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Anna Tyzack is a journalist at *the Telegraph* and founder of *Mumfidential*, a personal blog and community about motherhood and childcare.

Anna Tyzack

Nanny wars: how employees are being tempted with money and luxury cars



Two people fighting over Mary Poppins

A toxic combination of Brexit¹ and the pandemic² are to blame for Britain's nanny shortage

5 Forget *Squid Game*³ – such is the current drought of nannies that wealthy families are resorting to psychological warfare to net⁴ their child's Mary Poppins.

Nanny poaching is rife⁵, according to Lucy Challenger, founder of upmarket nanny agency Polo and Tweed, with parents sidling up to⁶ nannies at the school gates and luring them with vast pay rises, use of holiday homes, and in one case a flat in Chelsea⁷ with all expenses paid.

10 “There are seriously dirty tactics going on,” she says. “I heard of one family who stole their friends’ nanny after they’d seen how good she was while at a dinner party at their house. They subtly got hold of her number and offered her a £70,000 salary and a Range Rover as a signing bonus.”

¹ Storbritanniens udtræden af EU

² coronapandemien 2020-2021

³ *Squid Game*: sydkoreansk TV-serie fra 2021 om folk, der risikerer livet for at vinde penge i et TV-show

⁴ indfange

⁵ *Nanny poaching is rife*: At snuppe andres barnepige er udbredt

⁶ *sidling up to*: sniger sig hen til

⁷ velhaverkvarter i London

There are many similar stories circulating, such as the mother who arranged a chance encounter with her friends' nanny at a soft play centre⁸, where she offered her a £25,000 pay rise and an electric Mini, and another who became a shoulder to cry on for a friend's nanny, eventually suggesting that she might be happier looking after her children instead. [...]

A toxic combination of Brexit and the pandemic are to blame for Britain's nanny shortage, with the number of foreign nannies travelling to the UK falling to almost zero. Many European nannies returned home to be with their families at the start of the pandemic, only to miss applying for pre-settled status⁹ in the UK, thus losing their right to work here, while those from Australia and New Zealand simply haven't been able to get on a plane.

When parents were working from home during the pandemic, many found they could muddle through with ad hoc babysitting¹⁰, but now they're expected back in the office, a reliable nanny is an absolute necessity – putting further pressure on the diminished pool of childcare professionals. There are now 20 per cent less nannies looking for jobs since this time last year, according to figures from search portal *Childcare.co.uk*¹¹, while searches for nannies are up by nearly 30 per cent. "We're seeing families throwing in incentives¹² such as cars, regular spa treatments and foreign holidays," confirms founder Richard Conway. "We're the busiest we've ever been."

The demise¹³ of the au pair is only fueling the nanny wars. For those on lower incomes (or who were too tight to pay for a trained nanny), the au pair program, a cultural exchange where young people age 18 to 26 can live with a host family and receive weekly pocket money in exchange for childcare, has always been a lifeline but post Brexit au pairs are no longer allowed. [...] Where once families paid their au pairs £130 per week in pocket money – or less, if they only needed a few hours – £350 is now the norm, with added incentives such as gym memberships, *Net-a-Porter*¹⁴ vouchers and driving lessons. One local mother I know allows her au pair to take a group of friends to their weekend house once a month, while another pays for her highlights, waxing and spray tans.

Schools are the unwitting victim of the great nanny scramble¹⁵, as desperate parents resort to poaching their children's teacher. With the average London nanny salary now £48,000 – and junior nannies regularly paid £65,000 – one can see why teachers might be lured away from the classroom, particularly if the new role involves looking after just one child, and includes a host¹⁶ of glamorous sweeteners and bonuses. Nanny salaries have shot up by 20 per cent in the past year, according to *Nannytax.co.uk*, with the most experienced now netting £100,000, according to Natasha Earl, director of nanny agency *Burlington Nannies*.

While these figures put teaching salaries to shame, Challenger points out that the highest paid nanny jobs come with huge responsibility and inflexible hours. "I don't think we will see a mass exodus¹⁷ of teachers becoming nannies – you won't get teachers' holidays or time off at weekends. Working for a

⁸ *soft play centre*: legeland

⁹ *pre-settled status*: opholdstilladelse

¹⁰ *ad hoc babysitting*: (her) skiftende barnepiger

¹¹ hjemmeside, hvor forældre kan finde pasning til deres børn

¹² belønninger

¹³ tilbagegang

¹⁴ eksklusiv mode-webshop

¹⁵ *the great nanny scramble*: den store kamp om barnepiger

¹⁶ overflod

¹⁷ flugt

high net worth¹⁸ family can be a shock to the system; you can't turn your phone off; you might have to jump on the private jet at a moment's notice," she says.

50 With the UK's childcare system now the third most expensive in the world, parents on middle or lower bracket incomes¹⁹ are struggling to offer their nannies a competitive package. A third of parents spend more on childcare than on their rent or mortgage, according to one study, while many are finding that it no longer makes sense for them to go out for work.

55 "We used to use au pairs as they could work around our irregular hospital hours," explains mother of two Jenny Bruce, a neurologist in the NHS²⁰, whose husband also works for the NHS. "Now we can't find one, and nannies with no experience at all expect to be paid so much that I may as well not bother going in to work." Bruce sympathises with single parents, who must find the situation even tougher. "So many NHS staff are moving on to part-time contracts due to the debilitating²¹ costs of childcare, which is a waste of good manpower given the existing staff shortages," she says.

60 The only solution for those such as Bruce who are priced out of the nanny market is to hire a local student to look after their children on a wraparound basis²², paying from £9 per hour, "I call them live out au pairs," explains Rachel Carrell, founder of *Koru Kids*²³. "Many stay with a family for the duration of their time at university and continue to work for the family during university holidays."

65 Too bad, then, that the wealthiest parents are now getting in on the act, too. Over the past few weeks she's seen battles breaking out for the best student nannies, with parents doubling their salary offers to secure their first choice. "We have five times more nannies than we did six months ago but the fact is we still we don't have enough," Carrell says.

Until a new wave of Mary Poppins flies in, parents must thus pay up – or pick up their own children from school.

(2021)

¹⁸ *high net worth*: (her) velhavende

¹⁹ *middle or lower bracket incomes*: (her) mellem- eller lavindkomstgrupperne

²⁰ National Health Services

²¹ uoverkommelige

²² *wraparound basis*: (her) på timebasis

²³ *Koru Kids*: bureau, som formidler børnepasning