letter was co-written by Nirupama Naidu and Louise O'Hare (parent campaigners, SEND Crisis, Tower Hamlets), Veronica Deutsch and Miranda Critchley (organisers, Nanny Solidarity Network), Lee Shannon (parent campaigner, National Public Day Nurseries

campaign and Fight For The Five, Salford), Lucie Stephens (director, Friendly Families Nursery, Deptford). It was first publicly circulated for signatures on Friday 22 January 2021.

Further actions, references for the letter, and our manifesto, can be found here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qVhrXwxM8NICDSqxKdOOyXefbhzOLGDo7nt7T2VdDvl/

Notes:

ⁱ We use "all children" to emphasise that this must include all children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), whether they have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or not. Many children access SEN support without an EHCP, and most of the very youngest children who need SEN support, will not yet have an EHCP in place.

ⁱⁱ We refer to "all nannies/childcare workers" in the home, to include nannies who are not currently eligible for furlough because they are not paid through PAYE. Ending NRPF would also allow migrant nannies to claim Universal Credit if they cannot be furloughed.

iii All settings that invest in their staff, and want to provide affordable childcare to parents, suffer from the underfunding of the early years entitlements, and would benefit from a new funding approach. Public nurseries were closing due to the underfunding of entitlements, before the pandemic and now account for just 4% of all government funded childcare places. Government announcements in August regarding the last 389 "Maintained" Nursery Schools (2% of funded provision), suggested a funding injection, but the National Education Union is clear this will not tackle their deficits. The remaining local council-run day nurseries (under 2%), which like nursery schools prioritise disadvantaged children and those with SEND (while also offering affordable and wraparound hours for younger children than nursery schools) have also been closing their doors over recent years.

iv Such as the Childcare Infrastructure fund proposed by the New Economics Foundation https://neweconomics.org/2020/06/a-childcare-infrastructure-fund