

News links from May 2022

Obesity and Nutrition

Delays to the plans to outlaw multi-buy deals attracted criticism this month. Cardiologist Prof. Graham MacGregor, Chair of [Action on Sugar](#), said the delays contradicted the government's "levelling up" agenda, and Barbara Crowther, of the [Children's Food Campaign](#) said *"This delay threatens the UK target to halve childhood obesity by 2030. Boris is playing politics with our children's health"*.

This criticism is supported by Dr Dolly Theis at the [MRC Epidemiology Unit in Cambridge University](#) whose research ["Is Obesity Policy in England Fit for Purpose? Analysis of Government Strategies and Policies, 1992–2020"](#) asserts that Britain deserves better than 689 failed obesity policies. Staggering projections of obesity based on data collected by [Cancer Research UK](#) (CRUK) predict that that 71% of people will be overweight by 2040 (a rise from 64% today) and of these, almost 36% of adults – 21 million people – will be obese. More statistics can be found [here](#).

In the meantime, eating disorder hospital admissions have risen by a worrying 84% in five years, including a 35% increase in the last year alone for children and young people. [Read more](#).

Play

Professor Peter Gray asks the questions 'What is play? How do children define it?' in [Psychology Today](#), offering a different perspective with challenges such as *"If an adult is present, it's probably not play"*.

Shortcomings of our play-parks for children with disabilities have been highlighted by the disability equality charity [Scope](#). 1,000 parents of disabled children aged under 12 in England and Wales were surveyed and poor design and a lack of consideration of needs were cited as factors excluding children with disabilities. It's crucial for playgrounds to be designed with all children in mind, argued Scope, with their campaign [Let's Play Fair](#).

Education

A National Register of home-schooled children has been outlined as part of the [Schools Bill](#), announced in the Queen's Speech. [Ofsted](#) will be given greater powers to crack down on 'unregistered schools' operating illegally and follows the revelation last year of an 'astonishing' lack of data on the number of children being home educated and calls for a national register of children out of school, according to a [Willis Palmer article](#). For wider analysis of the Bill, go to the [Policy Statements](#).

Poverty and Inequality

[Loughborough University's](#) new [research](#) on the minimum acceptable standard of living has found that basic goods and services for a family with two children are about £400 a month more expensive than they were last year. Peter Matejic from the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) commented: *"Families in poverty are feeling the worst effects of the frightening jumps we are seeing in the cost of living, because more of their budget goes on essential items and their incomes just can't keep up."* [Read the news report](#) or [read the research](#).

Early Years

[The Education Endowment Foundation](#) (EEF) have found that in 2021, 4 and 5-year-olds were less likely to meet the expected levels of development than from before the pandemic. Areas affected relate to children's personal-social and emotional development, language, literacy and numeracy. [Read the report.](#)

[The Early Years Alliance](#), challenging the proposal to allow more children for each member of nursery staff in England, has found in [a survey](#) that 87% of 9,000 respondents were opposed to relaxing ratios and 80% were 'strongly opposed'. Just 2% of providers say that the changes would result in lower fees for parents. Alliance CEO Neil Leitch commented: *"It is simply not good enough: not for our children, not for parents and not for a sector for early years professionals who all deserve better. We urge the government to abandon this lame duck of a policy before any more time is wasted on it."*

More positive solutions to childcare challenges were proposed by the [Centre for Policy Studies](#) recently, as they recommended a threefold solution. To find out more, read the briefing paper [Solving the Childcare Challenge](#).

School Food

The BBC outlined [in their article here](#) how rising food prices will affect school dinners. Andrew Selley from food supplier [Bidfood](#), warned that school caterers could be forced to serve smaller portions or use cheaper ingredients. He called on the government to ensure funding for free school meals kept pace with rising prices, saying *"Over the last 10 years the amount of money the government provides for free school meals has only gone up by 1.7%, which obviously was well behind inflation even before this last 12 months."*

Physical Activity

Researchers from the [University of Bristol](#), funded by the [National Institute for Health and Care Research](#) looked at child physical activity levels. Findings showed that by the end of 2021 little more than a third (36%) of children were meeting the national physical activity guidelines. Notably, children were less active at the weekend than during the week, and took part in 8 minutes less moderate to vigorous physical activity during those weekend days compared with pre-pandemic levels. [Read more](#)

Mental Health

A coalition of more than 200 charities, academics and children's professionals - the [Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition](#) - is launching an inquiry to explore links between mental health and behaviour among school pupils. Concerns around schools in England using punitive approaches to tackle challenging behaviour have prompted the inquiry which will look at how current school policies impact on pupils and their families and ways schools can better safeguard young people's wellbeing. Read [this article](#) for further information. **Friday 10th June 2022 is the deadline for the call for evidence.**

Social Care

[The Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) of England's council-run children's services was published in May. It says struggling families need early intervention to ensure they do not reach crisis point, and the Review's lead Josh MacAlister called for £2.6bn over five years to transform the system and prevent the number of children in care - already at record levels - rising above 100,000. Government opponents point to austerity measures as a major cause, but Ministers have promised "ambitious and detailed" plans before the end of 2022.

[Read more](#) [Read the Children's Commissioner's response](#) [Read Charities' response](#) [Read Guardian article](#)

Concern about excess profits of children's home providers continued last month, with the new head of the [Association of Directors of Children's Services](#) (ADCS), Steve Crocker, writing in this [Guardian article](#) that providers should not be able to profit from caring for society's most vulnerable children, and some do so by *"cherry-picking the easiest children . . . maintaining their good Ofsted ratings by refusing to take children with the most complex needs"*. The result, he added, was a *"two-tier system"* where there was a severe shortage of homes for *"really tricky kids"*.

Profit margins for the 15 largest private children's home operators average 22.6%, according to the [Competition and Markets Authority](#).