

The UK Family Report Card 2015

Requires
improvement -
must try
harder!



**Family and
Childcare Trust**

Creating a family friendly UK

Introduction

There are 7.9 million families with dependent children in the UK. Most of them successfully raise their children, although some families struggle with parenting. All families, whatever their background, need certain resources in order to withstand stress and to thrive. These can be grouped into four key areas:

1. A decent income and opportunities for social mobility
2. Access to family-friendly work
3. High quality public services, such as schools and healthcare
4. A family-friendly infrastructure, particularly housing and transport.

Each year the Family and Childcare Trust produces a Family Report Card. This reviews the Government's progress towards becoming a family-friendly country. We draw on our own analysis of policy and official statistics, as well as the real experiences of families, through a survey of parents¹ who are asked to grade the Government on its effort to support families in the above areas, as well as giving an overall mark for being 'family-friendly'.

Our 2015 Family Report Card is published at an important time. All the mainstream political parties went into the 2015 general election with significant pledges for families and a new government is the opportunity to turn these proposals into action to help families. Since the election, the Government has announced many changes in policy that affect families, in particular, increasing the hours of free childcare and changes to tax credits.

It is also a year since the Government announced that all new laws or government policies will be subject to the 'family test' to make sure they support strong and stable families¹. It is an important time to audit family policy. We hope that the 2015 Family Report Card is a useful tool for those who want to work to make the country family-friendly.

Income and poverty

Financial pressures impact on family life in many ways. Arguments about money can contribute to the breakdown of relationships and increase parental stress and depression. While the relationship between poverty and parenting skills is complex, poverty makes it much more difficult to be a good parent.

Families have experienced close to a decade of stagnating living standards as wages have stalled while their expenditure on key items such as housing and childcare has increased. Tax and benefit changes implemented since 2010 have also reduced the income of most families with childrenⁱⁱ. Prospects for families with young children and low to middle incomes are unlikely to improve in the medium term as tax credit cuts to families with young children outweigh the benefit of planned increases in the minimum wage and tax cuts.

The overall proportion of children living in families whose income falls below the relative poverty line (60 per cent of median income) has remained stable at 17 per centⁱⁱⁱ, mostly due to a fall in workless households. The proportion of families with working parents in poverty has increased significantly. For example, in 2013/14, 35 per cent of children in families where one parent works full-time were living in poverty compared to 27 per cent in 2009/10.

There has also been an increase in the percentage of families who are living in material deprivation, which stood at 23.5 per cent in 2013/14^v. This measure of poverty is the proportion of parents who do not feel they can afford basic necessities. Rising material deprivation is consistent with trends in the minimum income standard, an income measure of poverty based on what members of the public think families need for an acceptable minimum standard of living^{vi}. For example, income for a couple with two children working full-time at the national minimum wage fell £31 short per week of the minimum income standard in 2008, and £75 short per week in 2015.

The Government has extended free school meals to all 5-7 year olds in England and will give parents greater help with their childcare costs from 2016 through Universal Credit, the new Tax Free Childcare scheme and increasing the hours of free early education. Despite these interventions, the future outlook

1 Survey to a nationally representative sample of 1,023 parents undertaken by YouGov between 2 and 4 September 2015.

for living standards for families is poor. This is because housing costs continue to increase and the Government proposes to significantly reduce financial support for parents both in and out of work. This includes a four-year freeze to most working age benefits and tax credits, and a reduction in the work allowance within tax credits (the amount individuals can earn before they start to see their tax credits withdrawn). The child element of tax credits, which is currently provided per child, will in future be capped at two children. Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that while the proposed rise in the minimum wage – £9 per hour by 2020 – will help improve incomes for families with at least one parent in work, this will not offset income lost for families through cuts to tax credits.

The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission reports that the UK risks becoming a permanently divided society^{vii}. Rising housing prices have locked many out of the housing ladder and many young people struggle to find high quality work. This means that the economic prospects for young parents and new families are increasingly precarious.

The Government has announced that it will repeal the Child Poverty Act 2010 targets and indicators of poverty, such as the relative poverty measure of 60 per cent of median income. They will be replaced by measures that the Government argues will highlight the root causes of poverty, such as family worklessness. The Government will continue to publish income poverty statistics but will not be required to improve family incomes in order to reduce child poverty. Family income however, remains the single clearest influence on outcomes for children. While there is reasonable scope to broaden the range of strategies the Government uses to reduce poverty, there is little sense in removing clear child poverty measures and targets.

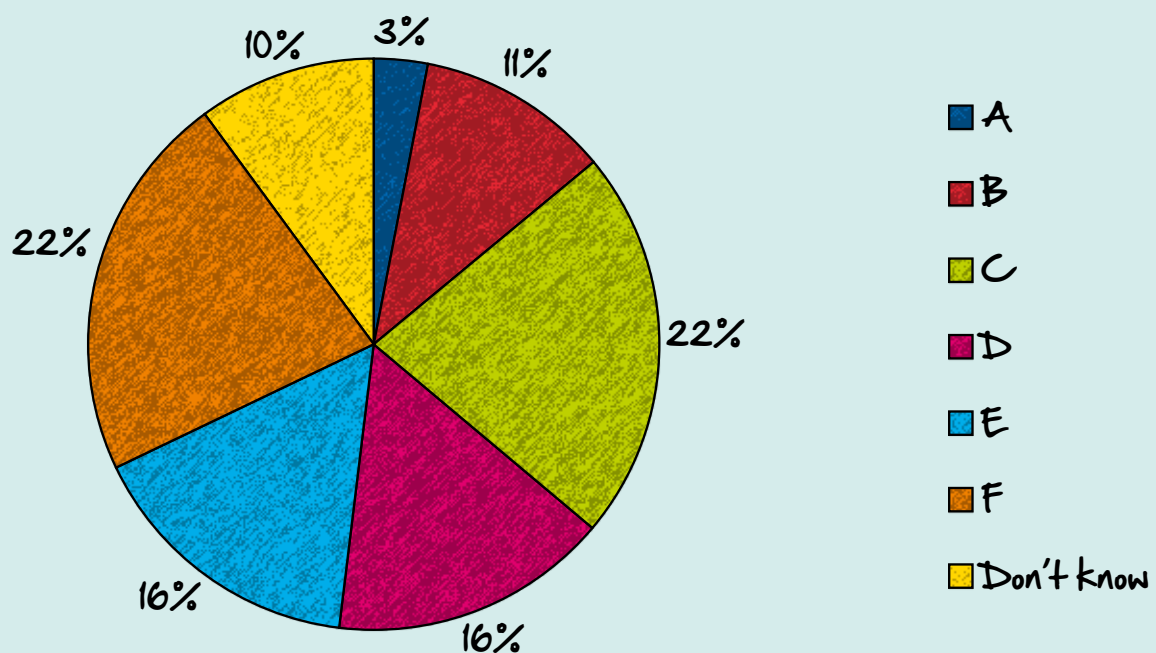
Parents' verdict on wages and benefits:

Families with young children have been hard hit by both recession and the Government's approach to reducing its deficit. While growth is now occurring in the wider economy, tax and benefit changes mean that families with low and modest incomes are likely to see their standard of living continue to decline rather than improve.

Grade:



Parent's grades on wages and benefits



N=1,050

Access to family friendly work

Over 90 per cent of couple families with dependent children have at least one parent in work and 56 per cent of single parents with children are in work. Over the last ten years there has been a significant rise in employment among women with children under three (from 52 to 60 per cent) and single parents from 53 to 60 per cent. But there are significant regional differences in maternal employment, with only 63 per cent of mothers with dependent children working in London, compared with 73 per cent in the rest of the UK. Despite these encouraging trends, maternal employment in the UK has historically lagged that of a number of European counter-parts, falling 20 per cent below the highest performers such as Denmark and 8 per cent below comparable nations such as France. These differences relate primarily to more generous parental leave entitlements, greater gender equality and more affordable childcare provision.

Many new families now aspire to a balance of caring between parents, but these aspirations are often frustrated by the reality of the work opportunities that are available, which usually means making a stark choice between full-time work, part-time work or not working at all. Half of the parents in families where both parents are not working full-time would like to work or work longer hours, but face barriers to doing so. Simultaneously, a third of parents working full-time would like to work less^{ix}.

The gender pay gap stands at 19.1 per cent (or 9.4 per cent for only those working full-time)^x. The gender pay gap is principally explained by maternal employment experiences when they have young children. Most mothers still remain the primary carers for their child, and thus experience career gaps or periods of part-time work. However, part-time jobs are often of a lower status than full-time employment, offer lower pay and are less likely to lead to promotion. In 2014, the median gross hourly pay for part-time female worker was £8.46 in England, but for a full-time female worker it was £12.37^{xi}. The lower status and pay of part-time work, combined with potentially frequent changes in employment, impact negatively on women's pay and career prospects, leading to a 'motherhood penalty'.

Flexible work – One way to increase gender equality at work is to promote work-life balance for all employees, which helps to destigmatise those who adjust their working patterns to support family life. Flexible work opportunities can also help families move out of poverty by enabling parents to move into work or extend their hours.

All employees now have the right to request flexible working. Despite this right, many UK employers remain reluctant to offer meaningful flexible working opportunities and fail to be pro-active in promoting work-life balance. For example, only a third of workplaces allow flexi-time working in the UK^{xii}. Some groups of workers find it particularly difficult to work flexibly, including the least well-qualified, those who work in male-dominated workplaces, and those who work manufacturing industry and construction. Employees who request flexible work are also sometimes seen as being less committed, with a third of respondents (31 per cent) in a 2013 survey reporting that they have heard derogatory remarks made about flexible work in their workplaces^{xiii}.

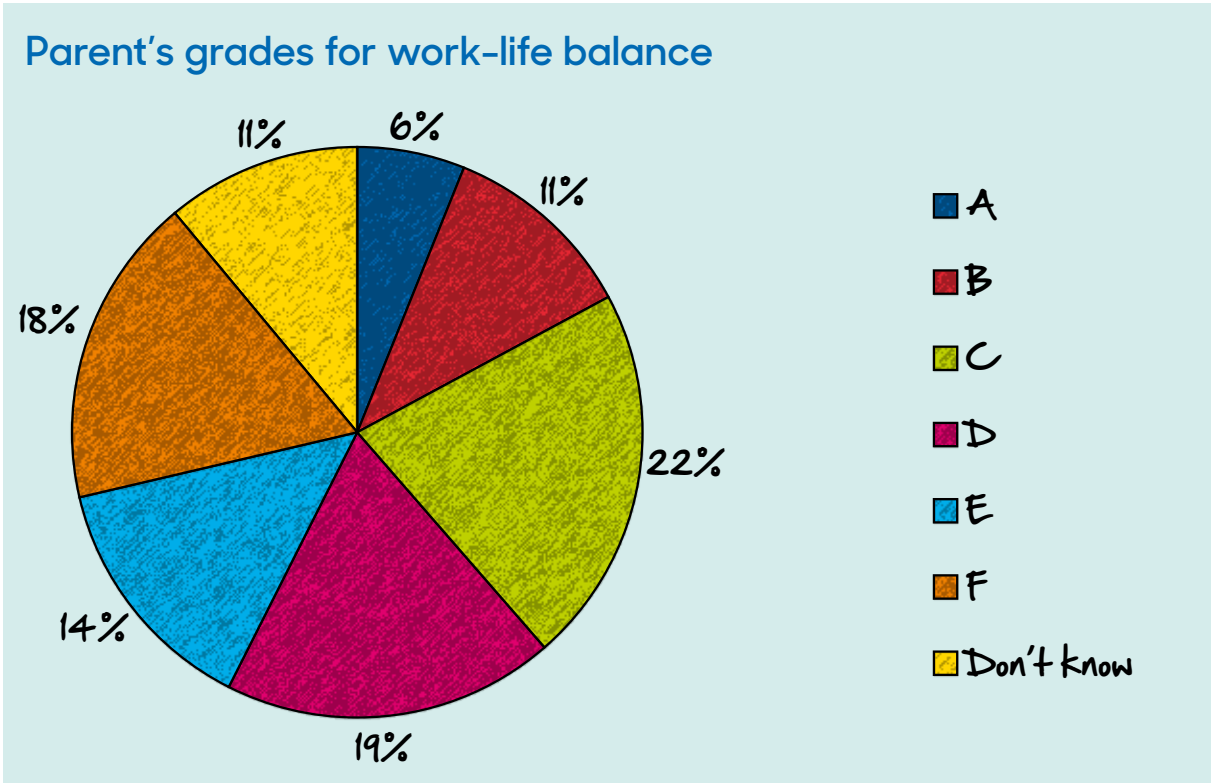
Irregular hours of work can make it difficult to balance work and caring obligations, as many childcare providers, particularly nurseries, find it difficult to accommodate parents whose childcare needs change from week-to-week. Those who are self-employed, agency workers and those on zero-hours contracts are groups whose work patterns are more likely to be irregular. The numbers of self-employed and workers employed on zero hours has continued to increase, making up 15 per cent^{xiv} and 2.4 per cent^{xv} of the UK workforce respectively.

Parental leave – Paid parental leave now stands at 39 weeks with an additional 13 weeks of unpaid leave for the mother or the father. From April 2015 parents have been able to share 50 weeks of leave between them, of which 37 can be paid. However, mothers continue to take on the majority of responsibility for care and the Government estimates that a relatively small proportion of fathers will use shared parental leave^{xvi}.

There are two major constraints on take-up of parental leave among fathers and a more equal distribution of care. The first of these is stigma and workplaces attitudes. Secondly, replacement pay for parental leave is low: after six weeks, statutory maternity pay is paid at a maximum of £139.58 each week, which is significantly less than the minimum wage. For many families, it is necessary for at least one parent to remain in full-time work to meet living costs, limiting opportunities for both parents to get involved in care. Yet the imbalance in caring responsibilities has long term consequences for mothers' employment opportunities and prospects and makes it difficult for fathers to play a full role in their children's lives.

Pregnancy discrimination – The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has recently published research on pregnancy discrimination. Some the EHRC’s main findings are troubling: one in nine mothers, amounting to 54,000 in a year, reported that they were either dismissed, made redundant where others in their workplace were not, or treated so poorly they felt they had to leave their job. One in five mothers said they had experienced harassment or negative comments related to pregnancy or flexible working at work^{xviii}. The Alliance Against Pregnancy Discrimination in the Workplace has proposed initial steps the Government should take, including a high profile information campaign and steps to ensure those affected by discrimination are not prevented from seeking redress by legal fees and by court costs that can add up to £1,200 to get a case lodged and heard at a tribunal.

Parents’ verdict on work-life balance:	Grade:
<i>While the Government has a positive approach to family friendly work, it is not yet doing enough to challenge entrenched employment practices that undermine family life, which include the greater amounts of low paid and precarious employment. Caring obligations – to children or older relatives – continue to be seen as a female responsibility. Until there is a shift in these attitudes, the gender pay gap between male and female earnings will persist.</i>	



N=1,048

High quality public services

Under-fives – At a national level, early education is enjoying a political profile that is unprecedented and the Government has set up a cross-departmental childcare taskforce. Since September 2014 the 40 per cent most income deprived two year olds became entitled to free early education in England, with disadvantaged two year olds in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales also entitled to part-time early education.

Take-up of free early education among deprived two year olds has been low in some areas. By January 2015 just 58 per cent of children were receiving this provision, with figures particularly low in London. This means that 113,000 of the most disadvantaged two year olds are missing out on early education.

The Family and Childcare Trust welcomes the Government's commitment to double the hours of free early education from 570 hours per year, to 1,140 hours annually. This will be implemented in September 2017 and apply to three and four year old children of working parents in England. The devolved administrations have yet to announce their plans for extending this provision.

Despite a greater focus on early education, there is no sign of the development gap between disadvantaged young children and their more advantaged peers narrowing in any substantial way^{xix}. There needs to be a greater policy focus on parenting support and the quality of early education provision if this inequality is to be narrowed. The reduction in children's centre services has continued and the Government has not articulated a vision for the future of this integrated support for under-fives^{xx}.

Schooling – Overall 5–11 school spending has been protected from funding cuts. In England, the Government has committed to opening 500 new free schools, if parents want them. All failing schools and coasting secondary schools will be turned into academies and there are ambitious plans to train more maths and science teachers. Children's test and examination results have continued to improve, but in all parts of the UK there are still very large gaps between boys and girls results, between different ethnic groups and between the most disadvantaged children and their peers. In England, for example, just 41.8 per cent of students entitled to free school meal obtained 5A*–C grades (including English and maths) at GCSE in 2014, compared with 69.8 per cent of all other children.

Post-16 education – The numbers of young people starting full-time university courses was at its highest ever level in 2015. But 16–19 education was cut by 12 per cent in real terms in 2010–2015, and will face further cuts in this Parliament. When apprenticeships are excluded, post-19 further education will see a 24 per cent cut in 2015/16. This will impact on many vocational courses training that play a vital role in helping parents' find work.

Early intervention and social care – The Government has continued to support early intervention programmes targeted at the most disadvantaged families. In the long-term these programmes will help reduce the numbers of children entering the care system. However, there are big differences in the level of spending on early intervention programmes between local authorities, as well in other areas such as parenting support and child mental health, which has led to a postcode lottery of services

While the Government wishes to improve the outcomes of looked after children, this intention has not been translated into practice. Many children are still placed in care many miles away from their home areas, and coordination between placing and receiving local authorities is often poor^{xxi}. In England there is a 43 percentage point gap at GCSE between looked after children and those not in care. Children's early experiences can have long-term impacts on their health, wellbeing and future employment. Children who have been in care are more likely to experience problems in later life, which can have a wider social impact and lead to higher costs to the public purse.

Health – This is a devolved policy area and like education also has a protected budget. In England the Government has a target to ensure that GP's surgeries are open between 8am and 8pm for seven days of the week by 2020. This will help busy parents and may help keep those with young children out of accident and emergency departments. The Family and Childcare Trust also welcomes £1.25 billion extra spending on children's mental health.

In England, health visitor services will be commissioned by local authorities from October 2015 and the Government will bring in a joint health-education development check for 2-3 year olds this year. But the UK has some poorer maternal and child health outcomes compared with other OECD countries. Just 46 per cent of mothers are still breast-feeding, partially or exclusively, in England by the time of a baby's 6-8 week development check, with the least well-qualified women least likely to breastfeed^{xxi}. The Family and Childcare Trust is also concerned about increased levels of childhood obesity. In 2012-2014, some 31.8 per cent of reception class children are obese or overweight, compared with 23.8 per cent in 2008-2010^{xxii}.

Overall, the UK is a country with deep-seated health inequalities that span a range of family health indicators, including breastfeeding uptake, healthy behaviours, hospital admissions and mortality. These inequalities do not only affect the very poorest. Rather there is a close link between where a family is on the socio-economic ladder and the health of its members- the higher the rank, the better the health. These inequalities remain one of the biggest challenges facing the NHS.

Cultural and leisure provision - The state supports much cultural, leisure and sport provision in the UK. It provides some of these services itself, by running libraries, music services, adult education services, sports centres and parks. Local government also commissions and provides grant funding to culture and leisure services. Local authority revenue spending on cultural environmental services amounts to £7,544,000 per local authority in 2015/16, 3 per cent less than the previous financial year^{xxiii}. While culture and leisure provision should not be immune from spending cuts, year-on-year spending cuts reductions have the potential to impact on the quality of life in the communities we live in.

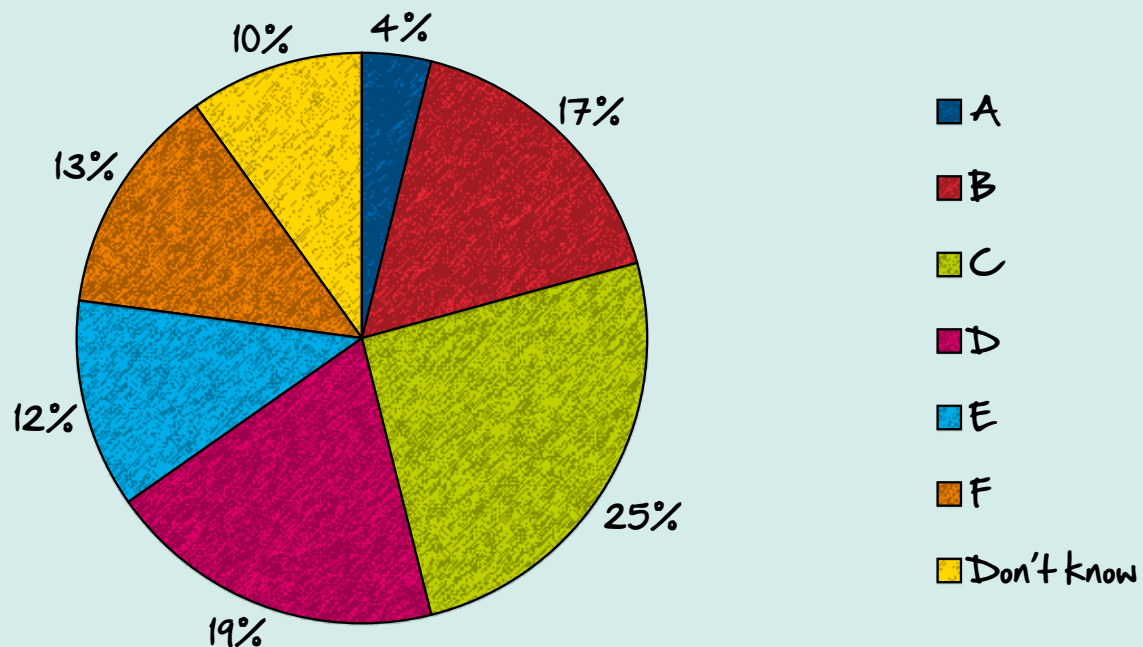
Parents' verdict on schools and nurseries:

There is a much higher level of satisfaction with the Government's performance on schooling and nursery provision than many other areas of family life. However, there are deep inequalities in educational and health outcomes that not reducing.

Grade:

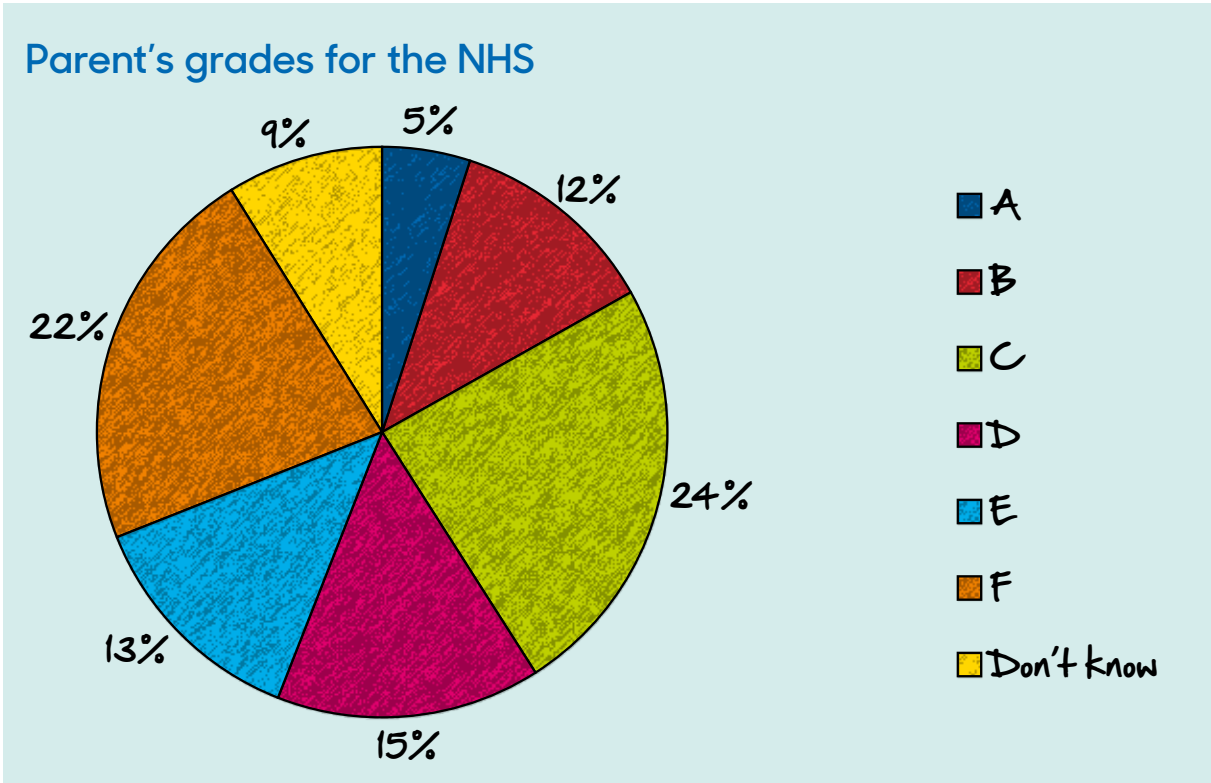


Parent's grades for schools and nurseries



N=1,050

Parents' verdict on the NHS:	Grade:
Parents' are concerned about the on-going quality of healthcare in GP surgeries and hospitals.	



N=1,048

A family friendly infrastructure

Transport – Families who have limited access to public transport and cannot afford a car are disadvantaged as it can be more difficult to find and keep work. Shopping options also are reduced and family lives are also more stressful and pressured. Transport poverty may prevent children from taking up free early education or attending after-school enrichment activities. Local authorities are obliged to draw up transport plans, which outline how national transport priorities are to be implemented at a local level. While they cover issues such as road safety and pollution, not all of them explicitly consider the needs of families.

In 2013 some 2,029 children under 16 were killed or seriously injured on roads in England, Scotland and Wales, of whom the majority were pedestrians. We believe that safe roads are part of a family friendly infrastructure. While there has been a year-on-year decline in road casualties in recent years, there are differences between social groups in the rates of child casualties, with children from the lowest socio-economic classes three times more likely to be killed as a pedestrian^{xxiv}.

Housing – Stable, decent housing is vital to families, but shortages of social housing, increasing private sector rents and house price rises – 4.2 per cent in the 12 months to August 2015 – have put this out of the reach of many families.

Over the last ten years there have been major changes in patterns of housing tenure in the UK, with many more families living in privately rented accommodation, with proportionately fewer owner occupiers and social tenants. In 2014 more than 1 in 5 families with dependent children were private renters, compared with 1 in 10 in 2007. Private rental prices paid by tenants in Great Britain rose by 2.5 per cent in the 12 months to June 2015. Much privately rented housing is of poor quality and regulation of this type of accommodation is weak. In England 33 per cent of private rented homes do not meet government's Decent Homes Standard compared with 20 per cent of owner-occupied homes and 15 per cent of social housing. Six months is the de facto length of a tenancy agreement for private renters and as a consequence many families in this type of accommodation are forced to move home frequently. This can disrupt children's education and social lives, as well as parents' support networks. A wide range of organisations are now lobbying for a longer 'family' tenancy for those in the private rental sector, as well as the regulation of letting agents' fees^{xxviii}.

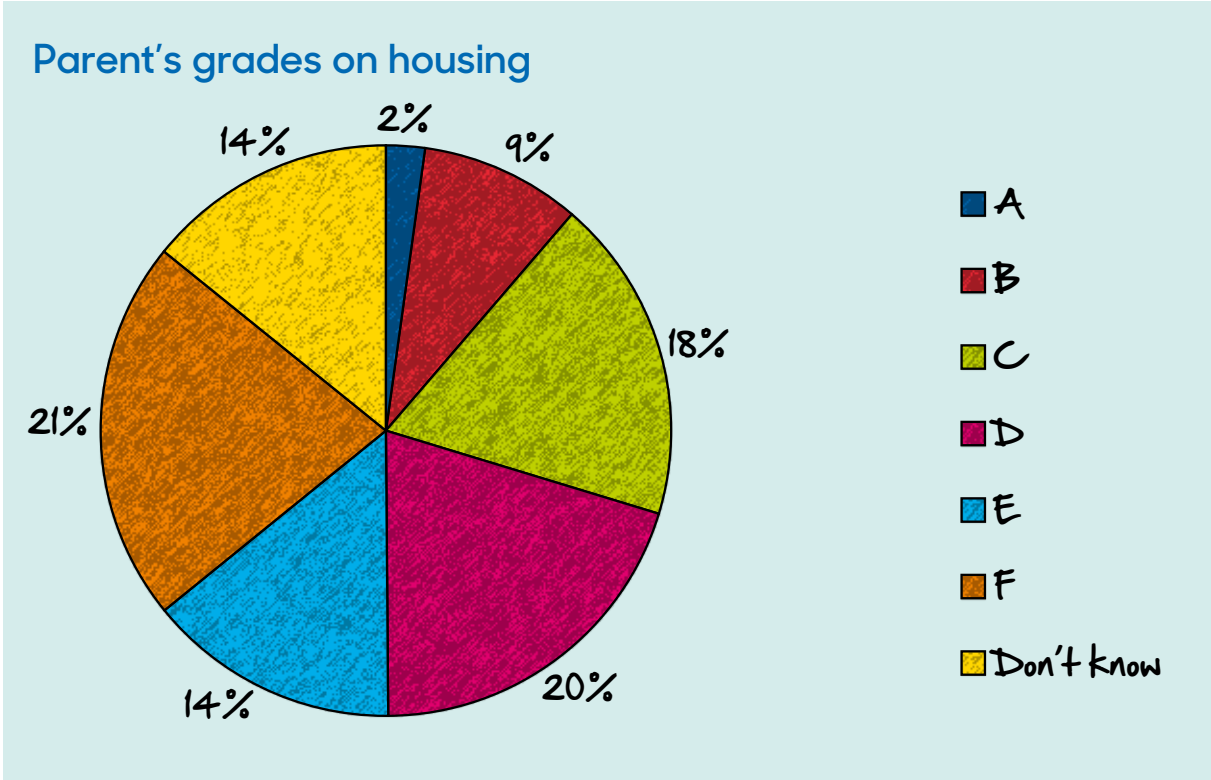
Policy developments since the General Election include giving the tenants of housing associations the right to buy their properties, although this change will only apply in England. Housing associations have argued that this will lead to a reduction in their housing stock. While the Government has promised that the properties that are sold will be replaced on a one-for-one basis, there will be a time lag in rebuilding them and it is uncertain where the replacements will be built. Local authorities are also being forced to sell their own vacant 'high value' social housing in order to fund the planned housing association replacement programme^{xxviii}.

Whether owned or rented, our homes are also smaller and more overcrowded, compared with other wealthy nations. The area of the average home is 76m² in UK, compared with 113m² in France and 133m² in Denmark. Architects are involved in the design of new homes less often in the UK than many other countries, which means that space may not be utilised effectively. Overcrowding places stresses on families, as well as affecting children's health and educational outcomes.

How we treat homeless families is a key indicator of a family friendly nation. Compared with the 1990s there are now fewer homeless households in temporary accommodation, although the number of homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation has increased by more than 300 per cent in the last five years. At the end of March 2015 there were 52,986 households in temporary accommodation in England, 10,509 in Scotland and 1,980 in Wales^{xxix}.

The root cause of homelessness and the shift of families into insecure private rental accommodation is a shortage of affordable housing. In England and Wales private and housing association housebuilding completions increased by 10.6 per cent in 2014/15 compared with the previous year, with 130,690 new housing completions, of which 78 per cent was private housing. But the amount of house building still stands at historically low levels, 31 per cent lower in England in 2014/15 than a decade ago^{xxx}. Unless this trend is reversed, many young families will not be able to own their own homes. Delivering on the promise to building enough new homes should be one of the Government's biggest priorities.

Parents' verdict on housing:	Grade:
Parents awarded the Government a much lower mark for its performance on housing, compared with its performance on work-life balance, education and the NHS. Only 11 per cent of parents in our poll gave the Government an 'A' or 'B', with 35 per cent grading the Government 'E' or 'F'. Building more affordable family-sized homes, including for social tenants, needs to be a priority.	



N=1,049

Overall grade

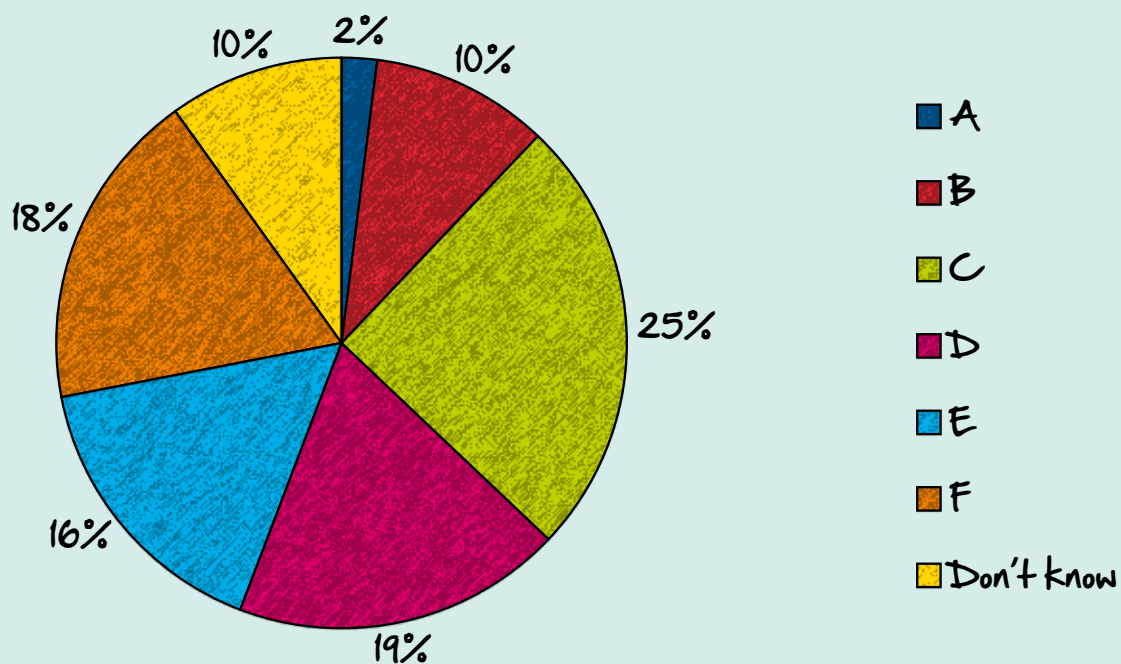
The parents we polled gave the Government an overall grade of 'D' for family friendly. The distribution of marks shows that the majority of parents are not satisfied with the Government's performance on family friendly: just 12 per cent of parents gave the Government an 'A' or 'B', compared with 34 per cent who gave an 'E' or 'F'. Parents living in Scotland and those with older children were significantly less likely to give the Government a high mark.

When we looked at parents' grading of different aspects of family friendly, parental satisfaction with schools and nurseries was higher than in any of other areas we examined. This may well reflect the better performance of schools, as well as the extension of free nursery education. That the schools budget has had some protection from public spending cuts may also have influenced this mark.

In England, Scotland and Wales parents were least satisfied with the Government's performance on wages, benefits and on housing. Tax and benefit changes coupled with high housing costs mean that families with low and modest incomes have seen their standard of living decline rather than improve.

All of us – individuals, the Government, business and civil society – have a role to play in making this country truly family friendly. A decent home is the centre of family life. But too many children and parents are living in overcrowded, insecure accommodation in this country. Taking action to reduce housing costs by building more homes must be a priority for the Government.

Overall grade for family friendly



N=1,048

Grading of the Government's overall record on family friendly

	% parents giving an overall A or B grade	% parents giving an E or F grade
All parents	12%	34%
Social grades A, B and C1	14%	31%
Social grades C2, D and E	12%	37%
Parents living in Scotland	8%	51%
Parents with children aged 0-2	23%	25%
Parents with children aged 10+	12%	37%

N=1,048

Parents' overall grade for family friendly:

Clearly, the Government needs to do better, particularly on income and housing.

Grade:



Acknowledgements

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Jill Rutter is Head of Research and Policy at the Family and Childcare Trust. Previously Jill was a senior research fellow in migration at the Institute for Public Policy Research. Educated at Oxford University and London University's Institute of Education, Jill has also lectured at London Metropolitan University, worked in as a policy advisor at the Refugee Council and as a secondary school teacher. Her publications include *Moving Up and Getting On: Integration and Social Cohesion in the UK* (Policy Press, 2015).

About the Family and Childcare Trust

The Family and Childcare Trust works to make the UK a better place for families. Our vision is of a society where government, business and communities do all they can to support every family to thrive. Through our research, campaigning and practical support we are creating a more family friendly UK.

The Family and Childcare Trust's annual childcare costs survey is the definitive report on childcare costs and sufficiency in the UK and its data are used by the Department for Education and OECD.



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- xviii Some 44.8 per cent of children in receipt of free school meals were judged to have a good level of development in their Early Years Foundation Stage Profile in 2014, compared with 63.7 per cent of children not in receipt of free school meals – a gap of 18.9%.
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- xxiv Department for Transport Road Casualty Statistics, 2013.
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