

Early Years (0-6) Strategy



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June 2010

EVIDENCE-BASED PAPER

**Evidence-based paper to inform Early Years
Strategy**

Department of Education

June 2010

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Early years has experienced a surge of policy attention in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries over the past 15 years. Policy makers have recognised that equitable access to quality early childhood education and care can strengthen the foundation of lifelong learning for all children and support the broad educational and social needs of families.

1.1.2 Policy responsibility for early years transferred from health to education as of 1st November 2006. Early years in this context includes services for all young children and to play, care and learning experiences for children provided in either voluntary, community, statutory or home based settings before compulsory schooling, under a range of programmes:

- Sure Start;
- Home Childcare Scheme;
- Early Years Development Fund;
- Childhood Sustainability Fund;
- The Pre-school Education Expansion Programme – providing a year of quality pre-school education for all children in their pre-school year (although this is not compulsory); and
- The Children and Young People's Funding Package - early years provision (which ended at the end of March 2008).

1.1.3 Prior to 1st November the policy responsibility for early years was with the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), with the Department of Education (DE) responsible for the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP). With the transfer of early years, DE broadened the definition of early years to incorporate the Primary Foundation Stage for Year 1 and Year 2

children. The Early Years Strategy is therefore addressing the needs of children from birth to 6 years.

1.1.4 The transfer of early years policy to DE signals Government's intention to provide an integrated approach to policy and service delivery for children. A more joined-up delivery of early years services should provide both better outcomes for children and parents and better value for the public purse.

1.2 Consultation to date

1.2. DE formed stakeholder groups to inform wider debate and to ensure a participative and partnership approach to the development of the policy. Membership of the groups was as broad as necessary to encapsulate expertise and to address specific issues in relation to the strategy (Annex 1 contains a list of stakeholders).

1.2.2 A brief outline of the purpose/role of each stakeholder group is highlighted below together with issues considered.

Name of Group	Purpose/Role	Summary of Group Outcomes
Regional Reference Group	To oversee the initial development of the early years strategy.	
Good Practice Group	To identify best practice (age appropriate) models, researching best practice models elsewhere, national (e.g. GB "Ten year Strategy for Childcare") and international frameworks (e.g. the OECD report "Starting Strong, Early	The group met between March 2007 to June 2007 and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided best practice examples from a range of settings; • Agreed on good

	Childhood Education and Care”). Taking account of outcomes that represent the voice of parents and children.	<p>practice headings; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held a workshop to identify and agree a clear set of principles on what constitutes best practice under each good practice heading.
Equality	Taking into account access for providers, parents and vulnerable members of society (including children with Special Educational Needs, English as an Additional Language, rural issues, Targeting Social Need/Anti-Poverty and travellers).	<p>The group met between April 2007 to October 2007 and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared a paper on the barriers that restrict/reduce access to provision, the solutions that could be implemented to address these and suggested solutions where none currently exist; and • Agreed on a set of principles for equality.
Delivery arrangements	Structures for service delivery and inter-agency co-operation	The Group met between June 2007 to

	<p>taking into account inter-relationships between early years and wider childcare and education reform. Also to examine appropriate funding mechanisms including the simplification of funding streams.</p>	<p>September 2007 and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapped out current arrangements of the 0 – 6 sector in terms of the source of funding, rationale for funding, monitoring and evaluation arrangements, partnerships arrangements and issues that would need to be resolved; • Using work completed by the Good Practice Group as a basis, completed a European Foundation Quality Framework exercise; and • Considered proposals for future delivery arrangements.
<p>Workforce Strategy Group</p>	<p>To clarify the future roles and responsibilities of workers in the sector and how they might</p>	<p>The group met between June 2007 and October 2007 and:</p>

	<p>evolve (e.g. training needs) in the light of policy developments to ensure the workforce continues to meet the needs of children in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered work that was currently being undertaken in relation to the early years workforce. This focused on the work of the Sector Skills Council, and a Learning & Development Strategy prepared by the 4 Childcare Partnerships. The group identified what additional information would need to be examined to encapsulate the broader early years 0 – 6 workforce issues for the Department to follow up.
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1.2.5 Furthermore, each group was asked to discuss a series of questions specific to its remit, review the aims and objectives of the strategy and to undertake an ABC exercise reviewing:

- Aims – what are we trying to achieve;
- Beliefs – what do we believe about early years;
- Challenges – what are the challenges we face and what do we need to challenge.

A summary of the stakeholder views is presented in annex 2.

1.2.6 Furthermore, whilst the Department fully intends to engage in a wide public consultation exercise on the draft strategy the Department employed the Early Years Organisation (EYO) to collate the responses from a small-scale survey of children, parents and staff from six playgroups to seek their views on what they feel is important to them. Playgroups from both rural and urban areas were represented as were children from the black ethnic minority communities and children with additional/special needs. The results from this small scale survey are summarised in Annex 3.

1.3 Purpose of paper

1.3.1 The purpose of this paper is to ensure that the Early Years Strategy is built on evidence-based policy findings. It will therefore:

- place early years within national and international frameworks by examining the relevant international, national and local policy contexts of early childhood education and care services;
- establish the evidence base for policy on early years by drawing on research;
- gather evidence from international delivery models of early years services; and
- state the policy implications learned from research, inspection evidence and best practice.

2.0 Strategic Context

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section seeks to highlight and summarise the relevant international, national and local policy contexts of early childhood education and care.

2.2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

2.2.1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international agreement on the rights of children that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in November 1989. It entered into international law on 2 September 1990. It is the most complete statement of children's rights and provides an internationally agreed framework of minimum standards necessary for the well-being of the child, to which every child and young person under 18 is entitled.

2.2.2 The United Kingdom (UK) has signed up to the UNCRC and as such has made a formal commitment to safeguard the rights of children set out in the Convention, i.e. to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to implement the rights recognised in the Convention, which implies assessing social services, legal, health and educational systems as well as funding for these services. Annex 4 provides:

- (i) Articles in the UNCRC of relevance to the strategy;
- (ii) Conclusions from United Nations Discussion Day on implementing children's rights in early childhood;
- (iii) 31st Session recommendations of Report submitted under article 44; and
- (iv) 40th Session on features of early childhood.

2.3 OECD “Starting Strong, Early Childhood Education and Care”

2.3.1 The OECD report “Starting Strong, Early Childhood Education and Care” 2001, identified eight key elements of policy that are likely to promote equitable access to quality early childhood education and care:

- a systematic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation;
- a strong and equal partnership with the education system;
- a universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of additional support;
- substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure;
- a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance;
- appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision;
- systematic attention to monitoring and data collection; and
- a stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation.

2.3.2 The recommendations for the UK in the report were:

- to formulate and implement an early childhood education and care policy for 0-6;
- to consider recent research on how children learn;
- to consider necessary foundations for learning;
- to reconsider the term ‘early years provision’;
- to examine training, salary levels and conditions of work of early years practitioners; and
- to invest directly in early years services.

2.4 National frameworks

2.4.1 In England and Wales an integrated approach to childcare and early education has been championed by the relevant governments. The national framework to build services around the needs of children and

young people is set out in “Every Child Matters: Change for Children”¹. This is a shared programme of change to improve outcomes for all children and young people. The programme aims to improve those outcomes for all children and to close the gap in outcomes between the disadvantaged and their peers.

2.4.2 The new Government is yet to set out its policies for early years provision. The previous Government’s vision was to ensure that every child gets the best start in life and to give more choice about how to balance work and family life is also set out in “Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare”. This built on the previous Government’s “Every Child Matters” programme. The vision was for a childcare system where:

- parents are better supported in the choices they make about their work and family responsibilities;
- childcare is available to all families and is flexible to meet their circumstances;
- childcare services are among the best quality in the world; and
- all families are able to afford high quality childcare services that are appropriate for their needs, (a childcare tax credit system has been put in place).

2.4.3 Under the previous Government the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) (replaced by the current Government with the Department for Education in May 2010) in England became the lead department in developing arrangements for children and families providing services which are built around children’s needs rather than professional structures. The DfES² paper “Building on Success” notes that all the evidence shows that joined-up services deliver both better outcomes for children and better value for the public purse.

¹ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/about/>

² The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) was renamed Department of Children Schools and Families in July 2007.

2.4.4 In Wales the approach to early years is founded on the Flying Start programme for the 0-3 age group and the Foundation Phase for 3-7 year olds. These are supported by other complementary programmes including Cymorth, Sure Start, the Basic Skills Strategy, the Parenting Action Plan and the Childcare Strategy. Taken together, these form a comprehensive suit of programmes targeting the needs of young children and parents and helping to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged.

2.4.5 In Scotland good quality early education and childcare services are seen as vital in helping children to develop and grow, and in supporting their families in moving into or sustaining employment, training or education. In May 1998 the Government published "Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland". The Scottish Government are currently reviewing the early years and childcare workforce to improve employment opportunities in the sector.

2.4.6 In the Republic of Ireland (RoI) the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECDE)³ was established in 2002 as part of the implementation of Ready to Learn, the White Paper on Early Childhood Education (1999). In 2006, the CECDE published Síolta, a National Quality Framework for early childhood education. The principles underlying Síolta can be applied across the spectrum of early childhood care and education provision. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is finalising a Curricular Framework for Early Learning which aims to provide all children with appropriately enriching learning opportunities from birth to six years.

2.5 The Good Friday & St Andrews Agreements

2.5.1 The Good Friday Agreement sets out the arrangements for devolved administration on a stable and inclusive basis within the north of Ireland. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides a

³ The Centre closed in November 2008. Further information on Síolta is available from the Department of Education and Skills

statutory framework to underpin mainstreaming of equality of opportunity, by placing a duty on all public authorities to have due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity and regard to the need to promote good relations. Strand Two of the agreement deals with relationships between the north of Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It refers to a North-South Ministerial Conference (NSMC) which brings together members of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government to oversee work of six cross-border implementation bodies. The St Andrew's Agreement reinforces the commitment to actively promote the advancement of human rights, equality and mutual respect.

2.5.2 In September 2008 Early Years was agreed as an additional item⁴ of sectoral work for the British Irish Council to work together and share experience of policy, practice and research. The Early Years workstream of the British Irish Council began in January 2009 with the first meeting of the British and Irish administrations. Officials from the 8 administrations agreed 4 key themes to take forward over the next 3 years to assist in providing the best educational and health care experiences for young children, their families and carers. It was agreed to improve:

- collaboration between all agencies concerned with health, education and social services to provide a 'joined – up' service for children and their parents/carers and to make better use of resources;
- transition arrangements (between home and childcare settings and then to school) to improve outcomes;
- the early years workforce; and
- evaluation and obtaining better value for money.

2.6 OFMDFM “Children & Young People Strategy”

2.6.1 The ten-year strategy for children and young people published by OFMDFM in June 2006 states that the extent to which the vision for

⁴ Bringing the total number of sectoral work areas to 10.

children and young people is achieved will be judged by six high level outcomes, which are the extent to which children and young people are:

- healthy;
- enjoying, learning and achieving;
- living in safety and with stability;
- experiencing economic and environmental well-being;
- contributing positively to community and society; and
- living in a society which respects their rights.

2.6.2 The vision is one where all children and young people will thrive and look forward with confidence to the future, with the aim of ensuring that by 2016 all our children and young people are fulfilling their potential.

2.7 Department of Education (DE)

2.7.1 DE's Vision Statement is set out in the DE Business Plan 2008-09 which states that:

“DE exists to ensure that every learner fulfils his or her full potential at each stage of development”.

2.7.2 Against this vision, the education service's activity will be characterised by the following 4 main strategic objectives:

- **Enable learners to fulfil their potential** through ensuring equality of access to a quality education and tackling the barriers to children's learning;
- **Prepare every learner for life** through improving quality and raising standards for all children, supporting a curriculum which is relevant to individual aspirations and to social and economic needs, and motivating and empowering our young people to contribute positively to society, now and in the future;

- **Transform education for learners** by building the best support for educators across all sectors and phases and maximising the resources focused on teaching and learning; and
- **Provide the best environment for learning** by securing the provision of buildings, equipment and materials that offer children a motivating and rich environment in which to learn.

3.0 Rationale for Early Years interventions

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The first years of a child's life are of critical importance for his/her future development and well being. It is during these early months and years that a high percentage of learning takes place, attitudes are formed, first relationships are made, concepts are developed and the foundation of all later skills and learning are laid. The research presented below will give broad arguments in favour of intervention in the early years. However it cannot prove definitively that with sufficient investment in the early years we can eliminate the need for later interventions, or say that sufficient investment in the early years will lead to improvements in educational attainment for every child. Education is a continuing aspect of everyday life. The principle of lifelong learning is seen as building upon and affecting all existing educational providers, including early years, schools and institutions of higher and further education and encompassing all agencies, groups and individuals involved in any kind of learning activity.

3.1.2 Children (and indeed adults) may require additional assistance at any stage in their lives. History is full of examples of young children who have survived horrifying conditions and gone on to lead happy, successful lives, as long as the trauma is followed by recovery in a safe and caring environment. What we can say is that ability gaps can open up early, long before formal schooling begins. It is therefore important that we look at the factors that promote resilience in young children. Resilience in this way is defined as the ability to thrive, mature and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances. Therefore this section will also provide an overview of research on the learning environment, provision of services, quality of services and curriculum.

3.2 Research

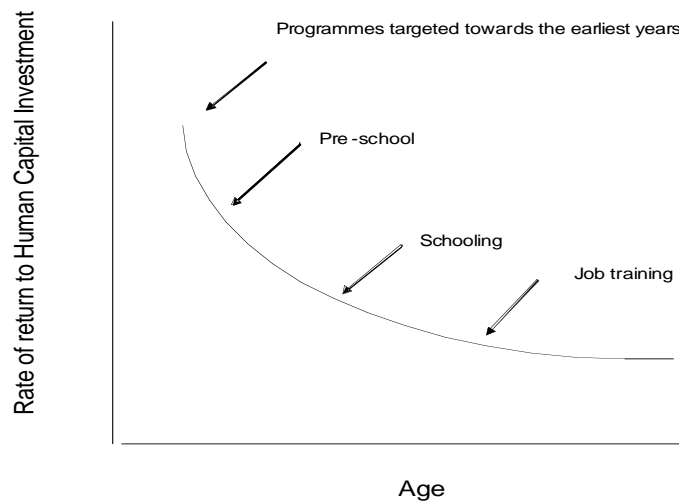
3.2.1 From the research⁵ undertaken into early childhood education and care, it is clear that countries differ in the policy objectives they set and the consequent development of services. Broadly speaking the objectives that determine decisions on investment in early years can be driven by economic, social or educational agendas or a combination of these.

- Benefit to the child: A child's ability to think, form relationships and become a lifelong learner is directly related to good health, good nutrition, appropriate stimulation and interaction with others;
- Benefit to society in economic terms: Children who have developed well in all areas and have a good sense of well-being are more competent socially and emotionally and so show higher verbal and intellectual development. Healthy child development and well-being is an investment in the future workforce and capacity to thrive economically as a society.
- Benefit to society in terms of social equity: Investment addresses the needs of mothers while benefiting their children. Providing safe, high quality education and care services allows women the chance to continue their education, careers and learn new job skills.

3.2.2 The economic rationale for early childhood education and care is based on the benefits to children, families and to society compared to the costs incurred. Studies have shown (Lynch, 2004) longer-term benefits accrue to societies in the form of reduced crime, productivity of the workforce and strengthening of the economy. Nobel laureate James Heckman (2005) noted that ability gaps open up early, long before formal schooling begins and that highest returns are on early interventions that set the stage for and create the abilities needed for success in later life. The longer we wait to intervene in the life cycle of

⁵ A large part of the research produced in this section has been re-produced with the kind permission of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) in the Republic of Ireland.

the child the more costly it is to remediate to restore the child to his full potential. Early interventions have much higher returns than other later interventions (illustrated in diagram form below).



3.2.3 Another compelling argument is the evidence that high quality early childhood education and care is good for children's development. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) (Sylva et al 2003) project in the UK (the first major European study of child development between the ages of 3 and 7) is a recent testimony to the importance of early childhood education and care. It concluded:

- pre-school experience (at ages 3 and 4) enhances all-round development in children;
- an earlier start (under age 3) is related to better intellectual development;
- disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially where there is a mix of children from different social backgrounds;
- good quality can be found across all types of early years setting; however, quality was higher overall in settings integrating care and education;

- high quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children;
- settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress; and
- where settings view educational and social development as complementary and of equal importance, children make better all round progress.

3.2.4 The EPPE longitudinal study has also tracked the original cohort of children to the age of 11. Their findings include:

- pre-school can help to combat social disadvantage with high quality being particularly important for children who have educational needs, mothers with low qualifications or who come from a poor home learning environment;
- primary schools can affect development, with evidence showing the overall quality of teaching affects children's social behaviour and intellectual development. The quality of teaching had more impact on academic progress than children's gender or whether or not they received free school meals. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds can be 'boosted' by effective teachers.
- both the experience of high quality pre-school and highly academically effective primary schools offered similar degrees of protection in terms of promoting better academic outcomes at age 11.
- home matters: higher parental qualifications are strongly associated with attainment and behaviour at age 11. The influence of the home-learning environment (at age 3-4) is similar in strength to the mother's qualification level.

3.2.5 The longitudinal research demonstrates the importance of investment in early years, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and for those who go on to poorer quality primary schools. The study has also revealed the relationship between disadvantage and educational experience is complex. Multiple disadvantages interact with education experiences and are key sources of inequality. Furthermore,

although high quality pre-school experiences will deliver positive benefits in terms of children's social behaviour and disposition to learning, for any long lasting effects the pre-school experience needs to be reinforced by good quality primary experience.

3.2.6 International longitudinal studies of child development programmes have also provided considerable data supporting the positive impact of early childhood education and care. In the United States the Perry Pre-school Project shows that the life chances of those who participated in the initial pilot phase had improved relative to those who did not participate (Schweinhart, 2004). The study followed the progress of those who participated back in the late 1960's, with the most recent findings relating back to the original group at age 40. The cost-benefit analysis showed a £7 return for every pound invested.⁶

3.2.7 Other positive outcomes from research are that children who experience effective early childhood education and care:

- are better prepared to make the transition to school (Howe, 1990);
- are less likely to drop out or repeat grades (Reynolds et al, 2001; Campbell, 2002);
- completed an average of almost 1 full year more of schooling (Heckman 2005);
- spent on average 1.3 fewer years in special education services e.g. for mental, emotional, speech or learning impairment (Heckman 2005);
- show greater sociability and having greater access to health care and improved physical health (McKey et al, 1985);
- have a lower proportion of unmarried births and fewer teenage pregnancies (Heckman 2005); and
- can produce a multiplier effect on the families of the children and on their communities. For example, mothers whose children participated in quality early child development programmes display lower levels of

⁶ Originally quoted in US Dollars.

criminal behaviour and less behavioural impairment due to alcohol and drugs (Olds, 1996).

3.3 The Learning Environment

3.3.1 Learning starts before the child is born and continues during infancy, long before formal education begins. We know from decades of international research that in order for children to develop in healthy and appropriate ways certain basic conditions must be met. The science is clear - a baby's brain cells multiply at an astonishing rate before birth and it is important that brain development is supported during this crucial time. Poor nutrition, drug use (legal and illegal), cigarette smoke, and alcohol are just a few factors that affect brain development before birth (Epstein 2001). These risk factors such as early exposure to nicotine, alcohol and drugs are associated with or exacerbated by poverty. For children growing up in poverty, economic deprivation affects their nutrition, access to medical care, the safety and predictability of their physical environment, the level of family stress, and the quality and continuity of their day-to-day care (Families and Work Institute, 1996).

3.3.2 Research by Schor in 1999, revealed that at birth a child's brain is about 25% of its approximate weight at adulthood and at age 3 a child's brain has reached about 90% of its full potential. Through the first decade of life, the child's brain is more than twice as active as that of an adult. The major outgrowth of this information is the realisation of the extent to which the quality of early experiences influence brain structure and child development, i.e. the first 3 years are critical. Dr Schor states:

“The unique way in which each of us solves problems, interprets information, and responds to the environment follows the patterns established early with guidance from our primary caregivers.”

3.3.3 Children need responsive care and attention during their earliest weeks, months and years to build cognitive, social and emotional skills necessary for healthy growth and development. The four principles highlighted in “From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: the Science of Early Childhood Development” (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000) are:

- early environments and nurturing relationships are essential. What happens during the first months and years of life is critical because it sets the foundation for what is to follow;
- emotional development and academic learning are more closely related in the very early years than has been previously understood;
- elements of early childhood programmes that enhance social and emotional development are just as important as the components enhancing linguistic and cognitive competence; and
- parents and other regular caregivers are “active ingredients” during the early childhood period, helping young children to develop across all domains.

3.3.4 Early care has decisive and long-lasting effects on how people develop and learn, how they cope with stress and how they regulate their own emotions (Families and Work Institute, 1996). Warm and responsive early care helps babies thrive and plays a vital role in healthy development. A child’s capacity to control their own emotional state appears to hinge in biological systems shaped by early experiences and attachments. A strong, secure attachment to a nurturing adult can have a protective biological function, helping a growing child withstand the ordinary stress of daily life.

3.3.5 The principles highlighted for early learning by Lillian Katz in 1995 are:

- all areas of child development are closely related: development or non-development in one area will affect the other areas of development;
- there is a relatively stable and predictable sequence of growth and change in children;

- development proceeds at different rates from child to child so age must be viewed as a crude index of developmental maturity;
- if positive or negative experiences occur frequently they can have a powerful and lasting effect on the child;
- development proceeds towards greater complexity, organisation and internalisation;
- development is influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts;
- children are active learners;
- development results from both hereditary characteristics and environmental factors;
- play is an important vehicle for children's development;
- development advances when children have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills;
- children have different ways of knowing, learning and representing. These should be encouraged and developed but the child should also be given opportunities to develop through other ways;
- children develop and learn best when they feel safe, secure and valued; and
- children need to be active – if they are not, they can not only damage their physical health, but also their development in writing and being creative.

3.3.6 Young children learn within the context of their relationships with primary care givers. Research has demonstrated the importance of warm trusting relationships and the attachments through which a baby's needs are met consistently provide the foundation for a child's well-being and help develop self-confidence and resilience. In the early months and years parents have an enormous influence on a child's learning. Infants and young children whose parents engage in more joint attention have larger vocabularies than children whose parents engage in less joint attention (Carpenter et al., 1998; Smith et al., 1998; Tomasello & Farrar, 1986). When adults repeat and expand on children's words, language development improves (Nicholas et al., 2001). High quality child care environments, where caregivers practice

joint attention and are responsive to the cues of infants and toddlers, have been shown to be tied to higher rates of language acquisition (Smith 1999).

3.3.7 Research shows that supportive relationships have a tangible, long term influence on children's healthy development, contributing to optimal social, emotional, and cognitive development for infants and toddlers (Zeanah & Doyle, 2001). As a child grows, supportive relationships with parents and caregivers shape her self-image and provide the child with the resilience needed to face new challenges. Nurturing, sensitive adult-child interactions are crucial for the development of trust, empathy, compassion, generosity, and conscience. These relationships are far-reaching; research has shown that they provide a context for supporting the development of curiosity, self-direction, persistence, cooperation, caring and conflict resolution skills (Greenough et al 2001). Healthy maternal-child relationships are a precursor of school readiness for older children (Kaplan- SANOFF, 2000). Throughout the life span, nurturing and supportive relationship experiences provide a model for loving relationships.

3.3.8 The Effective Pre-School Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) report published in April 2006 found that increasing active parental engagement with children and involvement in play activities that promote children's language, spatial skills and creativity, in particular, are likely to benefit children's subsequent cognitive and social development and attainment at school. In respect of home learning EPPNI noted that "for all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education and income. What parents do is more important than who parents are".

3.3.9 The quality of adult/child interactions is also significant, (Laevres 1995) with 3 central elements of quality:

- autonomy, providing independence;

- sensitivity to child's feelings and responding to needs; and
- manner and substance of interventions

3.3.10 The development of good language skills requires practice in real conversations, not just passive listening.

'The quality of the engagement and talk surrounding a growing child determines the level of language, listening and eventually literacy that a child is able to reach'. Palmer

3.3.11 Adults are also needed to help children learn to play well, ensuring play experiences are challenging, enjoyable and purposeful. Play is an integral element of development in the early years and fundamental to a healthy and happy childhood. Play challenges and informs our understanding of children. It is essential for physical and mental health and is significant for the cultural development of society. In the early years preparation for learning is most effective when the children learn through an enriched play-based experience, building on their natural curiosity and wonder at the world. The aim is to create healthy strong children who are skilled communicators and creative competent learners fostering skills and aptitudes such as questioning, recalling, explaining, reflecting, risk taking, problem-solving, organising and communicating.

3.3.12 The links between play and learning (Chapman 2005) are related to:

- cognitive processes and skills, including attention, observation, memorising, creativity, communication, decision-making and problem-solving;
- attitudes and disposition, including curiosity, motivation, involvement, independence, willingness to take risks, ability to struggle and cope with challenge and failure, perseverance, and resilience; and

- influences on learning, including mood and feeling states, self-esteem, child health and family health, home and community cultures and experiences, parental pressures and expectations, social skills, learning environment – home, school and community, quality of relationships between children, peers and adults, and socio-economic status.

3.3.13 In order for a child to develop the following need to be in place on a daily basis to produce measurable benefits in development:

- encouragement to explore the environment (indoors and outdoors);
 - mentoring in basic cognitive and social skills;
 - celebration of new skills;
 - rehearsing and expanding new skills;
 - protection from punishment or ridicule for developmental advances;
- and
- stimulation in language and symbolic communication.

3.3.14 Research in ‘Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine’ also suggests that poor nutrition in early life is associated with poor performance on cognitive (thinking, learning and memory) tests in adulthood. A study in the ‘Journal of School Health’ revealed that children with healthy diets performed better in school than children with unhealthy diets. School-age children need adequate amounts of dietary calcium to ensure strong healthy bones. Iron is an essential nutrient that should be in a child’s diet and fibre is another important nutritional component. Iron deficiency can lead to slower than normal mental and physical development. It has been estimated that as many as 1 child in 3 in deprived areas of the UK have an iron deficiency. This can also have an effect on children’s behaviour. The brain needs a healthy balance of glucose, vitamins, minerals, proteins and fats to run properly.

3.3.15 The EarlyBird Diabetes study of 233 children from birth to puberty (December 2008) found that one in four children aged four to five in

England are overweight. The study found that at birth the children were of similar weight to babies 25 years ago, but have gained more fat by puberty compared with children of the same age in the 1980's, and the bulk of the weight was gained before the children were five. The author concludes that strategies to prevent childhood obesity and its associated health problems might do better to focus on pre-school children.

3.3.16 Learning languages at a young age can give children major benefits (Edelenbos, Johnstone, Kubanek 2006)⁷. By activating their natural aptitude for language acquisition at an early stage, it gives them more time to learn and provides a linguistic and cultural experience that can enhance their overall development (cognitive, social, cultural, acoustic, linguistic and personal – as well as a better sense of determination and participation) and self confidence. For the very young learners it should be very important to learn with all their senses. Dr Robert C. Meurant states:

“Multi-sensory spatial play helps students learn experientially and linguistically, and acquisition of new language should be related to existent spatial language ability”.

3.3.17 “Youngsters who can lick their lips, blow bubbles and pretend that a building block is a car are most likely to find learning language easy”, according to a new study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Psychologists at Lancaster University found strong links between these movement, or motor and thinking, or cognitive skills and children's language abilities.

3.3.18 In addition starting school can be described as one of the major challenges a child can face at a young age and the experience can set the tone for the child's time at school.

⁷ The main pedagogical principles underlying the teaching of languages to very young learners. Languages for children of Europe.

“Transition is fundamentally a matter of establishing a relationship between home and school in which the child’s development is the key focus or goal”. (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman and Cox 1999).

Starting school is a big moment for many children. It can be a stimulus for growth and development but if too abrupt and handled without care there is a risk of regression and failure. It is therefore essential that transition to school occurs in a positive way for the child and family and that the child has a feeling of competence as a learner. At times of transition the child needs continuity in approach, pedagogy and underpinning philosophy, but this does not imply sameness.

3.3.19 In ‘Toxic Childhood’ Sue Palmer assembles evidence from a wide range of disciplines – from psychology and neuroscience to economics and marketing. Her research also included discussions with children, parents and teachers around the world as well as scientists and other experts. Palmer lists the following factors which lead to ‘toxic childhood syndrome’ – which she describes as modern society’s complex cultural problem which is damaging children’s ability to think, learn and behave.

- Diet: the food children have been eating over the last decade or so is rich in sugar, salt, additives and the wrong sort of fat and very little nourishment, instead of building healthy bodies, its making children fatter and unhealthier by the year;
- Lack of sleep: lack of sleep will affect a child’s mood and behaviour making it harder for him to concentrate. She states that skills, facts and ideas that are acquired during the day are transferred into long-term memory by the brain during sleep. It is therefore important that bedtime routines are established as soon as possible;
- Parenting: different parenting styles can influence how children develop. The parenting style most likely to lead to well-balanced, resilient children is: treating children warmly, giving plenty of time and loving attention, listening to them, responding to their concerns and

allowing safe choices; parents are firm, ensuring rules and routines to provide stability, security and safety;

- Lack of outdoor play: for many children the technological revolution has seen the replacement of age-old play activities (running, climbing, pretending, making, sharing) with a sedentary screen-based lifestyle;
- Childcare arrangements: there are 2 approaches to childcare: what children need at different ages and stages of life; or keeping children safe while parents go to work. Successful systems internationally include both. Childcare settings have to be well resourced with trained staff who know what they are doing;
- Teaching styles: primary education is about developing children's motivation to learn, their ability to work, both independently and with others, and their skills in the three R's. Disagreements on educational styles e.g. the debates about teaching reading have damaged children's learning. Strategies for literacy and numeracy which are too narrowly focused and demand more of teachers' time for record keeping can also damage children's chances;
- Inadequate language: children's ability to connect and communicate socially, to listen attentively and with comprehension, and to use language for learning. These are constrained as technology has invaded every aspect of life and work e.g. television, PCs, the Internet, the web, mobile phones etc;
- Home and school: what happens at home profoundly affects children's ability to learn at school. Where home and school work in harmony, children have a much better chance of success;
- Community: the influence of the wider community through the influence of marketing on their play (encouraging more adult behaviour), their friendships and their culture is an important factor that can affect children's development.

3.4 Provision of services

3.4.1 Heckman (1996) argues that well designed, high quality intervention programmes are more cost-effective investments with the gains lasting longer if there are follow-up and/or support services in place. Heckman

(1996) would also recommend funding going directly to providers to reduce charges to parents (supply-side funding) than payments being made directly to parents (demand-side funding). He argues that supply-side funding is better at targeting low income families; families with a disabled child; ethnic minority families and services in rural areas. These services should ensure:

- the child's interests and needs are being promoted; and
- they are contributing to the well-being of families and communities.

3.4.2 The Daycare Trust – the national childcare charity for Britain found that:
"the single most striking feature of countries that have achieved both high levels of employment and low levels of child poverty is the existence of universal early childhood services".

3.4.3 A literature review of the Impact of Early Years Provision on Young Children, with emphasis given to children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Edward C. Melhuish prepared for the National Audit Office), concluded that the studies all show the clear benefit for disadvantaged children of high quality pre-school childcare provision, whether started in infancy or at 3 years of age, with the impact of large-scale interventions being substantial and producing worthwhile benefits for children, families and communities.

3.5 Quality of services and curriculum

3.5.1 The EPPNI Research shows that children who experience high quality pre-school provision have better cognitive, social and emotional development when they start primary school (and maintain an advantage until at least age seven) than children who did not experience pre-school education and childcare. Conversely where poor quality education and childcare is given it may offer no developmental benefit for the child and may even disadvantage him or her.

3.5.2 High quality provision can also reduce the risk of the child experiencing additional needs at a later date. To guide decisions about their practice all early childhood practitioners need to know and understand the developmental changes that typically occur in the years birth to six and the variations that may occur. They also need to know how best to support development during these years. This is particularly relevant to children who are deemed to be in the 'at risk' category or from multiple disadvantaged backgrounds. All adults involved in early childhood education and care services need a shared knowledge base, shared standards and shared approaches. This common core can then be supplemented by different specialisms. EPPE suggests the following 'at risk' indicators:

- Premature birth or under 2500g at birth;
- Mother aged under 17 at time of birth;
- Mother with no qualifications;
- 3 or more siblings; and
- Father unemployed or absent;

3.5.3 Quality of services in early childhood education and care must be viewed in a holistic way including planning, staff training and qualifications, physical and social environment, parental involvement, curriculum and methodology and child-adult interactions. It can be viewed from a variety of perspectives – that of the child, parent, practitioner or external agency. Thus quality is a subjective term, dependent on so many variables. It is this complex multiplicity of reasons that makes the demarcation of and concept of quality difficult to define in simple statements and checklists (Department of Education and Science, 1999).

3.5.4 Research suggests that good quality is associated with appropriately trained and educated staff, high staff-child ratios, low staff turnover rates, good wages and effective leadership (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips 1989, University of Colorado at Denver, 1995 and Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes & Cryer, 1997). A suitably qualified workforce is

essential to ensure that quality services are provided in the early childhood education and care sector. The workforce is the foundation of a high quality service, and investment in the training and education of practitioners is one of the most important elements to enhance the quality of adult-child interaction, which is at the heart of early childhood education and care. Studies of the effects of qualifications indicate that both general education and specific training in the education of young children influence teaching quality and children's learning and development. Those with a degree and specialised training in early childhood have more responsive interaction with children, provide richer language and cognitive experiences and are less authoritarian (Barnett, 2003).

3.5.5 The EPPNI research (published 2006) found that qualified staff in effective settings provided children with more curriculum-rated activities (especially language and mathematics) and encouraged children to engage in challenging play. The most highly qualified staff also provided the most instruction, and were effective in their interactions with the children, using the most sustained shared thinking. Less qualified staff were significantly better at supporting learning when they worked with qualified teachers. EPPNI also found that compared with children who attended pre-school where the leader did not have any qualifications, children who attended pre-school where the leader had:

- a Bachelor of Education qualification scored higher on literacy; and
- BTEC/NNEB qualifications scored higher and made an increase on social isolation during Yr 1 and Yr 2.

3.5.6 Primary education is viewed as having the task of laying the foundations for lifelong learning, developing the motivation to learn, developing the ability to work independently and with others and ensuring children attain basic literacy and numeracy skills. The early years of literacy learning require motivation, plenty of practice,

application and perseverance. 'Motivation is the 'motor' that boosts a child on his way to mastery and discovery'(Herschkowitz and Herschkowitz 2004). Up to the age of 6 there will be developmental differences and children should be allowed to progress at their own pace. If this doesn't happen they are likely to withdraw their dispositions to learn and no longer try. Children must not be afraid to try and learn to accept that failure is an important step on the road to success.

3.5.7 John Bennett (2008) states it is useful to have a measure of the development of young children, yet if it is poorly designed, assessing children can lead to a focus on particular content and distract teachers from the relational and pedagogical work that young children need. Supporters of assessment argue that regular assessments are part of formative evaluation and give valuable information to teachers about the effects of their teaching and allow them to improve their practice. There is general agreement that assessments should not be regimented, and information should be based on sample assessments, without involving or putting pressure on staff and children in every setting. Early Years practitioners are more accepting of this approach and often complement external evaluations by voluntary quality assessments e.g.

- NAEYC Accreditation Program USA;
- Reggio Emilia documentation;
- Nordic countries – reflective practice/ national evaluations; or
- Child observation records

4.0 International models

4.1 International approaches to policy-making

4.1.1 The United Nations “UN Children’s Fund 2001’ called on world government leaders to ‘make children – the youngest most especially – the priority at all policy tables.... and to ensure that this has the necessary financial and political support’.

4.1.2 In most countries early years provision is divided into two periods; from birth to three and from three to the beginning of compulsory school age (with 6 years being the mean age for starting school world-wide). For many countries early childhood provision has begun from a relatively low base, but growing recognition and acceptance of the importance of early years, not only for the well-being, health and development of the children themselves, but also for the well-being, health and development of the country has led to a widespread interest in this policy area.

4.1.3 Early childhood education and care (ecec) services usually mean all services providing education and care for children below compulsory school age or before starting school. It is the term used in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Thematic Review and reflects a broad, holistic, integrated and coherent approach to early years. The term reflects new attitudes and understandings about ecec such as:

- an acknowledgement that all types of services providing education and care to children under school age belong to the same policy field;
- a shared desire to identify, understand and overcome barriers that have obstructed integrated action i.e. philosophy, objectives, management, regulation;
- a shift from selective and exclusive to universal and inclusive; and
- a right of all children and families.

4.1.4 Internationally there are three main approaches to policy making in respect of ecec:

- a labour market approach which focuses on the provision of childcare;
- an environmental approach where children learn from the environment and surroundings in which they are being raised and the creative ways of learning are encouraged; and
- an educational approach which focuses on learning.

4.1.5 The types of early years services offered to young children reflect the aims and expectations of society in general and of practitioners and policy-makers in particular. Ideas about children, childhood and learning influence decisions and expected outcomes and these vary between countries. Countries may view early years education and care as a way of:

- building future benefits for society;
- reducing social and economic burdens through intervention programmes to prevent later academic failure;
- providing childcare to allow mothers to go to work;
- offering opportunities to break cycles of deprivation and reduce poverty;
- sharing and developing a society's values and morals;
- promoting forms of social interaction;
- supporting social cohesion and cultural identity;
- respecting diversity; and
- promoting bi or multi-culturalism.

4.1.6 Most of Europe and many countries worldwide are well on the way to providing three years of publicly funded services for children aged 3 to 6 on a full-time basis (minimum of 5 hours per day). The Nordic countries are now moving towards 6 to 7 hours for 1 to 6 year olds. Belgium has 100% provision for 3 to 6 year olds, Bulgaria 95% and Denmark has full-time provision for all from birth to 7 year olds, but the centres are mainly attended by 2 to 7 year olds. The main areas addressed in countries in framework guidelines may include:

- social and emotional;
- cultural, aesthetic and creative;
- physical;
- environmental; and
- language, literacy and numeracy.

4.1.7 Most countries do not have centralised guidelines from birth to 3, but there is now an increase in the number of early childhood curricula

being developed. Scotland, Wales, England and Republic of Ireland have recently developed curricula for this age group. The Sure Start programme for 2 year olds in the north of Ireland is a recent development to illustrate this. The first national early childhood curriculum Te Whariki was developed in New Zealand. It has a socio-cultural perspective on learning with five strands:

- well-being;
- belonging;
- contribution;
- communication; and
- exploration.

4.1.8 Internationally countries also differ in the terminology used to describe settings. The International Standard Classification of Education defines pre-primary education as:

“all programmes that, in addition to providing care, offer a structured and purposeful set of learning activities, either in a formal or non-formal setting”.

These programmes would usually be for children 3 years and over. Current terminology used for settings which deliver these programmes for children from 3 to 6 years are:

Pre-school education – 93 countries

Kindergarten – 66 countries

Pre-primary education – 50 countries

Early childhood education – 34 countries

Nursery education – 28 countries

And combinations of above

Although most use the term pre-school, many feel this makes it sound as if the first years of life are only a preparation for school rather than building the foundations of lifelong learning.

4.2 Tensions constraining an integrated ecec system

4.2.1 The OECD identified two key tensions when countries were designing an integrated system of ecec:

(i) Family *versus* State

Countries strongly influenced by social-democratic ideologies e.g. Nordic Countries view childhood related matters as a public, social issue in which the state has an important role to play while those with dominant liberal or market-economy ideologies view the years of a child's life before schooling as a private family matter with the state only intervening in exceptional cases.

(ii) Child development and well-being *versus* Preparation for schooling

Based on UNCRC and research, early education is no longer viewed primarily as preparation for school or childcare as a support to working parents, but as a distinct and separate stage in its own right, with its own characteristics and values. UNESCO states that policies today are placed within a broader context of social development, gender equity and poverty reduction and must encompass both the well-being and holistic development of the child. Preparation for schooling supporters view formal education and outcomes/targets as the only legitimate use for state purposes and so any money put into ecec services must have outcomes based on later results.

4.3 General Policy Trends

4.3.1 The policy approach adopted has implications for funding arrangements in terms of the mix of parental fees; employer levy; and taxes and parental fees. However in general the policy trend has been towards:

- more effective participation of the public sector in the supply and expansion of services and in monitoring and evaluating services;

- growing recognition of early childhood education as part of basic education with a more active participation of the educational sector in early childhood education and care services; and
- a growing tendency towards co-operation with the private and/or voluntary/community sector.

4.3.2 Many factors have impacted on the shifts in thinking about ecec services since the post-war years, the most significant factor has been the social and economic change in families and the shift from single breadwinner family model to one in which an important component of family economic security has been both fathers and mothers in employment while children are young. Furthermore there has been an increase in the number of lone parents, an increase in immigration, an increasing awareness of child and family poverty, and the introduction of maternity and parental leave.

4.3.3 UNCRC in Article 18 sets out the role of parents as having the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child but other articles and clauses set out the responsibility of governments to provide parents with the assistance they need to perform their parenting role. This would see a shift from family's exclusive responsibility to a shared responsibility.

4.4 Pedagogy

4.4.1 The Oxford dictionary definition of pedagogy is the profession, science, or theory of teaching. To date most countries have an agreed pedagogical basis for ecec. The most common are:

- Developmentally Appropriate Practice:
 - Balance between self-initiated learning and practitioner guidance;
 - Opportunities for children to make meaningful choices;

- Active involvement;
 - A mix of small group, whole group and individual activities;
 - Play as a primary (but not exclusive) medium for learning; and
 - Systematic observation of learning and behaviour.
- Experiential Education:
 - Focus on children’s emotional well-being; and
 - Practitioners’ stimulate a level of involvement in children that supports deep learning;

5.0 Challenges facing the future development of early years provision and services

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The purpose of this section is to pull together the essential issues to be addressed to achieve positive outcomes for an early years strategy up to 2020. These have been identified by:

- ETI reports;
- stakeholders; and
- research and international best practice models

5.2 Issues identified by ETI Reports

5.2.1 During 1998-2008 ETI has completed a systematic inspection of early years settings and published a number of survey reports relating specifically to early years. The Chief Inspector's Reports over this period have also reported on the quality of early years provision. A sample of these reports with the main issues raised, including recommendations made by the inspectorate teams, follows:

5.2.2 In 2004 the Education and Training Inspectorate reported on the quality of provision in Year 1 and 2 classes in a sample of schools participating in the Early Years Enriched Curriculum Pilot. The findings indicated that the quality of provision was almost always of a high standard. The strengths highlighted were the children's positive attitude to learning, the wide range of teaching strategies being used, the well-organised, enthusiastic teachers, the effective involvement of classroom assistants and the effective liaison with parents. The recommendations from this report highlighted the need for more appropriate methods of planning, assessing and recording the children's achievements, and a better understanding of learning through play in years 1 and 2.

5.2.3 In 2007, a survey was carried out on Special Educational Needs in the pre-school sector. This report noted the complexity of the arrangements for funding, support and training and of the statutory responsibilities of agencies and government departments. In not addressing these complex issues, ETI concluded that the consistency in the quality of provision for special educational needs was being adversely affected. The issues highlighted were the major variations in quality and in the expertise and confidence of staff, particularly in understanding the Code of Practice, the referral process and training and support. The conclusions reached were that pre-school has a crucial role to play in the early identification of needs and in providing interventions to help children make progress. Staff in pre-school

settings are dedicated to helping children with special educational needs, but there is inadequate inter-agency collaboration or strategic planning. There needs to be better training, resources, support and access to specialist services for all funded providers, including voluntary, community and statutory. This report recommended a comprehensive policy for early intervention with effective inter-agency collaboration, better data systems to reflect more accurately the level of special educational need and training to improve the capacity and capabilities of staff.

5.2.4 Sure Start has a focus on supporting the healthy development of children in disadvantaged wards, by bringing health, care, education and parenting support services together in a co-ordinated way. All of the programmes must include a number of core services, including outreach and home visiting, family support, primary and community healthcare, support for quality play and support for children and parents with a range of needs. There are currently 32 Sure Start Partnerships in the north of Ireland. *To date, DE has not undertaken a formal, comprehensive evaluation of the Sure Start provision.* The Inspectorate did include a Sure Start project as part of a pilot evaluation of the impact of the Children and Young People Funding Package (CYPFP) in 2007. The main strengths of the project inspected were the effective leadership and management, a clear vision, high levels of commitment to the local community, effective consultation and collaboration with stakeholders, multidisciplinary and skilled staff, the gradual expansion of services building on well-established experiences and practices and a strong commitment to a coherent, multi-agency, multi-disciplinary approach to the provision of services.

5.2.5 During the early part of 2008, the Inspectorate undertook exploratory visits to 13 Sure Start centres, with a particular focus on finding out more about the Programme for 2 Year Olds. The majority had made a good start in developing their provision for two to three years olds.

Those more developed projects were characterised by good leadership from managers who have a sound knowledge and understanding of the development needs of young children, an emphasis on creating age-appropriate environments, the encouragement for staff to develop their skills and expertise and evidence of good multi-agency working practices. In addition, the staff are encouraged to adopt reflective approaches to their work. The Inspectorate commented :

“It is clear that the more effective Sure Start projects are building good links between the home and pre-school provision and also with the other professionals and agencies that can support the family and child where this is necessary. In these projects, in particular, there is an appropriate balance between inputs from health and education at all levels”.

5.2.6 DE has commissioned ETI to carry out a more detailed evaluation of the Sure Start Programme for 2 Year Olds. Evaluation visits involving Programme settings in 9 Sure Start Partnerships took place in November 2009, the outcome of which is due for publication in the near future.

5.2.7 The Chief Inspector’s Report 2004 - 2006 highlighted the need to develop further the capacity of the staff to assess the attainment of the children, to use their assessments to inform their future planning and thus enable the children to make the optimum progress in the course of the year in pre-school in all settings and primary school settings. It also highlighted the need to provide guidance and support for Boards of Governors and Management Committees and to ensure effective leadership and management at all levels. Related to this, there was the need for improved monitoring and evaluation with a focus on outcomes for children along with improved self-evaluation and self-improvement strategies for pre-school settings. In addition, there was the need to improve the quality of teaching, with more effective strategies for supporting and developing those children with additional needs. It was

recommended that agencies should collaborate more effectively to provide initial training and continuing professional development to meet the increasing challenges facing practitioners. At times of transition the individual needs and prior achievements of children needed to be well understood.

5.2.8 The Chief Inspectors report 2006-2008 shows there are evident strengths in pre-school centres, including: the stronger focus given to learning outdoors and physical play; the level and quality of training provided in relation to special educational needs; the continued development of the children's motivation and good attitudes to learning, with an appropriate emphasis on the children's personal, social and emotional development; and the promotion of the children's autonomy and independence. It does indicate, however, a small decline in the overall effectiveness of pre-school provision when compared with the previous reporting period, with a widening gap between the statutory and voluntary provision. There are several reasons for this including: a number of new voluntary or private centres within the pre-school education expansion programme where the staff and management groups are at the early stages of developing their experience and expertise, including their understanding of the quality of provision required; the apparent disparities inherent within the funding and support mechanisms for the pre-school education expansion programme, including the variation in the level and quality of professional external support available to the pre-school sector as a whole; and the comparatively lower levels of qualifications and training for staff in the voluntary and private sector. In this sector there is often high staff turn-over with a lack of job security, there are financial pressures caused by the fluctuating enrolment of the number of children with funded places, and the accommodation and resources are often of lower quality.

5.2.9 The Chief Inspector's report goes on to recommend the more consistent promotion of the children's language and communication,

and early mathematical experiences and an improvement in the specialist advice and support available to staff in this sector. It outlines for DE the need to address the disparities in funding and the discrepancies in the quality of provision which exist for those children in different pre-school settings and the need to provide for the further development of the professional skill and expertise of staff, with a particular emphasis on the more effective use of development plans and self-evaluation processes.

5.2.10 From these reports the main issues to be addressed as identified by ETI are:

- (i) A better understanding of child development;
- (ii) A clearer understanding and monitoring of the children's' progress and development
- (iii) an enhanced focus by pre-school centres on the effective use of strategies for self-evaluation and self-improvement;
- (iv) The individual needs and prior achievements of children communicated, valued and understood at times of transition;
- (v) All settings to have improved training, support, access to specialist services and inter-agency collaboration_for children , including those with additional needs;
- (vi) The long-term sustainability of services; and
- (vii) More collaboration from multi-disciplinary agencies for initial training and continuing professional development.

5.3 Issues/Challenges identified by stakeholders

5.3.1 These issues have been identified by stakeholders during meetings, workshop sessions, questionnaire returns and a survey of children, parents and service provider views carried out by the Early Years Organisation.

Quality and Standards Framework:

5.3.2 Stakeholders identified the need for a Quality and Standards

Framework based on child development and well-being, with quality indicators and standards for all service providers. There is a need to integrate health, care and education to support children's development and well-being needs.

Early identification and intervention:

5.3.3 Stakeholders were clear about the benefits of early intervention and preventative approaches to support children and families with additional needs, especially children with a learning disability and families from ethnic minorities. Early intervention was seen as a means of increasing educational attainment, improving family dynamics and promoting positive experiences. Staff generally commented they received very little support in relation to additional needs, feeling left on their own to cope with any issues arising.

"It was the leader of the setting who first pointed out to me that she had some concerns regarding my child. At first I was angry and did not want to admit that I also had concerns, but just hoped they would rectify themselves. However as I worked with the staff and now my child has been diagnosed it is such a relief. I see such a change in my child's development". Parent (EYO survey)

Play:

5.3.4 Play is crucial to the overall health, well-being and development of young children. The importance and benefits to children of play need to be made clear to parents, practitioners and the wider society, to ensure children are given every opportunity to enjoy and learn from play experiences. The provision of quality play should be a common component of all training for early years practitioners. All children should have the opportunity to benefit from safe, supportive, age-appropriate play. Children themselves raised the need and wish to be able to play outdoors.

"I wished on the wishcatcher that we could play outside our playgroup".

Child (EYO survey)

School Starting Age:

5.3.5 There was a difference of opinion on this issue with some stakeholders stating the Foundation Stage should be given a period of time before it was evaluated to ascertain if the developmental needs of individual children on entry to school were being met more appropriately. Other stakeholders felt strongly the school starting age should be raised with children receiving two years of quality pre-school. The issue of under age children in nursery settings was also raised as a problem which needed to be resolved.

Poverty:

5.3.6 As a result of the impact child poverty can have on a child's development and well-being, stakeholders were unanimous in their call for every effort to be made to reduce and eradicate child poverty.

Parents:

5.3.7 Parents have a vital role in their child's development and parents should be supported in their role as primary educators and carers, with well-developed parenting advice and programmes. Maintaining and developing effective engagement with families is important for all early years services. Stakeholders stated that ethnic minority and traveller families often need support to develop their confidence in their parenting role. The appointment of parenting co-ordinators may assist parents in obtaining advice and support. Parents who have accessed parenting support and programmes are very positive about them.

"The training was free and was the best support and advice for me that I have ever had. For the first time I did not feel isolated and left to cope on my own". Parent (EYO Survey)

5.3.8 Accessible home-based parenting support is sometimes required for parents. Parents, especially if their child has a disability, need to be

able to access information quickly and easily. The information needs of parents should be sought and then information provided in the best way possible. Parents should also be supported if they choose to stay at home rather than entering the workforce.

Integrated Services:

5.3.9 Providers who are assessed as providing high quality services should be allowed to build on existing services so that more integrated services are available for children, parents and families. These centres could then become Centres of Expertise with responsibilities for disseminating best practice in the local area. These centres would promote collaboration between health, social and educational agencies, workforce and parents. Parents raised the issue of the need for agencies to work together, particularly if a child has additional needs. There was a need for more partnership working so that services were not being duplicated and more effective links were established between early years services. This was seen as a more cost effective way of delivering services. This would have implications for refurbishments and new builds in local areas to enable the extension of service provision. DE building handbook would need to be reviewed to facilitate the creation of more innovative environments which could assist collaborative and integrated working. Consideration should also be given to extending Sure Start services to 0-6 age range and increasing the number of Sure Start projects.

Lack of registered childminders:

5.3.10 There has been a decrease in the number of registered childminders in the last five years. Action needs to be taken to ensure parents have choice and availability of full-time affordable childcare. Lack of access to registered childminders prevents parents from returning to or entering the workforce. Delays in the registration process can encourage childminders to operate illegally and discourages others from applying to be registered. There is also a lack of mandatory training and insurance cover which compromises the quality of the

service and may put childminders and families at risk. The implications of the cost of Access NI (Vetting Process) and subsequent ISA registration may have a major impact on the supply of childminders.

Core funding

5.3.11 The need for equity between the statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors in respect of core funding for services was a major issue identified by many stakeholders. This was seen as a key factor in the likelihood of some services becoming unsustainable. Many voluntary and community sector organisations have accumulated vast experience and skills which should be used and developed. The elimination of pre-school sectoral inequalities was deemed to be crucial. Some stakeholders noted that the early years sector always seems to be in a funding crisis so it is vital that more long-term funding mechanisms are put in place.

“We have fund-raised to buy new books to meet the needs of the children from different cultures”. Staff (EYO Survey)

One structure/one body:

5.3.12 Stakeholders commented that as funding streams, policies, legislation, regulation and accountability for many aspects of early years services are the responsibility of many different departments, this did not make it easy for frontline services. The preference would be that one department/one regional body would take responsibility for all aspects of early years services and the consistent application of policies, procedures and standards. It was recognised there was a wide variation in the interpretation of the guidance and regulations for early years across the trust areas. Stakeholders stated it was vitally important proper procedures and protocols are established to enable effective inter-departmental partnerships for collaboration in the delivery of cross-cutting policies, especially in relation to funding responsibilities. While one body was regarded as the most appropriate mechanism it must also be recognised that effective collaborative local

structures are imperative, with good communication channels and links to the regional body.

Workforce:

5.3.13 Initial training requirements for early years practitioners urgently needs addressed with clear indications of the skills and competences required, with a clear progression route and salary structure agreed. There was agreement the workforce should be graduate-led. Initial training could be on a multi-disciplinary basis as should continuing professional development as child development and well-being are not confined to one professional discipline. The lack of a coherent, quality training and support service has led to inconsistencies in opportunities for professional development across sectors. The welfare of our children is of paramount importance – ensuring the workforce is supported, trained and properly qualified should be a key priority. Training should include guidance in the implementation of children’s rights in early childhood. Efforts should be made to encourage and facilitate more men to join the workforce.

“Previously I would have been apprehensive in taking a child with special needs; however since attending training, I now see it as a real asset for both staff and children”. Staff (EYO survey)

Research:

5.3.14 Stakeholders were clear about the importance and value of research in helping to decide and determine policies. Much time, effort and money has already been spent on research and this should be used to inform policies but must also be reviewed, evaluated and kept up-to-date. Research indicating children as young as three are beginning to hold prejudiced beliefs was confirmed by the children in the EYO survey.

“At lunch time no one sits beside me. They said I was from a different country and I had different skin”. Child (EYO survey)

“You can’t be a teacher, you are Chinese”. Child (EYO survey)

5.3.15 However in our survey we also had examples where children were accepting of different cultures.

“My best friend lives in Poland. My mummy is going to help her mummy to learn how to speak like us. They come to our house and we play”. Child (EYO survey)

Childcare and services for 7-12 year olds:

5.3.16 Stakeholders expressed concern that the issues of childcare and out-of-school services for 7-12 year olds were not being addressed at this time through the Early Years Strategy.

Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group

5.3.17 Rural issues were also examined in the Equality thematic group. The problems associated with rural areas cover all the points raised above by stakeholders and the scattered settlements of populations compounds problems even further.

5.3.18 In July 2007 DARD established a Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group who launched a report in April 2008 which examines key issues relating to rural childcare provision and identified ways to improve access to childcare provision. A number of recommendations on the report were addressed to or affected other departments. The 2 recommendations made to DE include:

- DE should reassess school transportation to identify/scope out creative transport solutions for rural childcare and how services could be better integrated in meeting rural childcare need; and
- The extended schools model needs to be promoted for uptake in rural areas and/or options for the delivery of the extended model to go beyond the school gate to other service providers.

5.3.19 DE assessed school transport in conjunction with DHSSPS colleagues at the prompting of an NIAO report which suggested the examination of the scope for collaboration in order to better meet community/health transport needs. An inter-departmental review found neither fleet has sufficient 'down time' to accommodate other purposes.

5.3.20 Funding for extended schools is targeted at those schools with the highest proportion of disadvantaged children enrolled. Disadvantage is defined as being resident in a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or one of the most deprived wards. Rurality per se is not a criterion (though some rural wards will be included in NRA or most deprived wards). The Department has asked the Extended School Co-ordinators in Boards to encourage schools funded under the programme to work collaboratively with parents and voluntary and statutory agencies in their local area.

5.4 Research and international best practice models

5.4.1 This section draws heavily from the OECD Starting Strong II (2006) study highlights policy observations following their reviews of international practices in a number of countries.

Adequate investment

5.4.2 OECD's Starting Strong II states that the immediate factors turning government attention to ecec issues include the wish to increase women's labour market participation and the need to address issues of child poverty and educational disadvantage.

5.4.3 There should be adequate investment in early years to ensure universal early childhood services. Universal access does not necessarily entail achieving full coverage, as there are variations in demand for ecec at different ages and in different family circumstances, but rather making access available to all children whose parents wish

them to participate and encouraging those parents to participate that would benefit from services

5.4.4 Policy observations noted in the OECD Starting Strong II report (2006) include:

“To base public funding estimates on achieving quality pedagogical goals”

5.4.5 Good quality provision is expensive and so consideration needs to be given to both the availability and affordability of services. The ‘merit good⁸’ property of high quality ecec should be recognised and adequate resources dedicated to it.

5.4.6 Universal early childhood services will be our ultimate aim, as recommended by the UNCRC and the OECD, but it may be a phased targeted approach has to be adopted initially.

Child Development and Well-being

5.4.7 A child’s development can be measured through social, physical, emotional and cognitive developmental milestones. If children fail to develop properly they may be unable to become lifelong learners. Developmental delays may lead to speech and language difficulties, behavioural and learning problems. These delays need to be identified as early as possible to provide opportunities for intervention for professionals to work together with parents to help children grow up healthy and strong. (Healthy in this context means the best possible outcomes in the physical, mental and social functioning and well-being of an individual).

5.4.8 The early years of a child’s life are critical for cognitive, social and emotional development. It is important to ensure children grow up in environments where their needs are being met. The cost to society of

⁸ A merit good is defined as a good that delivers public benefits as well as private benefits.

less than optimal development is enormous and far-reaching. Failure to invest time and resources may have long term effects on health and social services and the education system; therefore it is in the public interest to ensure child development is high on the agenda for action and investment. It is also important to recognise there is a range of what is considered to be normal development. Some children may accomplish certain tasks or reach specific developmental milestones sooner or later than others.

5.4.9 Well-being is crucial for a child to develop social and cognitive skills and to have a 'sense of belonging'. A low level of well-being over a period of time can result in a child becoming listless, anxious, aggressive or regress in development. Improving the level of well-being is not about spoiling the child but about nurturing their self-confidence, helping them to express feelings, helping them to develop relationships, letting them experience success and developing their talents. Policy observations noted in OECD Starting Strong II state:

“To place well-being, early development and learning at the core of ecec work while respecting the child’s rights and natural learning strategies”.

5.4.10 The specific challenge in many countries is to focus on the child and to show greater understanding of the specific developmental tasks and learning strategies of young children.

Parents

5.4.11 A policy that focuses only on children and services will be less effective if similar support is not provided for parents. The bond between children and parents is the most significant influence on a child’s life. Good pre-natal care which enables a mother to enjoy the birth of her child will help her form a warm and loving attachment with her child and provide a positive stimulation from birth. This can make a difference to the child’s development and well-being for a lifetime. The way a child is

nurtured in the home has a crucial impact on his/her educational and emotional development:

- from the moment of birth most children display a capacity and desire to learn;
- forming secure attachments with parent and/or significant carer assists learning; and
- children need to feel wanted and loved – this is an important foundation for early learning experiences.

5.4.12 Policy observations noted in the OECD Starting Strong II report (2006) in relation to parents are:

- *To encourage family and community involvement in early childhood services.* The continuity of children's experiences across environments is greatly enhanced when parents and staff members exchange information regularly and adopt consistent approaches to socialisation, daily routines, child development and learning.
- *To aspire to ecec systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy.* It is important that wider societal interests are reflected in services including respect for children's rights, diversity and enhanced access for children with special and additional learning needs. At central level, touchstones of a democratic approach will be to support the basic right of parents to be involved in the education of their children.

Integrated provision of services centred on children and families

5.4.13 Comprehensive ecec services help to integrate families with young children. They provide child health, referral and other services, and contribute greatly to preparing young children for school.

5.4.14 The OECD Starting Strong II report (2006) examined key challenges of ecec service integration and co-ordination:

- the co-ordination of central and decentralised levels;
- the adoption of a collaborative and participatory approach to inform; and

- forging links across services, professionals and parents at local level.

5.4.15 The OECD Starting Strong II study notes that co-ordinating mechanisms can work well when they are established for a specific purpose. Ecec policy-making has become a shared responsibility in many OECD countries between national and local governments. A positive consequence of decentralisation has been the integration of early education and care services at local level, along with greater sensitivity to local needs. However decentralisation can also raise challenges. Devolution of powers and responsibilities may widen differences of access and quality between regions. In the devolution process it is therefore important to ensure that early childhood services are part of a well-conceptualised national policy in regards to goal setting, legislation, regulation, financing, staffing criteria and programme standards.

5.4.16 Ecec policy is concerned not only with providing education and care to young children but it is also linked with issues of women's employment and equality of opportunity, child development and child poverty issues, labour market supply, health, social welfare and education. Policy observations in OECD Starting Strong II states:

- *To attend to the social context of early childhood development and organise children's services in a manner that serves important social and economic objectives, such as, ensuring labour supply, equality of opportunity for women, family well-being and social inclusion. Well organised services will support parents in child rearing, provide opportunity for women to work and help include low-income and immigrant families in the community and society. The ministry in charge should forge a broad but realistic vision of early childhood services to which all relevant ministries, local authorities and parents can subscribe.*

An agreed set of quality standards

5.4.17 The EPPNI Research shows that children who experience high quality pre-school provision have better cognitive and social and emotional development when they start primary school (and maintain an advantage until at least age seven) than children who did not experience pre-school education and childcare. Conversely where poor quality childcare is given it may offer no developmental benefit for the child and even disadvantage them.

5.4.18 The evidence from OECD Starting Strong II suggests that direct public funding of services brings more effective governmental steering of early childhood services, advantages of scale, better national quality, more effective training for educators and a higher degree of equity in access.

5.4.19 Policy observations noted in the OECD Starting Strong II report (2006) in relation to quality include:

- *To develop with stakeholders broad guidelines and curricular standards for all ecec services.* Guiding frameworks help to promote a more even level of quality across age groups and provision. They also gain in effectiveness when co-constructed with the main stakeholders.
- *To base public funding estimates on achieving quality pedagogical goals.* Younger children need more staff than older children, and generally spend longer hours in services. In well-functioning systems, governments develop clear and consistent strategies for efficiently allocating resources, including long-term planning and quality initiatives. Investment should be directed towards achieving high quality pedagogical goals, rather than the simple creation of places.

5.4.20 An agreed set of quality standards should be in place relating to:

- level of funding;
- availability/affordability;
- staff qualifications and training;
- working conditions;
- group size;
- staff/child ratios;

- child activities/experiences;
- adult/child interactions/involvement;
- child/child interactions; and
- SEN, equality and mutual respect

Local providers to have autonomy to plan provision

5.4.21 Experience from the OECD reviews suggest that devolution of powers and responsibilities may widen differences in access and quality between regions. In the devolution process, it seems important to ensure that early childhood services are part of a well-conceptualised national policy on one hand with a national approach to goal setting, legislation and regulation etc, and devolved powers to regional and local authorities on the other.

5.4.22 Policy observations noted in the OECD Starting Strong II report (2006) state:

- *To provide autonomy, funding and support to early childhood services.* Once national programme standards for services have been decided local providers should have the autonomy to plan and choose or create curricula that they find appropriate for the children in their care.

Equality and diversity

5.4.23 Early childhood services are particularly important for children with diverse learning needs, whether these stem from physical, mental or sensory disabilities or socio-economic disadvantage. Policy observation from OECD Starting Strong II include:

- *To reduce child poverty and exclusion through upstream fiscal, social and labour policies and to increase resources within universal programmes for children with diverse learning rights (physical, mental, sensory disabilities or from socio economic disadvantage).*
- *To aspire to ecec systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy.* It is important that wider societal interests are reflected

in services including respect for children's rights, diversity and enhanced access for children with special and additional learning needs. At central level, touchstones of a democratic approach will be to support the basic right of parents to be involved in the education of their children.

Workforce

5.4.24 Researchers have identified the following categories of ecec workers, common to developed countries:

- pedagogues: broad training in theory and practice and working with children in multiple contexts;
- early childhood or pre-primary teachers: receive teacher training and work with children in settings;
- childcare or nursery workers; basic paramedical training to work in childcare settings;
- qualified or trained auxiliaries: semi-professionals who typically work part-time;
- family daycare workers: few, if any, formal qualifications or training and tend to work outside centre-based programmes – may be self-employed; and
- non-qualified volunteers.

5.4.25 With the overwhelming evidence about the need for a highly skilled workforce to ensure the development and well-being of children during this important time in their lives countries are now expanding and upgrading the early years' workforce. The trends emerging are:

- countries are developing, revising or improving the training programmes for ecec workers of children before compulsory school;
- many European countries are trying to reconcile primary and pre-primary qualifications – teachers attain the same base qualification level but with different specializations;
- teacher training is being enhanced with research based evidence concerning child development;

- several countries are actively promoting the employment of men in early years services;
- in-service training is being strengthened as a means of improving quality and qualifications of existing staff; and
- integrated training is increasing among early years professionals.

5.4.26 Policy observations noted from OECD Starting Strong II are:

- *To improve the working conditions and professional education of ecec staff.* Attention to the level of recruitment of early childhood workers, their professional education and work conditions is key to quality services.

Co-ordinated Policy and Management Systems

5.4.27 It is essential to have management systems to support policy to ensure analysis of services for better planning, validating or terminating services and greater accountability.

5.4.28 Policy observations noted in the OECD Starting Strong II report (2006) in relation to services include:

- *To create the governance structures necessary for system accountability and quality assurance.* Strong investment in research, data collection, monitoring and evaluation is needed to ensure well-informed policymaking, system reform and the development of a comprehensive provision structure. . Strong policy units need wide expertise, a data collection and monitoring process, an evaluation unit with strong investment in research, an organisation or organisations providing quality training, and an inspection or advisory pedagogical body.

5.4.29 Starting Strong II also found that in many OECD countries, the level of regulation of services for children under 3 gives rise for concern with much of the child care sector private and unregulated.

6.0 Policy Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The purpose of this section is to identify common threads or emerging themes from the previous section to inform the future policy.

6.2 Themes

6.2.1 Five themes have emerged.

Theme 1: Child development and well-being:

6.2.2 The early years of a child's life are crucial for cognitive, social and emotional development. There needs to be greater coherence in the promotion of child development and well-being outcomes in all early years programmes and services. A particular focus could be on speech, language and communication.

Theme 2: Families:

6.2.3 Policy that focuses only on children and services will be ineffective if similar efforts are not made with families. The bond between children and their parents is the most significant in their lives. Early childhood services are particularly important for families with a child with a disability and/or diverse learning needs. Better outcomes will be achieved if services raise and improve the level of engagement with families in the local community.

Theme 3: Quality and Standards

6.2.4 A Framework based on child development and well-being, with quality indicators and standards for all service providers can help to promote a better level of quality across service providers. A highly-skilled , professional and appropriately trained workforce is needed to ensure

the development and well-being of children during this important time in their lives.

Theme 4: Collaboration and integration of services

6.2.5 The regional and local structures should facilitate the development of collaborative working and integrated service provision. It is essential the regional and local structures support an improving quality agenda by ensuring analysis of services for better planning, funding, validating or terminating services and for greater accountability. It is vital that longer-term funding mechanisms are put in place with equity between alternative providers. Strong investment is required in research, data collection, monitoring and evaluation to ensure well-informed policy-making based on reliable and relevant information.

Theme 5: Services

6.2.6 Early childhood policies should be concerned not only with providing education and care services but also linked to issues of women's employment, child development, child poverty, health, and social welfare. Local providers should have the autonomy to plan and choose what they find appropriate for the children in their local area, based on the particular barriers to learning within the local area.

List of stake holders**INTER-DEPARTMENTAL GROUP PROJECT BOARD**

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ORGANISATION</u>
Anne Dorbie	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Caroline Evans	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Glen Donnelly	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Paul Martin	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Sean Holland	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Stephen Wilson	Department of Employment and Learning
Tim Devine	Department of Employment and Learning
Russell McCaughey	Department of Social Development
Louise Warde Hunter	Department of Education
Marilyn Warren	Department of Education
John Caldwell	Department of Education
Patricia McVeigh	Department of Education
Maggie McGibbon	Department of Education
Barry O'Rourke	Education Training Inspectorate
Maureen Bennett	Education Training Inspectorate

REGIONAL REFERENCE GROUP

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ORGANISATION</u>
Sean Holland	Social Services Inspectorate
Joan Henderson	Education Training Inspectorate
Alice Lennon	South-Eastern Education & Library Board
Liz Crowe	Belfast Education & Library Board
Mrs Lorna Gardiner	North-Eastern Education and Library Board
Heather Murray	Southern Education & Library Board (also representing WELB)
Miss Jayne Millar	North-Eastern Education & Library Board
Evelyn Curran	Early Childhood Consultation Partnership
Siobhan Fitzpatrick	Early Years - the organisation for young children
Bridget Nodder	Northern Ireland Child Minding Association
Jacqueline O'Loughlin	Playboard
Pauline Leeson	Children in Northern Ireland
Susan Campbell	Forum Of Nursery school Teachers
Danny Cassidy	Altram – Irish Language sector
Marie Cavanagh	Gingerbread
Marie Marin	Employers for Childcare
Dawn Shaw	NCH NI
Paschal McKeown	Mencap
Sharon Burnette	Coleraine Sure Start
Siobhan Slavin	Downpatrick Sure Start

Danny Power Clan Mór Sure Start
Andrew Dornan Sure Start

*Barney McNeany from Northern Ireland Children and Young People's Commissioners Office

*invited to attend as an observer.

GOOD PRACTICE GROUP

NAME

ORGANISATION

Anne Kitchen	Education Training Inspectorate
Mairead Conlon	Southern Health & Social Care Trust
Helen Bell	Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
Evelyn Curran	Eastern Childcare Partnership
Liz Crowe	Pre-School Education Advisory Group, BELB
Susan Campbell	Magherafelt NS (FONT)
Áine Andrews	Altram – Irish Language sector
Pauline Walmsley	Early Years- the organisation for young children
Clare Devlin	Early Years- the organisation for young children
Joan Hewitt	Northern Ireland Child Minding Association
Kyra Pauley	Playboard
Heather Knox	Home-start NI
Una Gilmore	Lifestart mid-Ards
Marie Marin	Employers for Childcare
Carolyn Stewart	MENCAP
Lorraine Brennan	South & East Belfast District Childcare Partnership
Rosemary Wade	Little Doves playgroup
Rosemary King	Merdyn Day Nursery
Janet Armstrong	Pond Park NS
Kathleen Burns	St Therese NS
Christine McKeown	Ashton Centre – Community Sector
Martina Storey	Sure Start Creevagh
Sharon Kirk	Sure Start
Lynda Fulton	Alessie Centre
Margaret Sillery	Ballycrochan Playgroup
Mary Murphy	North & West Belfast Childcare Partnership
Roberta Marshall	Barnardos
Catherine Wegwermer	St Joseph's PS, Crumlin

EQUALITY GROUP

NAME

ORGANISATION

Briege Lyttle	Education Training Inspectorate
Mairead Conlon	Southern Health & Social Care Trust
Evelyn Curran	Eastern Childcare Partnership
Maura Mason	Western Childcare Partnership
Lorna Gardiner	Curriculum Advisory Support Service- NEELB
Siobhan O'Hanlon	Pre-School Education Advisory Group, WELB
Kathleen O'Kane	Early Years- the organisation for young children
Frances Walsh	Playboard

Sinead Hoy	St Mary's NS, Newtownabbey (FONT)
Danny Cassidy	Altram – Irish Language sector
Patricia Murray	Employers for Childcare
Colette Slevin	Mencap – The Voluntary sector
Joy Poots	Sure Start
Karin Eyben	NI Rural Women's network
Mary Gillen	Bligh's Lane NS - Statutory Nursery Sector
Tish Holland	Upper Andersontown Community Forum (UACF)
Maria Maguire	Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
Winnie Kelly	Sure Start Omagh
Siobhan O Dwyer	Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
Sharon Burnett	Sure Start Coleraine
Thomas Thompson	Northern Health & Social Care Trust
Christine Hagen	District childcare partnership
Jenny Boyd	Enniskillen NS
Denise Morgan	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
Joan McGovern	Barnardos

DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS GROUP

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ORGANISATION</u>
Anne McDermott	Education Training Inspectorate
Paul O Neill	Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
Hilary Walker	Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
Linda Erwin	Childcare Partnership – NCCP
Mary Quinn	Childcare Partnership – ECCP
Jayne Millar	Pre-School Education Advisory Group, NEELB
Liz Crowe	Pre-School Education Advisory Group, BELB
Siobhan O'Hanlon	Pre School Advisory Advisory Group, WELB
Nuala Heaney	Curriculum Advisory Support Service- WELB
Liz Jones	Southern Education and Library Board
Josephine Doherty	Western Trust
Siobhan Fitzpatrick	Early Years- the organisation for young children
Jenny Adair	Northern Ireland Child Minding Association
Maura Moore	Playboard
Heather Knox	Home-start NI
Donna Walsh	Our Lady's NS, Belfast (FONT)
Sue Pentel	Altram – Irish Language sector
Marie Cavanagh	Gingerbread
Marie Marin	Employers for Childcare
Julia McKeown	NCH NI (National Children's Home)
Colette Slevin	Mencap
Elaine Millar	Ulster Communities Hospital Trust
Teresa Canavan	Rural Development Council
Muriel Bailey	Sure Start Dungiven
Joy Poots	Sure Start
Amanda McGall	Ballymena Sure Start
Sam Mahaffey	NHSC trust
Alison McCaw	Department of Education – Early Years
Kevin McCormick	Barnardos
David McCartney	Brooklands PS

Nancy McGrath
Majella McDowell

Edenderry NS
Galliagh NS

WORKFORCE STATUTORY GROUP

NAME

ORGANISATION

Christine Johnston	NI Social Care Council (Skills Council)
Sonya McGuckin	CCP Lisburn
Joanne Magee	Eastern Childcare Partnership
Maura Mason	Western Childcare Partnership
Evelyn Curran	Eastern Childcare Partnership
Heather Murray	Pre-School Education Advisory Group, SELB (also representing WELB)
Dawn Crosby	South-Eastern Education and Library Board
Clare Devlin	Early Years- the organisation for young children
Barbara Quinn	Northern Ireland Child Minding Association
Margaret Deevy	Playboard
Clare Majury	Hollywood NS (Font)
Áine Andrews	Altram – Irish Language sector
Sheelagh Carville	Stranmillis College
Patricia Murray	Employers for Childcare
Carolyn Stewart	MENCAP
Elaine Millar	South-Eastern Health & Social Care Trust
Liz Kavanagh	Sure Start Strabane
Alison Loughlin	Parents Advice Centre
Barbara Wilson	Northern Health & Social Care trust
Alison McCaw	Department of Education – Early Years
David Patterson	Lowood PS
Ray Cromie	Templepatrick PS
Maureen Irvine	Holy Trinity NS
Maureen McGirr	Belfast Trust
Patricia Graham	South East Trust
Deirdre Walsh	Whiterock Children's Centre
Aine McCabe	Blackie Centre
Michelle Devlin	North Down & Ards Institute

Summary of Stakeholder Workshops

What are we trying to achieve (aims)?	What do we believe?	What are the challenges we face and what needs to be challenged?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should meet children’s rights • Should achieve the 6 high level outcomes of the 10-year Children’s strategy • The Child should be at the centre of all provision with childhood valued and celebrated in its own right • Best childhood outcomes for children, families and communities • Best quality childhood experiences for young children • Quality learning, lifestyle and caring environment • Reflective of all children’s needs • Belief in the importance of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s rights need to be recognised • All behaviours are established at this early age • Importance of on-going evaluation • Importance of play • All children have the right to participate in decisions that effect them • Research and identify root issues that impact on children’s potential • Workforce should feel valued • All cultures should be respected and tolerated • Must be properly funded • Parents are prime carers and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social or academic pedagogy needs to be accepted • The school starting age should be challenged. Northern Ireland has the lowest school starting age in Europe. • Importance/value/ benefits of play need to underpin the strategy – and the need to inform and influence this message to parents • A need to revisit the terminology – pre-school or kindergarten • Lack of recognition by wider community of value of early years provision • The strategy needs to be in line

childhood

- Early years should be valued and respected
- Inclusion and recognition of parents in holistic approach to ecec
- Nurture and support the family unit
- Provide high quality outreach services to families with additional needs
- Should be adequate support for parents
- Cohesive Early Years Strategy with joined up thinking, flexibility and integration
- Sustainability for local providers.
- Consistently high quality accessible care and education provision for all children 0-6
- Appropriate training, qualification and remuneration for the workforce

educators

- Advice should be made available to parents so they can make informed choices about services and provision on offer
- Belief in the importance of parents, including fathers
- Need to inform and support parents
- Supportive framework for diversity of cultures for families
- Investment in social support for children, parents and families within their own communities
- Parents to be seen as first educators
- There should be universal services
- Early years must be properly funded
- Good quality children's services depend on a quality trained

with OFMDFM's play policy

- The Strategy should be consistent with other strategies e.g. Anti-poverty, Parenting, Mental Health review
- Recognition of the vital role of parents in their child's development
- There should be support for parents as child's first teacher
- To educate parents/wider society about the needs of children – to see it as a long term investment – to be open to parenting information from:
 - qualified adults
 - messages from research including EPPNI
- We need to win hearts and minds in terms of importance of early years

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow a body of best practice from NI perspective • Provide high quality outreach services to families with additional needs • Children will have the best and most appropriate services/opportunities made available to them regardless of whether this is home/site-based • Provide a dynamic service which reacts to change – services need to be flexible • To create a framework to integrate, maintain and evaluate quality early years services which will ultimately improve the lives of children and their families • To enable all those who are committed to improve the life 	<p>workforce with proper remuneration, terms and conditions and progression route</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance between children’s care, education and play • Children with additional needs are entitled to have these identified and addressed at an early age • Vehicle for delivery of integrated services for children • In the best interest of all children • Early Years coherent strategy will improve services from all providers • Strategy for early years will improve services • Strategy will promote good standards • Will support development and progression • Provide safe stimulating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A regional consistent approach is essential to realise benefits of early years interventions. • Common agreed assessment/inspection processes • Situation re 2 year olds and whether they are in an age-appropriate environment • The development of the workforce is essential to ensure quality provision • Adequate investment dedicated to early years. • Local accountability/involvement • Training – there should be a commitment to Continued Professional Development • Should aspire to the provision of 2 years of funded pre-school provision
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<p>chances of children 0-6 to work towards an integrated approach that will encourage and support families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To allow children in their communities to become life-long learners fulfilling their potential at each stage • Consistency of values across all agencies • Early intervention is essential • Appropriate strategic and operational structures linked with community planning • To achieve a common quality framework that will be usable by all early years services • Best childhood outcomes for children, families and communities • Best quality childhood experiences 	<p>environment regardless of location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to appropriate support and intervention if required • Continual professional development for all those working with children • Greater cohesive and consistent approach re qualifications • Children should be at the centre • Needs to be change in culture towards children and understanding their needs • Develop good practice through policy and procedures, a skilled and nurturing workforce, partnership working • Have systems in place to ensure service delivery begins pre-birth and continues beyond 6 yrs • Supportive framework for diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structures/infrastructure to support 0-6 • Adequate resources in terms of : adult/child ratios; Qualifications of staff required to work in early years settings, and standards of quality. • Effective monitoring mechanisms • Targeted resources for children/families requiring additional support • Infrastructure – buildings, equal provision in all sectors, govt policy re childcare, parental leave, flexible working, extended families, practical implications of integrated support • Suspicion and lack of trust between sectors • Silo mentality within and between departments
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<p>for young children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality learning, lifestyle, environment, caring • Standardised registration and Inspection • There should be equality between sectors • Through highly qualified people who hold relevant and appropriate qualifications build a skills ladder/climbing frame – benefits will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - better outcomes for children - contribute to NI's economic development - support parents - inter-agency co-operation through agreed approaches and mechanisms/processes - investment in education and 	<p>of cultures for families and workforce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for integration for children with additional needs • Investment in social support for children, parents and families within their own communities • Staff recognised for the work they do and are rewarded via pay structures and career structures • Quality childcare, accessible for all • Children's outcomes are dependent on the qualifications of the adults with whom they engage • Parents can be supported to be economically active through being re-assured in relation to the quality of their children's experiences • Access route should be flexible • Early Years workforce can 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability function – value for money • There should be multidisciplinary working • Multi-agency training • Recognition of the contribution and potential of non-professionals • Recognition of value of community/voluntary sector • Financial equality for early years practitioners • Single Department with responsibility/accountability • Vulnerability of Early Years sector – danger of disappearing with wider educational agenda. • Other govt departments acknowledging their responsibility for strategy • Need for recognition of soft skills
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<p style="text-align: center;">training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality training which is quality assured and inspected • Standardisation of qualifications • Affordable quality childcare • More enforcement powers for Education & Training Inspectorate 	<p style="text-align: center;">contribute to capacity building in NI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic approach to developing workforce to support holistic approach to child and family • There is a lot of good practice and expertise in existence 	<p style="text-align: center;">and wide range of specialist skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers working across different agendas • True partnership across statutory, voluntary and community sectors • Professional interactions must produce positive action so that groups can be re-assured their concerns will be met • How to disseminate best practice in all areas and sectors • Ensure quality across all sectors and providers • Financial challenges • New inspection/quality/benchmarks • Regulations and inspection standards • Development of models of excellence • How training colleges will provide
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		<p>qualifications framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need for informal training and education to support needs of workforce• Persuading govt to allow funding to drive the need for a graduate led workforce• Getting appropriate financial support• Reaching disadvantaged children• Regional approach is essential
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Summary of Consultation with children, parents and staff

Responses on what children, parents and staff feel is important to/for them highlighted under the different headings

Children	Parents	Staff
Additional/Special Needs		
<p>My sister is in a wheelchair, she is the same as everybody else, she just can't walk.</p> <p>I help my friend in our class who can't walk very well, our teacher told us why he can't walk and we all take turns to make sure he is ok.</p> <p>My wee baby brother wears glasses; some boys in my class laughed at him and said they never saw a baby wearing glasses before.</p> <p>I really like you coming to our playgroup with Rosie and Jim and the masks that make us say when we are happy. When are you coming back?</p>	<p>As a parent of a child with special needs I believe there is a lot of support out there, my child attends the local playgroup, and she uses a wheelchair. Her peers just see her like any other child, the staff work very closely with me and the other agencies who are involved. I am so thankful that she was able to attend our local playgroup which is very much part of the community, she already knows some of the children which was a really good start for her.</p> <p>It was the Leader of the setting who first pointed out to me that she had some concerns regarding my child. At first I was angry and did not want to admit that I also had concerns, but just hoped they would rectify themselves. However as I worked with the staff and now that my child has been diagnosed it is such a relief, the support I have received from the staff and</p>	<p>Now that we have a format for planning for children with additional/special needs, it has been absolutely amazing to see the difference it has made for both staff and children.</p> <p>We receive very little support from the special needs team of Social Services, there is no health visitor or speech and language therapist for me to contact, I feel once the child has been enrolled in the group we are left very much on our own to cope with any problems.</p> <p>Some settings seem to be of the opinion that if they have a child with additional/special needs, they will need special equipment/resources; this is not always the case. We use all our normal equipment/resources for all children, at times we just have to adapt it.</p> <p>Previously I would have been apprehensive in taking a child with special needs; however since</p>

	<p>others has been amazing. I see such a change in my child's development.</p> <p>The playgroup has helped stimulate my child's imagination and challenge her to face and overcome risks, this has helped to build self-confidence and independence, some other centres refused to take my child, and one would only take her for one hour three days a week.</p> <p>The staff in the childcare centre my child attends, contacted a health visitor who came out to the group, and gave me some booklets to help me cope with my child's ongoing behaviour problems, I can hardly believe the difference these strategies made, I work closely with the staff in the group to make sure we are being consistent in our approach.</p> <p>As a parent in the group my child attends, I was invited to training on children with additional/special needs. The training was free and was the best support and advice for me that I have ever had. For the first time I did not feel isolated, and left to cope with this on my own. My child is making remarkable progress thanks to the nursery.</p>	<p>attending training, I now see it as a real asset for both staff and children.</p>
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Ethnic Minorities

My best friend lives in Poland, my mummy is going to help her mummy to learn how to speak like us, they come to our house and we play.

You can't be a teacher, you are Chinese.

Why does nobody else look like me in playgroup?

I wish I looked like everybody else.

I love coming to this group, but I worry what next, what will happen when my child leaves here.

I had a really good job in my own country, I have good skills which I could use, I am really pleased the leader has asked me to come in and cook some of our food to let the children sample different foods.

I want to go to work, but it is hard because I only speak very little English. I have met a lady whose little girl goes to the same nursery as my child, she is going to help me with my English, she is a good friend to me, I visit her for coffee.

I was never educated, I think education is very important, I see such a difference in my child since she has come here, I am learning so much from her.

I feel the playgroup has helped me fit into the community, and that I am respected, also my culture.

It is the feeling of isolation that is the worst thing for me.

We have fundraised to buy new books to meet the needs of the children from different cultures, this has been a great help, one little Polish child was reading her story to a child in the playgroup; she said you are really clever to read like that. I wish I could speak in that language. We have introduced a lending library; this is of great benefit for the parents and indeed the children.

We would really need funding to purchase many more resources for the setting for example the home area, books, musical instruments, dolls and puppets to help us become much more inclusive and to be able to provide more resources that are familiar to the children and their culture.

	<p>I was very lonely and missed my family, I still do, but since coming to this group I find people very friendly, and I have got a lot of help.</p>	
<p>Inclusion and Diversity</p>		
<p>I don't like the flags, they make me afraid.</p> <p>The man on the wall outside our playgroup frightens me, he has a gun and he might come real and shoot.</p> <p>At lunch time no one sits beside me, they said I was from a different country and I had different skin.</p> <p>There is a bully in our class, he told me to give him the money I had left over after I bought my lunch, I told my mummy and she told the teacher, but he still does it when no one is watching, I try to hide from him.</p> <p>I asked my Granny did Catholics come from a different country, she said they live in many countries like</p>	<p>It is very important for my child to learn to respect people from different cultures, especially now that we are having so many coming from abroad.</p> <p>I don't think my child needs to know all this about religion and different cultures, he is far too young, I knew nothing about this at his age and it never did me any harm.</p> <p>I try to bring my children up the way I was brought up to respect everyone, it is good that my child learns and mixes with children who are different than they are.</p>	<p>Using the media initiative resources has enabled us tackle issues that have arisen in the playgroup, and also with parents.</p> <p>It is very important to keep our policies up to date in these areas and to make sure that all staff read them.</p> <p>It is important for us to deal with sensitive issues as they arise.</p> <p>The children love the media initiative puppets, we use them on a daily basis, and this initiative has helped us to build a better understanding among our children and parents.</p>

<p>our country because everyone is the same and they are not different from me.</p> <p>I don't like kick the pope bands, they are too noisy.</p> <p>I can't go over there to play, that is where the orangeland is.</p> <p>We make shoe boxes in our school to fill with toys for the wee children in poor countries; I think it is very good to share</p>		
<p>The Environment/Outdoor/Decision making</p>		
<p>I like it best when we go outside to play, but I have to get all my work done first.</p> <p>I think the man should build us a park with no glass on the ground, and then the wee children would not get hurt.</p> <p>I wished on the wish catcher that we could play outside our playgroup.</p>	<p>The main problem I have in getting my child to go outside to play is because there are too many distractions on TV</p> <p>I have a major problem with safety outdoors, we live on a busy road so I need to supervise my child at all times, and this is not always practical. I wish we had a play park near us.</p> <p>The play station games are a real encouragement for children to stay in side.</p>	<p>Our committee have fundraised to have a sensory garden, an area for digging and planting herbs and aromatic plants. It was really important to get the design right for this environment. This will enable us to have a much more balanced curriculum.</p> <p>By using the wishcatcher the children have helped design their own garden.</p> <p>I feel this is an area which is easy to neglect within the curriculum, particularly in our planning</p>

<p>Our teacher Pat asked us to cut out from the book what we would like for our new outdoor play when she gets the money.</p> <p>I have already told Rosie and Jim what I like to play with outside.</p> <p>I love to go to my Nannies house, cos I can play outside.</p>	<p>Because we are both outdoor people we take our children walking, rock climbing and we go camping a lot, this helps them to appreciate the environment and experience outdoor life which enables them to have a healthy lifestyle which is very important.</p> <p>My son is very overweight and so am I, so I know how he feels when he is called names; we now go for a lot of walks together instead of using the car. We both joined different sports, now that I have got him involved he is a much happier person in himself, and we both see the benefits as we loose weight.</p> <p>The Daycare my child goes to seem to watch a lot of television, they can do this at home, I wish they would take the children out more, I have talked to the Manager about this, but it has made no difference.</p>	<p>and observations.</p> <p>We have found by using the puppets and the wishcatcher the children were able to express their opinions, it is very important to listen to what the children have to say. Our children take a lot of photographs themselves we then discuss them in a group. Since I have started using the creative ideas to talk to the children, they now respond so much better.</p>
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United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Articles from UNCRC most relevant for the development of Early Childhood Education and Care Services

- (i) Article 3:
 - 3.1 In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
 - 3.2 State parties undertake to ensure the child such protection as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.
 - 3.3 States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

- (ii) Article 5:

States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

- (iii) Article 12:
 - 12.1 States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

- (iv) Article 18:
 - 18.1 States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.
 - 18.2 For the purposes of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure

the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

18.3 States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

- (v) Article 19:
19.1 States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
19.2 Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.
- (vi) Article 23:
23.1 States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.
- (vii) Article 27:
27.1 States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
27.2 The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.
27.3 States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.
- (viii) Article 29:
29.1 States parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

- (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
- (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
- (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

- (ix) Article 42:
States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

**United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of Discussion:
Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood (17 September 2004 –
Palais Wilson)**

The Committee underlined the importance of early childhood development as early childhood years are critical in laying a solid foundation for the sound development of each child's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities. In order to guarantee rights to the youngest children the Committee recommended:

- (i) State Parties develop rights-based, multidimensional and multi-sectoral strategies, promoting a systematic and integrated approach to policy development and providing comprehensive and continuous programmes in early childhood development with access guaranteed for all children;
- (ii) States Parties uphold the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or legal guardians to provide advice and guidance to young children in exercising their rights in environments based on respect and understanding and within reliable, affectionate relationships;
- (iii) States Parties increase their human and financial resource allocations for early childhood development services and programmes as these services and programmes are vitally important for the short and long-term cognitive and social development of children;
- (iv) States Parties and Stakeholder Groups respect all the provisions and principles of the Convention especially the four principles: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child;
- (v) State Parties develop a system of data collection and indicators consistent with the Convention as comprehensive and up-to-date quantitative and qualitative data is required for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of progress achieved and the impact assessment of policies;
- (vi) States Parties ensure services and facilities conform to quality standards;
- (vii) Attention should be paid to the importance of prenatal and postnatal care for mothers to ensure healthy development of children in the early years and a healthy mother-child relationship;
- (viii) State Parties must identify and remove all obstacles and allocate adequate resources to the implementation of the right to rest, leisure and play;
- (ix) States parties must take all appropriate measures to ensure the concept of the child as a rights-holder is anchored in the child's daily life from the earliest stage: at home (including the extended family); in school; in day-care facilities and in his or her community. Children should be given opportunities to actively and progressively exercise their rights in everyday activities, according to their evolving capacity;

- (x) States Parties should construct high-quality, developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant programmes by working with local communities rather than imposing practices;
- (xi) States parties should undertake systematic education and training of children, their parents and all professionals working for and with children on children's rights along with research in the field of early childhood development. An awareness – raising campaign for the general public on rights and child development should be conducted;
- (xii) States Parties should provide assistance to parents, legal guardians and extended families by providing parenting education;
- (xiii) Human Rights education should form part of pre- and primary school programmes, adapted to the ages and evolving capacities of young children;
- (xiv) Continuous research should be carried out on the crucial importance of quality in early childhood development.

**Committee on the Rights of the Child Thirty-first session:
Consideration of Reports submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of
the Convention**

Concluding Observations: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern
Ireland

4 October 2002

Recommendations:

- (i) To incorporate the rights, principles and provisions of the Convention into domestic law, provide training in the provisions of the Convention and disseminate the Convention more widely;
- (ii) To undertake an analysis of all budgets to show the proportion spent on children, identify priorities and allocate resources to maximum extent available;
- (iii) To ensure the Convention is recognized and used as the appropriate framework for the development of policies and strategies;
- (iv) To establish a data collection system, using the data to assess progress and design policies with regular public reporting and used in parliamentary debate;
- (v) To substantially expand dissemination of information on the Convention among children, parents, wider society and all levels of government;
- (vi) To develop on-going training programmes on children's rights for all groups working for and with children;
- (vii) To adopt the best interests of the child as paramount consideration in all policies affecting children;
- (viii) To establish procedures that would allow the views expressed by children to be taken into account and to have an impact on developing policies affecting them;
- (ix) To take all necessary measures to accelerate the elimination of child poverty;

**Committee on the Rights of the Child Fortieth Session:
Geneva (12-30 September 2005)**

General Comment No 7 (2005)

Recognition that young children are holders of all rights enshrined in the Convention and early childhood is a critical period for the realization of these rights.

The Convention requires that children be respected as persons in their own right.

Young children should be recognized as active members of families and communities with their own concerns, interests and points of view.

Assessment should be carried out on the impact of policies on children.

Features of Early Childhood:

- (a) Young children experience the most rapid period of growth and change during the human lifespan, in terms of their bodies and nervous systems, increasing mobility, communication skills and intellectual capacities and rapid shifts in interests and abilities;
- (b) Young children form strong emotional attachments to their parents or other caregivers, from whom they seek nurturance, care, guidance and protection, in ways that are respectful of their individuality and growing capacities;
- (c) Young children establish their own important relationships with children of the same age, as well as with younger and older children. Through these relationships they learn to negotiate and coordinate shared activities, resolve conflicts, keep agreements and accept responsibility for others;
- (d) Young children actively make sense of the physical, social and cultural dimensions of the world they inhabit, learning progressively from their activities and their interactions with others;
- (e) Young children's earliest years are the foundation for their physical and mental health, emotional security, cultural and personal identity and developing competencies;
- (f) Young children's experiences of growth and development vary according to their individual nature, as well as gender, living conditions, family organisation, care arrangements and education;
- (g) Young children's experiences of growth and development are powerfully shaped by cultural beliefs about their needs and treatment and about their active role in family and community;

States Parties are urged to create conditions that promote the well-being of all young children during this critical phase of their lives.

Under normal circumstances young children form strong mutual attachments with their parents or primary caregivers. These relationships

offer children physical and emotional security as well as consistent care and attention. Through these relationships children construct their personal identity and acquire skills, knowledge and behaviours.

Article 18 of the convention reaffirms that parents have the primary responsibility for promoting children's development and well-being, with the child's interests as their basic concern.

Early Childhood is the period of the most extensive and intensive parental responsibilities related to all aspects of children's well-being covered by the Convention: their survival, health, physical safety and emotional security, standards of living and care, opportunities for play and learning and freedom of expression.

An integrated approach would include interventions that impact indirectly: Taxation and benefits, adequate housing, working hours, maternity leave as well as those with more direct consequences: Postnatal care, health services for mother and baby, parent education, home visitors.

Children's best interests should always be the starting point for service planning and delivery and parents should also be consulted and involved in the planning of comprehensive services.

Work with young children should be socially valued and properly paid, in order to attract a highly qualified workforce. It is essential they have sound up-to date theoretical and practical understanding about child development , well-being and children's rights; they adopt child-centred practices, curriculum and pedagogy; and they have access to specialist professional resources and support.

Growing up in relative poverty undermines children's well-being, social inclusion and self-esteem and reduces opportunities for learning and development.

In providing assistance to parents in their child-rearing responsibilities State Parties should take all appropriate measures to enhance parents' understanding of their role in their children's early education, encouraging child-rearing practices which are child-centred, encouraging respect for the child's dignity and providing opportunities for developing understanding, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Programmes should complement the parents' role and include active cooperation between parents and professionals.

The traditional divisions between 'care' and 'education' services have not always been in children's best interests the concept of 'educare' is sometimes used to signal a shift towards integrated services and reinforces the recognition of the need for a coordinated, holistic, multi-sectoral approach to early childhood.

Annex 5

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