



Lord Agnew Kt DL

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Lord Watson of Invergowrie
House of Lords
London
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3rd September 2019

Dear Lord Watson,

Further to the Debate on Young Adults and Public Service Funding on 18th July 2019 and Viscount Younger's appointment as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, I am pleased to write on his behalf on Care to Learn and some of its recommendations:

1. Care to Learn is extended to all young parents aged 19 and under who are on apprenticeships, or who wish to take up volunteering.

The underlying principle of an apprenticeship is that it is a paid job, and the benefits system treats an apprenticeship in the same way as any other job. Apprentices are employed from day one, do not have to contribute to the costs of their learning, and acquire skills much valued in the labour market. Apprentices on low incomes may be able to claim Universal Credit or tax credits to help with living costs, and can be eligible for the same support of up to 30 free hours childcare and tax-free childcare as any other employee. Additionally, we have made it easier for part-time workers to undertake apprenticeships, which supports those with caring responsibilities and lone parents.

The government is committed to providing meaningful social action opportunities for young people to build their skills and networks outside of school regardless of their background or circumstances. We know participation in social action gives young people the vital skills for life and work and has a positive impact on local communities, and DCMS continues to support Step Up to Serve's #iwill campaign. The way the Care to Learn scheme is currently devised means the available childcare support is not available for social action or volunteering opportunities. We will keep this under review.

2. Care to Learn is extended to all young parents who are their child or children's primary caregiver up to the age of 25.

All parents aged under 20 who meet the Care to Learn residency criteria and engage in publicly funded education (other than higher education) can apply for support if they are the main carer and in receipt of child benefit for their child. Childcare support is also available via Learner Support for all adults participating in an ESFA funded adult education programme who have a specific financial hardship that is preventing them from taking part/continuing in learning – this includes childcare costs. Childcare funding can be used to pay for childcare with a childminder, provider or childminder agency, who is registered with Ofsted. Workers on low incomes may be able to claim Universal Credit or tax credits to help with living costs, and can be eligible for support of up to 30 free hours childcare and tax-free childcare.

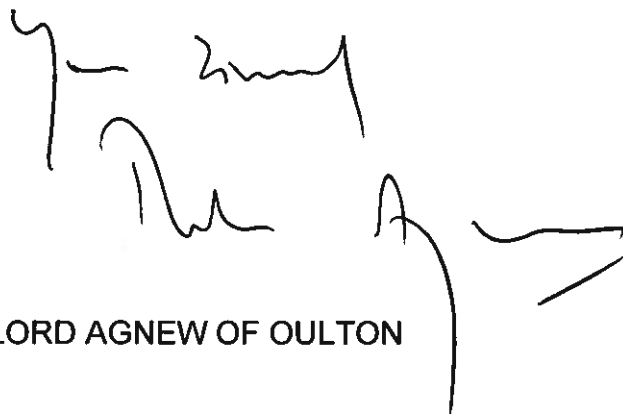
15. Government recognise the importance of children's centres, and ensure that the needs of young parents and their children are taken into account in any future inspection framework.

The government recognises the important role integrated early years services, such as those provided by children's centres, can play in improving outcomes for disadvantaged children. We also welcome the development of family hubs, which deliver services for 0 to 19 year olds and their families, as a way to meet local need. Ultimately, it is not the role of central government to promote one specific way of delivering services to children and families. It is for local authorities to determine the model that they believe will work best for them, based on their area's specific needs, the evidence base, history of local provision, local community circumstances and priorities. We have announced new research with the Early Intervention Foundation to improve our evidence on where children's centre or family hub models work effectively and how to replicate this around the country, so that councils feel more confident in making these decisions.

16. Young parent groups at children's centres are inclusive of all young parents up to the age of 25, including young fathers, where possible. This should be made explicit in information literature.

In 2013, Government introduced a statutory guidance for Sure Start children's centres, including a new "core purpose" for children's centres, focusing on families in greatest need of support. The children's centre core purpose includes both young parents and fathers within its scope and we would look to local authorities to deliver services in a way which best meets the needs of local populations. The statutory guidance is clear that local authorities should target services at young children and families in the area who are at risk of poor outcomes and ensure that families who need services are supported to access them. Ultimately, it is for councils to decide how best to make services available in their areas based on their assessment of local needs.

I hope this has been useful. I will place a copy of this letter in the House library and send a copy to all Peers who spoke in the debate.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lord Agnew of Oulton'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail that extends downwards and to the right.

LORD AGNEW OF OULTON