

I write, as a mother and grandmother who has actively participated in the workforce and supported my daughters' families and careers. In relation to childcare for children under three years of age, it is my view that parents should be given Paid Parental Leave (PPL), to enable a family to support itself. I believe that women's workforce participation has become the dominant policy motivator, at the expense of child emotional and physical wellbeing.

Childcare is not the preferred option for children under three because:

- the science of attachment for children indicates that children need a strong attachment figure, not rostered staff, taking active responsibility for their development (Robin Barker well known author of Baby Love has also strongly stressed this point)
- the level of infectious illness in childcare centres is bad for children and families (individual paediatricians have expressed similar views on the short-term and medium term impacts of chronic infections)
- the guilt and grief felt by many mothers returning to work affects their mental health and inhibits their ability to parent
- the distress to young children, very clear in the first months at childcare for many babies and toddlers, is not good for children's mental health.

Paid Parental Leave should be set to allow parents to remain with their children under three, and this load

should be spread, wherever possible between men and women. To prevent women's financial disadvantage, policy should ensure that fathers of children should take, at least, half of this leave. Where parents decide to return to the workforce for lifestyle and career reasons they should bear the full cost of childcare.

I am not aware of any financial modelling on the comparison of increased PPL and subsidies of childcare costs for under three year olds, but I believe that this should be part of your inquiry. Care for babies is expensive and very difficult to access (I was amused to find that at one centre where my grandchild was seeking a place, all the baby places were taken by babies of staff members). I believe that, given the current staffing problems in childcare centres and the increasing costs of childcare, you should compare the costs of giving parents the options better paid PPL for three years.

Any assessment of the costs of babies and toddlers staying at home with a parent, compared to Centre-based care, should include an assessment of mental health and physical health outcomes for children. The Colleges of Paediatricians and Psychiatry should be involved here.