EARLY YEARS:
valuable ends and effective means

Edited by
Janet Grauberg

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## Contents

Executive Summary and Recommendations ................................................. 6

1. Introduction: Policy Themes and Tensions ................................. 8
   Janet Grauberg

2. Childcare: can we afford it? ................................................... 21
   Ellen Broomé, Family and Childcare Trust

3. The Future of Early Years Education .......................................... 26
   Dr Kitty Stewart, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics

4. Early Childhood Services: for whom and for what? ................. 32
   Naomi Eisenstadt, Department of Education, University of Oxford

5. Priorities for Early Education and Care .................................... 37
   Leon Feinstein & Donna Molloy, The Early Intervention Foundation

6. Thinking beyond ‘0-5’ ............................................................ 42
   Jonathan Rallings, Barnardo’s

7. A better qualified workforce ..................................................... 46
   James Kempton, Centre Forum

8. Conclusions and Recommendations ......................................... 51
Executive Summary and Recommendations

Since the publication, twenty years ago this year, of a Royal Society of Arts (RSA) report on nursery education, there has been a rapid expansion of policy interventions in the area of early childhood education and care. The case for government intervention has been accepted.

However, a review of the many policy interventions or “means” deployed over the last twenty years, and of the complex and confusing policy landscape that results, demonstrates that there is a lack of clarity about the outcomes or “ends” to be sought. Successive governments have introduced policies to support parental employment, promote learning and development for every child and, in recent years, to “narrow the gap” in outcomes between children from disadvantaged families and their peers.

Six contributions, written by experts drawn from the academic study of early years policy, policy-thinkers and those who lead delivery of early years services, make strong cases for each of these outcomes. The arguments draw on UK and international evidence about what works in delivering high-quality early childhood education and care, and what works in supporting children from all backgrounds, and their parents, to grow and develop. The contributions recommend a number of policy changes that should be made to achieve the desired outcomes.

In order to avoid perpetuating the confusion and inefficiency of the current system, there is a need for greater clarity of purpose from central government, whichever outcomes are sought. The time has come for politicians and policy-makers to be clear about what it is they are trying to achieve, and to adopt policy interventions in that light.

While there is a good case to intervene to support universal child development and maternal employment, the case for intervening to narrow the gap in outcomes in the early years is strongest. If the government is to intervene in the early years, it should act to promote a just society, where no child is held back by the circumstances of their birth, and every child has the chance to succeed. There is strong and growing evidence for policy interventions which support this end – the time to act is now.

Recommendations to improve clarity and focus in policy-making

1) Government should make an explicit statement about the outcomes to be achieved through state intervention in early childhood education and care, in order to increase the likelihood of policy interventions being designed to achieve the stated outcomes.

2) In preparing an explicit statement about outcomes, government will have to recognise the need for trade-offs and design a forum in which these trade-offs can be made, either as part of a party political manifesto process, or, if elected, through the machinery of government.
3) Ministers should ensure that plans for evaluation and evidence gathering are in place before changes begin to ensure progress can be tracked.

4) Government should adopt the Family and Childcare Trust’s recommendation for an independent review of childcare funding, but not until the government has come to a clear view, and made a public statement, about which outcomes it wishes to prioritise.

**Recommendations to make progress in “narrowing the gap” in children’s outcomes**

5) As a priority Government should be explicit about defining what “narrowing the gap in outcomes” means, and how progress will be measured, including the place in this of The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, and the new reception baseline assessment.

6) Government should accept the case made in the Nutbrown Report and commit to investing in a better trained and qualified workforce - a graduate-led, QTS profession, and a workforce trained to L3, with English and Maths as a prerequisite for entry.

7) As a first step, government should set higher qualification requirements for staff working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds, reflecting the evidence that these children stand to benefit most from high-quality early education. Stronger quality criteria for settings offering the two year-old offer, stronger conditionality around the Early Years Pupil Premium, or additional funding to disadvantaged areas are all routes by which this could be achieved.

8) Government should accompany investment in early childhood education and care with policies that support family income in the early years, such as extending the free entitlement to offer additional hours as parents take on additional hours of work and paying parental leave at the minimum wage.

9) Government should recognise the critical importance of the home learning environment and the importance of early speech, language and vocabulary development and develop ways to equip all professionals working with young children to support parents in developing their children’s early learning, especially speech and language skills.
1. Introduction: Policy themes and tensions

For several years now, “evidence-based policy” has been in vogue in social policy. Successive governments have invested significantly in research while the current government has established a network of “what works” centres, such as the Education Endowment Fund and the Early Intervention Foundation.

However “what works” is a secondary question – it is a question about means. The primary questions for government are “what are you trying to achieve”; and “what role should government intervention play” – these are questions about ends.

This paper argues that, since the publication, twenty years ago this year, of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) report “Start Right,” there has been a rapid expansion of policy interventions in the policy area of early childhood education and care – a proliferation of “means.” This introductory chapter offers a reprise of key policy developments, an analysis of the ebbs and flows of policy, and concludes that the proliferation of means is in part due to a lack of clarity about the desired ends. The chapter finishes by positing three “ideal outcomes” that could reasonably be answers to the question “what are you trying to achieve.”

Six chapters, written by eminent academics and practitioners in the field of early years policy debate, discuss the relative value of these “ideal outcomes” and make recommendations for progress towards achieving them.

The concluding chapter reviews the contributions and challenges politicians and policy-makers, as they look to the next Parliament, to be clear about the outcomes they wish to achieve. It makes the case that “narrowing the gap in outcomes” should be the primary outcome in order to give every child an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential in the early years and beyond.

Early Childhood Education and Care: Themes from the last twenty years of policy

This chapter offers a brief reprise of the key policy developments of the last twenty years and traces the emerging themes. It identifies, by reflecting on the proliferation of legislation, policy measures and funding streams, that there are tensions about the purpose of government intervention in this policy area, and the policy outcomes that are being sought. A more detailed summary of policy interventions over the last twenty years can be found at www.centreforum.org.
Policy Developments under the Conservative Government of the 1990s

The 1994 RSA report “Start Right” is a convenient starting point, containing substantive recommendations for a systematic approach by government to early childhood education and care at a time when there was considerable ambivalence about mothers working and children under five attending settings outside the home.¹ The report reviewed the evidence that high-quality early education leads to lasting cognitive and social benefits in children and recommended that part-time nursery education should be compulsory from three, that nursery schooling should be provided at ‘family centres’ where parents could learn alongside their children and that all nursery school teachers should receive a full professional training.

In 1996, the Conservative government picked up some of these threads, publishing “Desirable Outcomes”, guidelines for early years settings and announcing plans for Nursery Vouchers, giving parents of four-year-olds a £1000 voucher towards a place at a private or voluntary provider.²

The Desirable Outcomes appear to be the predecessor to “learning goals”, emphasising early literacy and numeracy and the development of personal and social skills.

The Labour government of 1997 – the first few years

The pace of change accelerated in the early years of the new Labour government. In 1998 the government published ‘A National Childcare Strategy’, which argued that the previous laissez-faire approach to the childcare sector was flawed, that parents (particularly mothers), children and employers were losing out and there was a case for government intervention.³ The strategy introduces all the key policy themes which reappear over the subsequent fifteen years – choice and flexibility, availability and affordability and quality.

“Our aim is to ensure good quality, affordable childcare for children aged 0 to 14 in every neighbourhood, including both formal childcare and support for informal arrangements. The Strategy is founded on a commitment to promoting the well-being of children, offering equal opportunities for parents, especially women and to supporting parents in balancing work and family life.”

¹ Sir Christopher Ball, ‘Start Right: The Importance by Early Learning’, RSA, 1996.
The 1998 Strategy introduced:

- The Childcare Tax Credit, as part of the Working Families Tax Credit, to come into place from October 1999.⁴
- The start of the “Free Entitlement”, replacing the proposed Nursery Voucher scheme with a promise that from September 1998 all four-year-olds would have access to an early education place, with a vision for this to be extended to all three-year-olds. This extension was announced in September 2000 and introduced in 2004.

It also saw a leading role for Local Authorities, bringing together providers and employers to review provision and prepare plans for expansion and improvement in local childcare partnerships.

In July 1998, as part of the first Comprehensive Spending Review, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, announced the “Sure Start programme to prevent very young children becoming socially excluded and ensure they can realise their potential!”⁵ Sure Start was an area based intervention programme to tackle disadvantage among young children.

October 1999 saw the inception of the “Foundation Stage” as a distinct phase in education, with the publication by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) of proposals for a foundation stage for children from age three to the end of the reception year.⁶ In May 2000 the QCA published detailed guidance introducing a foundation stage curriculum comprising six areas of learning:⁷

- personal, social and emotional development;
- communication, language and literacy;
- mathematical development;
- knowledge and understanding of the world;
- physical development;
- creative development.

In 2002 “Birth to Three Matters”,⁸ a guidance framework for those working with younger children was published. This highlighted the interrelationship between growth, learning and development and the environment in which babies and young children are cared for and educated.

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⁴ Reimbursed up to 70% of childcare costs up to £70 for one child and £105 for two or more children, available to single parents working more than 16 hours a week or couples where both parents worked more than 16 hours a week.
Alongside these curriculum developments, there were changes in the regulatory regime for early years settings, with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) taking over regulatory responsibilities from Local Authorities and introducing national standards from September 2001.\(^9\)

**The 2004 Ten Year Childcare Strategy**

The Ten Year Childcare Strategy published in December 2004 is generally seen as the seminal publication of the Labour government, framing the subsequent debate about early childhood education and care.\(^{10}\)

It sets out objectives relating to choice for parents and a childcare system which is available, affordable and of high-quality, themes that recur throughout the years that follow:

“The government’s vision is of 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.

It is against these objectives of choice, availability, quality and affordability that the government’s vision is framed….. This strategy will not have succeeded if, along with its other achievements, it has not helped more of this generation and the next out of poverty and worklessness.”

The Ten Year Childcare Strategy set out plans to expand the “Free Entitlement” of 12.5 hours per week of free early education from 33 weeks per year to 38 weeks per year from September 2006, with a goal of 15 hours by 2010 and 20 hours in due course for all three- and four-year-olds. It extended paid maternity leave to 9 months, announced an increase in the costs reclaimable through the Working Tax Credit to 80% from April 2006 and announced plans for a small-scale pilot of free early education for 12,000 of the most disadvantaged two-year-olds.

Under the heading of quality it set out a commitment for all full day-care settings to be led by a graduate early years professional, announced a consultation, to be led by the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC), on a new training and qualifications structure, and announced a new integrated quality framework from 0-5 (subsequently known as the Early Years Foundation Stage) bringing together Birth to Three Matters, the Foundation Years Learning Goals and the Minimum Standards for Under Eights.

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The Ten Year Childcare Strategy also moved Sure Start from an area-based initiative to a service offer for all families. It committed the government to the establishment of 3,500 Children’s Centres, one in every neighbourhood, but with limited detail on purpose and funding.

An Annex on Child Development drew on the recently published EPPE study which had identified the contribution to child development of high-quality early years settings, in particular for children with disadvantaged backgrounds. The qualifications of staff, viewing educational and social interactions as complementary and the quality of adult-child verbal interactions all contributed to development, as did supporting parents to be involved in their children’s learning.

Implementing the Ten Year Childcare Strategy: 2005 - 2010

The key provisions of the Strategy were brought into force by the Childcare Act 2006, which introduced the new Ofsted Childcare Register and the Early Years Foundation Stage, and placed obligations on Local Authorities to secure sufficient childcare, provide better parental information, improve outcomes and reduce inequality. The Explanatory Notes draw from the Every Child Matters (ECM) programme and Children Act 2004, and refer explicitly to “narrowing the gap in achievement”. These themes hardly featured in the original strategy, but link much more closely to the ECM outcomes debate being led by the Department for Education and Skills at the time.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), created by the Act, brought together requirements relating to “learning and development” of young children, and requirements relating to “welfare of young children”, including specifying the number of staff qualified to Level 2 and Level 3 in each setting required within prescribed adult-child ratios.

It updates the “six areas of learning” introduced in 2000 and gives powers to set early learning goals, describe educational programmes, and make arrangements for assessing the learning and development of young children (the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile). After consultation, in May 2008 the government published detailed requirements relating to the EYFS, which became mandatory in September 2008.

The workforce commitments of the Ten Year Strategy were taken forward in a CWDC consultation document, published in April 2005 which made the case for investing in the early years workforce primarily on grounds of impact on child development, drawing on the UK EPPE research, and international research.

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The government’s formal response, published early in 2006, announced a new Early Years Professional role for those leading Children’s Centres and full day-care settings, new work- and study-based routes to gaining this status, and significant funding to improve the qualification levels of both those leading settings and the workforce as a whole.14 Between April 2008 and March 2011 the Graduate Leader Fund of £305m supported private and voluntary sector providers to employ a graduate or Early Years Professional to lead practice and support the implementation of the EYFS.

In January 2009 the “Next Steps” document announced that the government was considering making it a legal requirement that every full day-care setting had a graduate leader, and every member of staff had a full and relevant Level 3 qualification.15 Next Steps also announced an expansion of the “Every Child a Talker” programme, new research on how early years practitioners can best help families to support their child’s development and an extension of the pilot free education entitlement for disadvantaged two-year-olds to every Local Authority. The evaluation of the pilot, published in July 2009 concluded:16

“The pilot had a positive impact on children who attended a setting of reasonably high-quality, but not on children who attended settings of lower quality. The results suggest that in order to have a positive impact on child outcomes, when the programme is rolled out nationally only settings with an Ofsted score of at least ‘good’ should be used.”

In 2009 the Department of Health published a detailed early years update to the “Healthy Child Programme,” first launched in 2004.17 The Healthy Child Programme (HCP) incorporated universal standards for immunisations, visits and advice for parents with a focus on early identification of vulnerable children, and a greater emphasis on supporting parents.

The Coalition government: 2010 – 2012 Families in the Foundation Years

In May 2010 the General Election led to the formation of a Coalition government between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, with commitments to supporting the provision of free nursery care for pre-school children, focusing Sure Start on the neediest families and introducing an extra 4,200 Health Visitors.18

The first significant announcement on early years policy came in October 2010 as part of the Spending Review\(^1\) and heralded the introduction, from September 2013, of an offer of 15 hours free early education for the 20% most disadvantaged two-year-olds, building on the extension to 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds which had come into force, as planned, in September 2010. This policy was subsequently extended to 40% of two-year-olds from September 2014.

The Spending Review also announced that the proportion of childcare costs reclaimable through Working Tax Credit would reduce to 70%, having increased to 80% in April 2006.

In July 2011 the Department for Education, jointly with the Department of Health, published “Supporting Families in the Foundation Years” a wide-ranging policy document with a clear child development focus.\(^2\)

This provided the government response to three policy reviews which had been commissioned the previous year, Frank Field MP's review on poverty and life chances;\(^3\) Graham Allen MP’s review on Early Intervention,\(^4\) and Dame Clare Tickell’s review of the Early Years Foundation Stage.\(^5\)

The Frank Field and Graham Allen Reviews stressed the importance of the early years in providing a foundation for success in later life, and highlighted the importance of the home learning environment. The Tickell Review also recommended greater emphasis on the role of parents and carers as partners in their children's learning, and recommended a significant streamlining of the areas of learning and learning goals, identifying three “prime areas of learning,” being personal, social and emotional development, communication and language, and physical development.

“Families in the Foundation Years” launched a consultation on a revised EYFS and a review of Early Years Qualifications, proposed a developmental review for two-year-olds, to be linked to the Healthy Child Programme, and an update to parents, and made proposals to strengthen the quality criteria for providers delivering the free early educational entitlement. The narrative of the document stresses child development and the importance of the home learning environment. There is an absence of many of the themes of previous documents around affordability and accessibility, costs and funding:

“First and foremost, we must be clear that the primary aim of the foundation years is promoting a child’s physical, emotional, cognitive and social development so that all children have a fair chance to succeed at school and in later life. High-quality provision at this age has a lasting impact on children’s chances.”

The free early education that is available to all three and four-year-olds is just that – education. Universal early education, like school, may help parents manage their childcare costs and working patterns but that is not its principal purpose.”

In June 2012 Professor Cathy Nutbrown published the report of the qualifications review. It recommends a minimum standard of Level 3 for the workforce by 2022, with entry requirements of Level 2 English and Mathematics, supports the goal of graduate leadership, and recommends an early years specialist qualification with Qualified Teacher Status.


The government responded to Professor Nutbrown’s report in January 2013. “More Great Childcare” proposed a new “Early Years Teacher” status with the same entry requirements as school teachers, and a new Level 3 “Early Years Educator”, adopting the Nutbrown proposal that this should require a “C” at GCSE English and maths. It also proposed the introduction of childminder agencies, and encouraged schools to take younger children in nursery classes. The qualifications reforms were taken forward by the Teaching Agency in further consultations and in September 2013 “Early Years Teacher Status” replaced EYPS and a new early years teacher training programme was introduced.

Since “More Great Childcare” additional policy announcements have included the introduction of an “Early Years Teach First” programme, proposals to link “Teaching Schools” to early years providers in their area, and plans to introduce “School Direct”, a placement-based qualifications route, to the early years.

In the Budget of March 2014, the government announced that there would be an Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), £50m in 2015-16 to provide nurseries, schools and other providers of government funded early education with extra money for disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds.

In June 2014 a consultation document on EYPP implementation encouraged settings to use the additional funding to move to a teacher-led model, with outcomes to be measured through the reception baseline.

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Speaking to Policy Exchange in April 2014, Elizabeth Truss, Education and Childcare Minister, said:

“the most important measure of success for the early years sector is whether the poorest children are doing as well as their better off peers by the time they start school.”

Running alongside this debate about child development and improving the qualifications of the early years workforce, was a debate about the perceived rising costs of childcare. In July 2012 the Prime Minister announced a Childcare Commission.

This informed the announcement of a “tax-free childcare” scheme announced in Budget 2013, described in more detail in “More Affordable Childcare” published in July 2013. Key proposals included:

- An additional £200m support within Universal Credit for lower income families;
- A new “tax-free childcare” scheme, replacing Employer Supported Childcare Vouchers, in which the government contributes 20% of parents’ yearly childcare costs from autumn 2015. (The original announcement set a cap of £6,000 childcare costs per child, and a phased introduction starting with children under five. In Budget 2014 this was extended to a cap of £10,000 and to children under twelve.);
- refocusing the role of Local Authorities on meeting the needs of providers who have been rated as ‘inadequate’ or ‘requires improvement.’

In the Budget of 2014 it was further announced that the proportion of childcare costs reclaimable through Universal Credit (gradually replacing Working Tax Credit) would rise to 85%.

Retrospective: Consistent, fluctuating and emerging themes

Looking back over twenty years, some themes have featured consistently in the policy debate:

- The importance of a trained and developed workforce is highlighted by the RSA’s document in 1994, taken forward throughout the Labour government papers of 1998 and 2004, and is still under live debate today.

- The view that there should be some sort of “curriculum” for the early years phases, in particular from the age of three upwards, has been put forward since “Desirable Outcomes” in 1996, through the Childcare Act 2006 and through Dame Clare Tickell’s review in 2011.

- Despite the Labour government’s view that the previous government’s market approach was letting children, families and employers down, there has been no real challenge to the view that early childhood education and care is provided by a mixed economy of voluntary, private sector and maintained sector providers, with parents being able to choose the type of setting they prefer and the hours they want to use.

- Since 1996 national government has had a policy to intervene to support parents with the cost of early childhood education and care, through a mix of supply side subsidy such as the free entitlement, which has gradually expanded in hours offered and age group eligible, and demand side subsidy through the tax and benefit systems, and in the future through Universal Credit and the “tax-free” childcare scheme.

However many other policy themes appear to have ebbed and flowed, with approaches coming in and out of fashion, roles and responsibilities being added and taken away, and concepts finding and falling out of favour:

- For much of the past twenty years, education and health policies related to the early years appear to have developed on a separate track. The Healthy Child Programme, started in 2004 and with a significant update in 2009, features in the spotlight in the 2011 document “Families in the Foundation Years” but otherwise develops separately.

- While everyone is in favour of a more highly skilled workforce, the type of workforce required is still contested, and lack of career progression still limits the attractiveness of the profession to young people. The Children’s Workforce Strategy debated different pedagogical approaches, and led to the Early Years Professional (EYP). In 2013 the EYP was replaced with the Early Years Teacher – a teacher by name, but without Qualified Teacher Status. In the last years of the Labour government, they considered mandatory graduate leadership and mandatory Level 3 qualifications for all staff; this was recommended again by Professor Nutbrown in 2012, but not yet taken forward.
Different initiatives have been funded through supply side and demand side approaches that have resulted in a funding system more akin to the Schleswig Holstein question than a model which is efficient for the taxpayer and effective for providers, parents and children. Parents have to navigate a complex and changing system of tax and benefit subsidies, and redo their calculations when one or other parent goes back to work or increases their hours.

At some periods over the past twenty years the “Foundation Stage” has been seen as a whole, at other points as a number of phases. The original “Foundation Stage” curriculum covered age three to the end of reception year, complemented by the “Birth to Three Matters” framework; the EYFS brought these phases together.

Looking back from the vantage point of 2014, it is also possible to see that some themes have appeared more recently in the policy debate, sometimes reflecting political changes, sometimes reflecting influential new evidence, such as the EPPE Report published in 2003. Examples include:

- The significance of the home learning environment in contributing to children’s outcomes. Largely absent or implicit in the policy debates before 2003, it is a key part of the EPPE evidence, is picked up in the Children’s Workforce debates in the late 2000s and features strongly in the Frank Field and Graham Allen Reviews of 2010 and 2011.

- Linked to this, a theme of recent developments has been the role of parenting support, given more prominence in the 2009 update to the Healthy Child Programme and picked up again in “Families in the Foundation Years”.

- The relative importance of speech and language development, and gaining vocabulary, within the various dimensions of child development. Brought to the fore in Dame Clare Tickell’s review of the EYFS in 2011, it influences the recommendations made by Professor Nutbrown in 2012 and accepted by government in 2013, to require L2 English and Maths for entry to L3 early education and childcare courses.

- The debate about narrowing the gap in outcomes between children from lower income families and other groups has been much more prominent in recent years. Although the Childcare Act 2006 specifically places duties on Local Authorities to narrow the gap in achievement, the debate gained greater prominence after the 2010 Frank Field Review, which recommended both increasing the funding for early years, and targeting that funding towards disadvantaged groups. It made the point that gaps in cognitive and behavioural performance identifiable at school entry persist through the school career. The extension of the free early education offer to disadvantaged two-year-olds from September 2013, and plans to introduce an Early Years Pupil Premium from April 2015, are policy responses to this issue.
• The most recent years have also seen a trend towards what is termed “schoolification” of the early years, exemplified by the policy to encourage schools to offer provision for younger age groups, and by a debate largely led by Ofsted to assess early years settings by the extent they “prepare children for school”. Since the incorporation of early years funding into the Dedicated Schools Grant in 2006-07 various education policy initiatives such as Teach First, School Direct and the Pupil Premium have been extended into the early childhood education and care sector.

Reflections: the costs of an incoherent policy landscape

Although there is now political consensus, built up over twenty years of government intervention, that the state has an important role to play in early childhood education and care, the range of policy interventions being used, and the range of narratives being deployed have led to a complex and confusing policy landscape, with consequences for parents, providers and the efficiency of the system. Parents, navigating the complex landscape of entitlements, benefits and taxes, may not be able to find the support to which they are entitled, and may not find an affordable option which reflects their individual working preferences. Providers, navigating a mix of funding streams, changes in curriculum requirements, inspection regimes and staff development opportunities, incur additional costs in keeping their organisations and staff up to speed. As a whole, the system incurs additional costs, in the form of information services and brokers, in order to manage complex funding streams and keep parents and providers in touch with change.

Reflections: the challenge of outcomes

Underlying the policy confusion is a debate about outcomes. The proliferation of policies, some of which pull in different direction, is evidence of a lack of consensus about the prime purpose of government intervention in early childhood education and care. There is a lack of clarity about ends, which evidences itself in complexity about means.

Further evidence of this lack of clarity is seen in the quotations from Ministers as they have published new policy documents over the past twenty years. The purposes cited vary from “offering equal opportunities to parents, especially women” in 1998, to “choice, availability, quality and affordability” in 2004, to “promoting a child’s development so that all children have a fair chance to succeed” in 2010 and to “whether the poorest children are doing as well as their better off peers” in 2014.
Looking ahead – making the case for alternative outcomes

Real progress has been made in the last twenty years. In an age of austerity, additional resources continue to be found, and manifesto offers on early childhood education and care will feature in the debate in the run up to the General Election of 2015. The case for early childhood education and care has been accepted, the debate is now about what actions to take and what interventions will work.

However, the lesson of the last twenty years of policy is that when the desired outcomes are unclear or the primary desired outcome changes from year to year, the resulting policy interventions are incoherent and inefficient. The extent to which a given intervention will “work” will depend on whether it is clear what it is trying to achieve.

In order to help clarify the debate, the remainder of this paper posits three “ideal” outcomes, which have all been cited as the purpose of the state’s intervention in early childhood education and care, and could form the prime purpose in the coming years. These are:

a) supporting maternal employment. The availability of reliable, affordable, accessible childcare for 0-5 year-olds allows mothers and fathers the option of returning to work, supporting themselves and their family, and contributing to the economy.

b) contributing to child development, and achieving a wide range of learning outcomes that provide the necessary foundation for a successful journey through the school years.

c) tackling inequality and child poverty, and helping to “narrow the gap” between the life chances of children from disadvantaged and advantaged households.

In the chapters that follow, each contributor debates the value of these outcomes, the priority to be given to each, and the policy interventions that should be adopted by the next government if they wish to make progress towards them.
2. Childcare: can we afford it?

Ellen Broomé, Director of Policy and Research, The Family and Childcare Trust

One of the main criticisms of the current childcare system is that it is ineffective. As Chapter 1 highlights, this is because we are not clear about what we are trying to achieve: is it parental employment, child development or reducing inequality we want to affect? The answer is self-evident: they are all related and equally important. But they do require different strategies.

In Britain today, too many parents can’t afford childcare. This is costly for all of us: the state loses out on tax income and pays out in benefits, the economy loses out on vital skills and experiences, parents are not able to work and are trapped in poverty, and children miss out on key development opportunities. And not only that: we know about the serious consequences that living in poverty has on children, both in the short and long term.

Our current childcare system is complex, inefficient and not delivering the high-quality childcare that children need to thrive and that parents need to work. The Family and Childcare Trust’s 2014 annual childcare costs report showed that for a family of two children, the cost for one child in part-time nursery care and one in an after school club is £7,549 a year – 4.7% more than the cost of an average mortgage in the UK.33

The top priority is to make high-quality childcare affordable for all. Any incoming government must look to simplify the current childcare funding model, and divert more money directly to settings or local authorities to lever up quality and prevent price inflation for parents. Otherwise, parents will not be able to work and children will not access the high-quality childcare that improves their outcomes and narrows the gap between poorer children and their more affluent peers.

Background

There have been three main areas of government action to promote affordable childcare since 2004: the expansion of free universal early education provision, the introduction of employer-supported childcare vouchers and changes to Working Tax Credits.

Since 2010, all three- and four-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours a week of early education, and by September 2014, this will also apply to the 40% most income disadvantaged two-year-olds.

Tax Credits, and in future Universal Credit, provide substantial support for parents with childcare costs (up to 85%). But, while support with childcare costs through working tax credits is targeted at families on low incomes, subsidies are withdrawn at a relatively sharp rate once families increase their working hours. This creates high marginal taxes for second earners which mean that many parents on low wages can still expect to earn extremely low sums once childcare costs are taken into account.\textsuperscript{34} Oddly, this means that tax credits do not provide good incentives for many of the very people childcare support is designed to help.

The replacement of employer supported childcare with a new voucher scheme in 2015 will reach more parents and remove the arbitrary features of the current scheme, but will disproportionately benefit those who need the least help. Initially it is likely that the scheme will help parents, but its benefit is likely to be eroded by price inflation over time. It is a poor response to the pressing problem of affordability.

**How much does government spend on childcare?**

Significant resources have been devoted to support parents with the costs of childcare. The UK’s spend on childcare rose from around 0.33% in 2004 to a peak of 0.48% of GDP in 2010 and has declined since.

The provision of free early years places to three- and four-year-olds is estimated to cost £1.9billion a year, whilst the government has set aside a further £755million to provide the free places for two-year-olds in 2014-15.\textsuperscript{35}

Support to families through Working Tax Credit had an estimated annual cost of £1.3billion in 2013, whilst HMRC estimates that the employer supported childcare voucher scheme cost £640million in the same year.\textsuperscript{36}

**Who gets help with childcare costs?**

Listening to the debate on childcare, one could be forgiven for thinking that most parents who use formal childcare get financial support with their costs. In fact, as few as one third of families paying for formal childcare receive any support through either the employer-supported childcare voucher scheme or Working Tax Credit. This equates to about 740,000 families out of approximately 2.3 million families who use and pay for formal childcare.\textsuperscript{37}

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\textsuperscript{34} Alakeson and Hurrell, ‘Counting the Costs of Childcare’, Resolution Foundation, 2012.
In 2013, 96% of three- and four-year-olds were taking up their free early years education entitlement of 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year, and this percentage has remained relatively stable for the last few years.\textsuperscript{38}

This high figure masks some real inequalities, though. Research conducted in 2010 found that only 77% of families with an income under £10,000 took up the offer compared to 92% for families with incomes over £45,000.\textsuperscript{39}

In the same year, the free early education entitlement was extended to the 20% most disadvantaged two-year-olds. By September 2014, this will rise to 40% of income disadvantaged two-year-olds along with small numbers of other specified groups of vulnerable children.

While the free offers have seen considerable take-up, too many parents are unable to take full advantage of them. Childcare providers do not always offer provision during the hours and days when parents need it, with many providers only offering free provision on specific days or time slots. Many parents need to buy additional hours of childcare on top of the free entitlement, often purchased at inflated prices with parents effectively subsidising the offer.

Is childcare getting more or less expensive?

The change in childcare costs in the last ten years is unequivocal: in real terms, nursery costs in England for under-twos are approximately 20% higher in 2014 than in 2004, and 23% higher for over-twos.\textsuperscript{40} These headline costs, however, do not take into account support or subsidies that parents or providers may be receiving from the government.

One further, if subjective, way to gauge the affordability of childcare is to measure the experiences of parents. The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, conducted by the Department for Education, gives an idea of the overall experience of parents in paying for childcare.\textsuperscript{41} In 2007, 18% of families found it difficult or very difficult to pay for childcare. In 2013, this figure had risen to 26%. Over the same period, the proportion of families who found it easy or very easy to pay for childcare fell from 54% to 49%.

Parents’ experiences of affordability also varies significantly depending on their circumstances, and we know that lone parents, parents with low incomes and parents with more than one child are more likely to find childcare costs prohibitively expensive.

\textsuperscript{40} Butler, Lugton and Rutter, ‘Where next for childcare? Learning from the Last Ten Years of Childcare Policy’, Family and Childcare Trust, 2014.
Today, parents undoubtedly receive more support with childcare costs than ever before. But, the impact of new support has been substantially reduced by price inflation: while the proportion of fees paid by families has reduced, the cost burden for many families has nonetheless increased as childcare prices rise above inflation.

This is why, although the government’s extra investment in childcare support through the Childcare Payments Bill is indeed welcome, it is not the best use of public money. We have seen previous increases in the financial support given directly to parents leading to rapid price rises in childcare costs as the extra money in the system has led to increased fees from childcare providers. So, the value of this extra help for parents could be eroded quickly and leave parents no better off.

What needs to be done?

In childcare, we have seen a breakout of consensus across the main political parties on the need for a world class childcare system. And while the early years have not been immune to budget cuts over the last few years, it is striking that the childcare system is almost certain to emerge in the next Parliament with additional spending commitments. This, however, masks some fundamental problems with the way childcare is funded.

There is a poor alignment between support and the needs of families. Childcare costs are a key factor in parents’ decisions about work, and particularly for parents with young children who want to make the transition back to work. Yet the system of support with childcare costs is complicated and capricious, adding an unnecessary layer of challenge for parents.

There are also serious challenges in identifying an achievable route for childcare funding reform. Currently, multiple funding streams managed by a number of different government departments converge to create a market that is extremely complex, unpredictable and unresponsive, while parents demand a childcare system that is simple, reliable and responsive to their different and changing needs.
Norway and New Zealand – better ways of funding childcare?

There are international examples of approaches to childcare funding that better reconcile the aspirations of universal access to high-quality, flexible and affordable care with the UK’s inheritance of a mixed childcare market and strong public expectations of choice.

New Zealand and Norway both have diverse childcare markets of public, private and voluntary providers, but each country also invests in childcare by directly funding providers rather than providing subsidies to parents. New Zealand combines a free early education offer with negotiated hourly rates for providers based on high-quality standards and additional direct funding to providers in disadvantaged areas. Norway also uses a fee framework, supervised by local government, in which providers accessing public funding must participate, encouraging a diverse market but giving communities control over affordability and quality standards.

Neither of these approaches is necessarily perfect – they inevitably involve trade-offs – but high rates of take up, lower fees for parents and high standards of care in both countries reflect a more effective use of the taxpayers’ money than the UK’s relatively confused approach. The common factors in each approach are greater simplicity, control over fees and clear design to use spending to achieve the desired quality and affordability outcomes.

Our childcare funding system is too complex and does not effectively serve the government, providers or families. So despite political consensus and very significant extra investment in childcare support over the last decade, parents in England still pay some of the highest prices for childcare in Europe, and many spend more than a quarter of their income on childcare. As we have seen in other countries, there are better ways of doing it.

Recommendation

The time is long overdue for the government to take comprehensive action. To this end, the government should establish an independent review of childcare funding to clarify the long term investment required in childcare, simplify the current model and organise spending to improve quality, access and affordability with more money going to settings or local authorities and linking investment in childcare to improving quality and preventing price inflation for parents.
3. The Future of Early Years Education

Dr Kitty Stewart, Associate Professor of Social Policy, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics

Introduction

Well-designed early childhood services can further many goals at once, but policy discussion is often muddled about which of these goals should take centre stage. In our unequal society, the first priority should be to ‘narrow the gap’, in the dual sense of reducing child poverty while widening access to opportunities for young children to play, learn and socialise. To achieve this we need childcare that facilitates maternal employment so as to raise household incomes; and childcare that is of the highest quality, and accessible by both working and non-working families, to foster child development.

At the same time, it makes every sense for government to be involved in the provision of services for all families, not just those on low incomes. The rise of maternal employment has been good for gender equality, economic growth and women's mental health, but the economics of childcare mean only the very richest families can afford high-quality provision without government intervention. With more than one child to pay for, and not all childcare options attractive ones, many women leave the labour market or work fewer hours than they would like to. This has implications for their long-term employment trajectories and costs to the industries and services that would benefit from their skills and experience.

To some extent – and particularly in the short-run – there must be trade-offs between improving access to high-quality provision for children who have most to gain, and extending childcare support to all households. However, there is also a strong case that the best public services are services used by everyone, so even if our prime goal is to narrow the gap, universal services may be the best way to achieve this. Countries that have designed childcare systems that seem to work best in terms of promoting equitable outcomes for households and children – Scandinavia, France – provide universal services, with higher subsidies for those on lower incomes.  

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How to Improve Outcomes

If child development is a primary goal, a focus on quality is paramount. There is evidence from a range of international studies that early education and childcare only delivers lasting benefits for young children if the quality is high, which means provision that is sensitive, stimulating and responsive to the individual child’s needs.43

Poor quality care can have negative effects: in Canada, the introduction of generous subsidies for low quality provision was successful in increasing maternal employment but led to a worsening of children’s socio-emotional outcomes, health and vocabulary.44

Research has highlighted staff qualifications and training as key predictors of quality provision. In their wide-ranging evidence review, Mathers et al (2014) point to a strong evidence base supporting the importance of qualifications, and in particular the value of graduate-led provision for children aged three and four.45 A graduate presence seems to make most difference to quality in settings catering for disadvantaged children.46 There is less research on the impact of graduates for younger children, but the overall qualification level of the staff team seems important, as does specialised training with a child development focus.47 This review also highlights the value of stability and continuity of care, in turn signalling the relevance of staff pay and conditions. Ratios of adults to children matter too, particularly for younger children, as does the physical environment.

In addition, there is some evidence that the composition of the classroom is important. Recent research for England finds that, while the presence of a graduate increases the probability of a setting being assessed as higher quality, having more children in a setting from poorer areas lowers this probability, whether quality is measured by Ofsted ratings or by observational process measures.48 It appears that delivering responsive and stimulating care is more difficult in the context of high levels of disadvantage.

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This suggests the value of ensuring a social mix within each setting, but it also points to the need for a holistic approach that supports families outside of early education provision. Sure Start Children’s Centres have been shown capable of playing a key role in providing this support, if sufficiently funded, as have intensive targeted interventions such as the US programme on which Family Nurse Partnership is based.49

There is also strong evidence that families’ own financial resources have a significant effect on children’s outcomes. In recent work, Kerris Cooper and I conducted a systematic review of studies examining the relationship between household income and a range of wider outcomes for children.50 Importantly, we restricted the review to studies using techniques that allow researchers to be confident that they are observing the effects of income itself, rather than associated factors such as intelligence or parental interest in education. The results indicate clearly that household income makes a difference to children’s cognitive and social and behavioural outcomes. Additional income seems to have the greatest impact in poorer households, and there is some evidence that for cognitive development income in early childhood matters most. Our review considered the reasons why money matters, and pointed to evidence for two causal pathways. On the one hand, more money enables parents to buy healthy food and stimulating toys, books and activities for their children. Perhaps more importantly, more money in lower income households can reduce parental stress and depression, changing the nature of what happens in the family. The studies we reviewed identified positive effects of income on measures of parenting, maternal depression, smoking during pregnancy and the home environment.

These findings underline the crucial role of policies that support household income in any strategy aimed at ‘narrowing the gap’. This is of course one reason why services need to operate effectively as childcare as well as early education, facilitating parental employment. But the role of the benefit system in supporting families when employment is not possible, or jobs are scarce, is also crucial and should not be forgotten.

Recent Developments and Prospects for Further Progress

There are several aspects of early education provision in England today that are worth celebrating. Near universal access to part-time provision for three- and four-year-olds is one of them, and the extension of free places to disadvantaged two-year-olds is also promising. Improvements have been made to quality, both with some upgrading of qualifications over the last fifteen years and the introduction of the well-regarded Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.


An unusual strength of the system, achieved by historical accident rather than design, is that children from the most disadvantaged areas are more likely than those from less deprived areas to take up their free place in a setting with a specialised graduate, because they are more likely to attend settings in the maintained sector; a rare example of a social gradient operating in favour of poorer children.\(^{51}\)

However, there are a series of reasons for concern about the likelihood of further progress. First, there is the lack of funding for graduate specialists in settings outside the maintained sector. The Graduate Leader Fund, set up under the previous government to support graduates in the sector with the newly created Early Years Professional status, and successfully evaluated as improving quality and outcomes, was abolished by the Coalition. This is a real weakness when one in five three- and four-year-olds from the poorest areas has no access to a teacher or specialised graduate before reaching reception class, and it also places a big question mark over the value of the current two-year-old offer, which is almost entirely concentrated in the private and voluntary sector. Early Years Professionals are being replaced by Early Years Teachers, and from September 2014 there will be tougher entry requirements for Level 3 qualifications. But the new EYT will not have teachers’ pay or conditions, and no funding has been announced to support settings to employ them or to improve pay to reflect the more demanding standard for Level 3.

A second concern is the government’s decision to reduce the role of local authorities in supporting quality in the sector, with a reduction of both funding and responsibility for monitoring and improving the quality of provision, and Ofsted made “the sole arbiter of quality”\(^{52}\). Many local authorities were playing a key role in providing on-going support and professional development for providers, a role that was quite distinct from that of a three-yearly Ofsted inspection visit.

Third, there is a weak connection between free part-time provision and full-day provision that operates more effectively as childcare. If free part-time places cannot easily be extended to full-time, they operate as a barrier to work, rather than a stepping-stone. They may also increase social segregation, with only children of non-working parents attending part-time provision, such as that provided in schools, and children of working parents attending full day settings in the private or voluntary sector. There is some anecdotal evidence that this divide may be worsening as a result of local authority funding cuts that have led to the withdrawal of provision above statutory requirements (such as the full day that many school nurseries used to offer four-year-olds).

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In this context, the government’s new policy of tax-free childcare seems poorly designed. It will channel most resources to those higher up the income distribution because the subsidy increases with the level of parental spending on childcare (making it much more regressive than the universal free entitlement hours, for example). And, because the money comes with no strings attached, it will do nothing to improve the quality of provision – and possibly very little to improve affordability either, as higher subsidies may just mean higher prices and higher profits in a market dominated by private sector providers.

Looking at the broader environment, the removal of the ring fence on Sure Start funding is likely to have had serious consequences for the ability of Children’s Centres to operate effectively, especially in the context of severe cuts to local authority funding that have hit poorer areas hardest. As well as providing crucial support for parents, Children’s Centres operate some of the highest quality early education outside of nursery classes. Meanwhile, income poverty among households with children is set to rise. The share of children living below the relative poverty line (60% of equivalised median income) fell in the early years of the recession, in part due to falling average living standards, but child poverty measured against a fixed income standard has been rising since 2009-10. Further, the Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts steady increases in both relative and absolute child poverty rates from 2011 to 2020 as a result of the Coalition government’s reforms to the tax-benefit system. These changes can be expected to have a negative impact on children’s home environment, making the role of early childhood services both more important and more challenging.

Recommendations

My first recommendation is for government to make a renewed and serious commitment to quality. Government should set a clear goal of a fully graduate-led sector and a workforce with a minimum of Level 3 qualifications. Progress towards this goal should start with the two-year-old offer and then move on to cover all three- and four-year-olds in settings catering for funded two-year-olds. This should ensure that children with most to gain from high-quality provision are given priority in access to qualified staff. Early Years Teachers should be given full parity of pay and conditions with teachers in the maintained sector, and funding for the free places should be redesigned to enable settings to take teachers on under these new conditions.

Second, more attention should be paid to making sure that early education places have a dual role as childcare, and can be a stepping-stone for parental employment. The smoothest way to achieve this from our current starting point would be to offer additional free hours for working parents of three- and four-year-olds, which would also be an effective way of improving affordability for all parents. There would need to be a cut-off point in terms of working hours, so a rule could be that if both parents (or a lone parent) were in paid work for at least 20 hours a week, a child would be entitled to 25 hours free early education, instead of the standard 15 hours. This could similarly apply to the parents of funded two-year-olds who move into work. Childminders also have a key role in the provision of wraparound care and should continue to be supported by local authorities. But for parents unsure about the move into work the ability to extend a child’s hours with an existing trusted provider may be decisive.

Third, funding for Children’s Centres should be increased to allow them to continue to provide high-quality support for parents and opportunities for children to play and learn, both within formal childcare and before and beyond it. And last – but by no means least – we need urgent reconsideration of the devastating impact tax-benefit reforms are having on families’ financial stability and economic well-being. This includes a review of the large high profile changes like the bedroom tax and the welfare cap, but also of less noticeable reforms such as the shift to uprating benefits using the Consumer Price Index rather the Retail Price Index, which the IFS estimates will be the most significant factor behind increasing poverty rates in the longer run.

These recommendations will not come cheaply. Some resources for improved quality and extended free hours could be gained by scrapping the tax-free childcare scheme, but the net additional cost would still be high. In my view, significant additional government investment in this area is unavoidable if we want to support all parents to remain in the labour market while narrowing the gap in both household income and child development.
4. Early Childhood Services: for whom and for what?

Naomi Eisenstadt, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Oxford

Introduction

This paper aims to explore the wide variety of aims attached to the provision of early childhood services. Various government initiatives have tried to frame the provision of services within a wider narrative about benefits to society: better educational attainment leading to a more vibrant economy; better social and emotional development leading to less crime and mental illness in adulthood; increased female labour market participation leading to lower levels of poverty and improvements in gender equality.56

Within these overall policy aims is another question: should services aim to reduce inequality between socio-economic groups, or is the assumption that provision for all creates a level playing field? Should services be for all children, poor children, or children living in families with complex and seemingly intractable problems? Indeed, if early childhood services could achieve all these goals for all these groups, we would have found a magic bullet. Unfortunately, each of the goals requires a somewhat different service response. In some cases there are tensions to be managed, and in others some goals are simply in conflict with others.

The debate is relatively recent about what government should provide for families between the birth of a child and the child entering school. Health services clearly have a critical role to play during pregnancy and the early years of childhood. But beyond obvious health provision, the state role has been undefined. From after the Second World War to almost the end of the 20th century it was assumed that unless there was serious risk to the child, government would not interfere with family life. It was up to families to decide for themselves whether one or both parents went to work, whether young children went to any group provision before school, and what behaviours constituted being a good parent.

Indeed, parenting seems a relatively new term in public discourse. Governments were cautious about interfering in family life with worries about the nanny state and considerations about the privacy of the family. Sensitivity concerning the deeply held cultural values of families within different minority communities also led to reticence on these issues. Over the last fifteen years this reticence has vanished, with all three main political parties claiming to be the party of the family, and new policies and promises on childcare, family leave, and parenting appearing almost daily.

However, the narrative sorely lacks coherence. As in the US, there are basically three lobby groups who rarely wind up in the same room: campaigners for affordable childcare, campaigners for early education, and campaigners for integrated family support services. This last group has splintered into two camps: campaigners for early intervention and evidence based practice, and the more conventional campaigners for more light touch community based family support.

What Children Need

Perhaps the best starting point for a discussion on the aims of the variety of services, is a basic description of what children under five need to thrive. From children’s needs, we can then discuss how particular services meet those needs. From birth, babies need caring adults who are attuned to their moods, their physical requirements for food, cleanliness, warmth, and comfort, and their emotional requirements for responsive attention. From birth to early childhood, exposure to complex language and frequent praise has critical impact on good outcomes. The adults who provide these things also have needs for warmth, nourishment, housing and social relationships. The extent to which adults have their needs met often determines the extent to which they are able to meet the needs of their babies.

Poverty has a strong effect on parents’ abilities to meet the needs of their children. The impact of poverty starts before birth and continues into adolescence. Not all poor parents struggle to meet their children’s needs, but it is harder without financial resources. The stress caused by lack of money can interfere with the critical care required for infants and toddlers. So a policy dilemma emerges: initiatives that reduce poverty or initiatives that ameliorate the effect of poverty?

Early Education and/or Childcare

Young children from around two benefit from some time in group care. The evidence on the benefits of high-quality early education from two or three years of age is strong. The EPPE research found that children in group care from three onwards, have advantages over those with none. It also found that children in high-quality group care have the most benefits, and poor children benefit more than better off children. The benefits are both social and cognitive, particularly if high-quality nursery education was followed by high-quality primary education.

High-quality early education for all three- and four-year-olds is probably the least expensive way to provide better social and cognitive outcomes for the most children. It helps all children, while narrowing the gap in outcomes between

poor children and the rest. If the goal is improved educational attainment, particularly for less well-off children, investments should be concentrated on ensuring the current fifteen hours per week offer for all children is high-quality. Early education is important for shifting the curve of underperformance. It helps to ameliorate the impact of poverty.

Policies to reduce the numbers of poor children combine a series of measures: tax and benefits regimes that ensure it pays to work, childcare that is low in price for low income families, and childcare that is flexible to suit the needs of working parents. High-quality childcare is expensive, particularly for under threes. The mix of basic physical care including changing nappies and meal provision combined with the need for warm and responsive attention from adults over long days is difficult to sustain. Very young children benefit from predictable routines which are difficult to establish if attendance is odd days and odd hours, hence the flexibility required can be at the cost of ensuring a good experience for the child.

Work is critically important not only for the basic economics of family life, but also for long term mental health and social connections for adults. Adults out of work for long periods suffer more ill health, and are not building up pension savings for later life. Poverty is damaging across the life cycle. The challenge is to ensure the offer of childcare is affordable for parents on low incomes, while high enough in quality to deliver the kind of service known to improve outcomes for children. This will require better qualified staff for all under-fives, not just those in nursery education, and some limits on flexibility.

Integrated family support

Some children live in families where the needs are additional to early education and childcare. Included in integrated family support are: ‘stay and play’ which is usually open access and informal; information and advice sessions on a range of issues including child behaviour, health, diet and nutrition, and local employment opportunities; structured parenting programmes; drug and alcohol services; and mental health services.

The challenge for service providers is the rarely discussed gradient of need. It is useful administratively to put families in particular categories: tier one, tier two or tier three. But the reality is that all families need some help some time, and all families tend to move in and out of need. A very small group of families will have complex problems that require multiple inputs from a variety of agencies. A larger group will need some support that if given at the right time and with the appropriate skills, will keep them from falling into higher need.

Many families who lack financial resources also lack the educational background to provide their very young children with the kind of language and stimulation that gives huge advantages to middle class children. These are not neglectful parents; they use the resources they have but those resources are thin.

If the aim is to reduce the difference in outcomes between poor children and their better off peers, a variety of services and interventions need to happen at least from birth, and need to be both socially acceptable and effective. Some of these can be fairly light touch, inexpensive to deliver, and will help a large number of families. If the aim is to help the smaller number of families who have more serious problems, the need is for higher unit cost delivery. The best evidence based parenting programmes are expensive to deliver, require well trained staff and significant effort to ensure mothers and fathers participating stay with the course for all the sessions. Often these families will also need mental health and/or drug and alcohol services. Addressing the needs of these families is likely to result in significant cost savings in the long term but the numbers in any particular area will not be enough to shift the curve and the short term costs are high.

What to do
Two aims stand out as generating the best outcomes for families, and for society as a whole. Giving children the best start in their early years and getting more parents into employment that, through improved wages and benefits, actually does lift families out of poverty. How could these both be achieved? A service model is needed that:

- takes a life course approach from pregnancy through to school and beyond;
- is sensitive to the gradient of need;
- is clear on the use of data to identify community trends as well as individual family needs;
- takes full advantage of the current universal services, using them to identify families in need of light touch support or progressively more intense help;
- takes advantage of key transition points to ensure that as families come into contact with universal services their wider needs are addressed: finding suitable housing; birth; returning to work after maternity leave; entering employment for the first time, starting childcare or early education; and entering school. This has been described as ‘no wrong door’.

The current early years infrastructure is fragile, but it can be strengthened to secure the above.

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Recommendations

Service planning at local level should be informed by three core areas: what local data says about needs in the area, for example: breast feeding rates, smoking rates, levels of worklessness, uptake of the free fifteen hours per week among low income families, incidence of domestic violence. Secondly, what local people say is needed, and thirdly, what is known about what works to improve outcomes. All three of these knowledge areas should inform service planning and the specific service offer from Children’s Centres and other early years providers.

Depending on the analysis of the three areas, Children’s Centres could concentrate on supporting skills development for the mothers and fathers of children from birth to age two or three. This should include employability skills as well as programmes that develop the behaviours known to encourage attachment and cognitive development in infants and toddlers. They should be based in poor areas, and have a combination of targeted and open access services. Links with health, as well as public health will be critical to ensure there is good data on new births in the area, and on families in need of support.

There should be supply side funding to childcare providers to ensure highly qualified staff, presence of early years teachers working with children in nurseries, not just in management or supervisory roles. The welcome announcement of extending the pupil premium to poor children from aged three provides an opportunity to ensure that new funding does not allow providers to raise prices for parents. It should be used as a lever for quality, conditional on increases in staff qualified at both level six (teacher or equivalent) and level three (the new Early Years Educator).

Finally, the two-year-old fifteen hours a week offer should be scaled back to apply to the poorest 20% of children instead of 40%. The money saved could be used as further fund to increase training available for childcare staff, bringing all staff to at least level three.

The recommendations above will not shift the curve overnight, and will be dependent on wider social and economic policies: high-quality early years education is strengthened by high-quality primary schools; employment will not lift families out of poverty if wages are low and transport and housing costs are high. Early Years Foundation Stage results have steadily improved, and the gap has narrowed, but at an alarmingly slow rate. With a concerted effort much more could be achieved.
5. Priorities for Early Education and Care

Leon Feinstein, Director of Evidence, and Donna Molloy, Director of Implementation, The Early Intervention Foundation

What should be the priority for early education and care?

In our view no government could afford to neglect the goals of supporting maternal employment, contributing to child development, and tackling inequality and child poverty. Implementation of programmes and services requires a clear focus on a well-defined goal but these three objectives are mutually reinforcing. Policy on early education and care should support all three and address the relationships between them.

This can be illustrated by approaches like New Hope. This was an experimentally evaluated programme to enhance employment opportunities for mothers alongside improved access to quality childcare for families in or on the edges of poverty. During the two years following the intervention, recipients worked an average of 3.0 quarters per year, compared with an experimental counterfactual of 2.6. Two years afterwards participants earned 19 percent more than expected. Children had significantly higher academic achievement than those in control families. Analysis for the Hamilton project indicates net positive social value. New Hope shows how the three objectives can be met in a coordinated framework of policy at a local level.

Although the three goals of maternal employment, child development and child poverty are related, they do each require careful specification. There are particular problems in the policy goals for child development. In schools the policy amongst all main parties has been in favour of testing only for academic achievement. Yet the evidence is clear that, as well as being important in and of themselves for children’s lives, there are substantial wider social and economic benefits available if schools, local councils, the voluntary sector and other agencies can find ways to address social and emotional development, communication skills and health and well-being as well as literacy and numeracy.

65 M Barber, ‘Instruction to Deliver: Tony Blair, the Public Services and the Challenge of Delivery’, Politico, 2007.
Schools are not incentivised to focus on mental health, communication skills, creativity etc. Neither are local councils. The benefits of these aspects of development are mostly economic and social not fiscal to local councils. The resulting underinvestment has consequences for growth and jobs as well as for children’s mental health and well-being.

So there is an emerging debate in Whitehall and Westminster about the role of character, social and emotional skills and well-being in achieving a successful and happy adulthood. Meanwhile in Greater Manchester, an Early Intervention Foundation “Pioneering Place” will collect annual data on the broad based development of all children between birth and age five. This will tell us a huge amount about how environments impact on development and what features of development are most important in the lives of these children. Greater Manchester are using the ASQ3, the Ages and Stages questionnaire which offers a broad-based notion of child development comprising communication, gross motor (movement), fine motor (e.g. using a pencil), problem solving, and personal-social elements.

**Early Intervention: The importance also of targeted additional support**

This broad based notion of child development is important but what works in achieving it? From developmental science and economics we know that the key drivers are children themselves and their families and wider communities. Wider social institutions like culture and governments play a huge role in determining local contexts but local institutions such as maternity services and schools also play crucial roles in the lives of many children and families. But many families still struggle and need more help in the complex business of raising children.

Early intervention is extra support for those children and families requiring help beyond that provided by universal services. There are many forms, from parenting programmes for first time, young mothers, support to develop home learning environments, to therapeutic support for children in families coming to terms with domestic violence and abuse.

There is not scope here for a discussion on the relative costs and benefits of universal and targeted services, other than to observe the importance of balance as so well expressed in the Blueprint for Change that Blackpool has developed to frame its new ten year, Big Lottery funded £45million investment in services from pregnancy to three:

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• A public health approach, ‘shifting the curve’ for the whole population;
• Evidence based interventions, providing more intensive support for those with additional needs;
• System transformation, building shared understanding and shared action across all agencies;
• Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development, focussed on capturing and sharing learning;

This framework highlights the need for a combination of universal and targeted activity. Determining the right balance and identifying the most appropriate forms of targeting is an increasingly important challenge at this time in which resources are set to continue to decline in most public sector and voluntary agencies.

With extra support, parents experiencing adversities can parent positively and provide an environment in which children can thrive. We know that those who have suffered early adverse experiences such as abuse and neglect or domestic violence or problems in adulthood such as mental health or substance abuse, may struggle with parenting themselves. People who have suffered more than four adverse experiences in childhood are seven times more likely to have been involved in violence in the last year, three times more likely to be obese, three times more likely to be a heavy drinker. In Blackburn with Darwen, another Early Intervention Pioneering Place, a short questionnaire asking about whether people have experienced adverse childhood experiences is being used as a screening tool in services to identify those who may struggle with parenting and need extra support beyond that available through universal childcare.

The Bercow review (2008) concluded that too many parents believe speech and language skills develop entirely naturally and that they have no role in facilitating the development of these skills in their children.

To ensure consistent messages for parents about their own role a number of places have adopted the recommendations of the CentreForum Report “Parenting Matters”; in a ‘five to thrive’ programme containing five messages for parents about how they can support their children’s development that all of their early years’ workforce are trained to deliver.\(^\text{76}\) (See for example Hertfordshire’s programme delivered across their early years services since 2011, or Barnardo’s plans to roll out this programme across their 300 early years services.\(^\text{77}\))

The increase in health visitors and moves towards greater integration of early years’ services offers opportunity to develop enhanced roles that allow some early years professionals to have broader and more ongoing responsibility for families. One local authority is considering developing generic ‘health and wellbeing early years workers’ whose work might transcend the parameters of traditional health visiting or early parenting support. This offers potential to build lasting relationships with those families needing extra support, ensuring they get the services they need rather than merely ‘signposting’.

Beyond early years the role of schools is crucial. Islington Council has shown that the majority of the money available to provide additional support for children and families is now in school budgets. Yet the incentive and accountability framework for schools remains relentlessly focused on narrow definitions of cognitive development that ignore social and emotional learning, communication skills and mental health. It remains to be seen whether pupil premium funding will be used by schools to commission services that support wider aspects of learning, including the family environment.

The Coalition government has alternated between localism and centralism in its support for early intervention, first creating a ring-fenced Early Intervention grant and then cutting and dismantling this with the remaining funding tipped into the formula grant for local authorities. Freedom for councils to spend on their own local priorities coexists with centrally driven initiatives such as CanParent and Troubled Families. Meanwhile what we hear from local councils and other local agencies is that many of their early intervention services are losing out to cuts, to statutory services and to the pressure to meet short term objectives.

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Recommendations: What should happen now?

There would be substantial benefits from an expansion of universal childcare. As we argue above, this system of provision needs a clear and meaningful definition of the quality of childcare that includes agreement about objectives in terms of the broad based features of the development of children, around which local and national policy and practice can align in framing their work and pooling funding.

But improved universal early educational services won’t be sufficient to address inequality, nor to address the developmental needs of many children. It is important that new commitments to universal childcare are not funded by the closure of early intervention services in Local Authorities. On current trends in LA expenditure, unless early intervention is protected, the NHS, schools and social care will have to pick up more of the cost of deprivation and dysfunction at local level. So alongside any new commitment on universal childcare it is important that there are clear commitments to protecting early intervention funding.
6. Thinking beyond ‘0-5’

Jonathan Rallings, Assistant Director of Strategy, Barnardo’s

The introductory chapter sets out the exponential growth in UK policy directed at children under five and their families over the past twenty years, and debates different potential desirable outcomes. There is now increasing recognition that the sometimes conflicting and contradictory aims of the drivers – e.g. the political desirability of cheaper childcare set against the cost of providing the quality of care needed to improve child outcomes – has created a degree of confusion about the overall objective of policy in this area.

There is, however, also a further factor leading to this confusion that is rarely questioned. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy in the UK has developed around the notion of the age range ‘0-5’ being a single stage of a child’s life and development. But is it feasible to expect that such a broad brush approach can adequately cater for the myriad incremental stages of development that an infant experiences during this early phase of childhood?

The reasons for our fledgling ECEC sector evolving around the concept ‘0-5’ are largely historical – primarily it being tailored to fit a former vacuum of state provision between the child’s exit from neo-natal services shortly after birth to their starting school, usually at age five. Given the age of entry to formal education varies across most developed countries, then it is probable that had UK children been starting school at six when ECEC policy began to develop in the mid-nineties, then this essay might easily have been addressing ‘0-6’ policy instead.

Over the last 15 or so years this has led to a general view of the 0-5 age range as a fixed stage of the system to be passed through, somewhat akin to the way later periods in primary, secondary or further education are seen – e.g. 5-9, 11-16, 14-19, 16-19 etc. But it must be remembered this is simply an artificial perception distinguished by professionals and policy-makers as a holistic way of grouping services. Why do we not refer to 0-2 years? 3-5 years? 2-4 years? A notable anomaly that further complicates the issue is that “childcare” policy is often framed within the ‘0-5’ dichotomy, despite the expectation of it also addressing the childcare needs of children right into their teenage years.

Any age-specific grouping of very young children, though, will inevitably fail to properly distinguish between the numerous stages of development a child undertakes during its early years, which are recognisably more rapid and dynamic than at any other stage of life.

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78 Exemplified most recently by an Education Select Committee Inquiry, which principally found that there is too little clarity over the purpose of children’s centres and consequently what services they should offer. House of Commons Education Committee, ‘Foundation Years: Sure Start Children’s Centres’, Fifth Report of Session 2013-14, Volume I, December 2013, available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmeduc/364/364.pdf
The differences between the needs of a newborn baby and a ‘rising five’ preparing for school – and indeed the multiple overlapping stages inbetween – are wildly diverse. So are the wider family needs surrounding these children in their development. This is even before the varying pace of development in individual children, or the balance between, say, their health and educational needs at any given stage, is taken into account.

This latter point is particularly important, as different elements of ECEC policy are the responsibility of different government departments. Each of these ministries usually holds a bespoke professional view of the importance of each stage of development from birth to five years old, often dictated by specific targets they are accountable for. This has meant that as the volume of ECEC policy initiatives has increased from various different parts of government, it has led to confusion around the overall strategic objective for the early years where policies appear to be mutually exclusive, or even directly contradictory, in intent.

It is unfeasible to expect that greater co-ordination between government departments when determining policy would completely solve these problems. However, it should be remembered that professionals in the frontline are usually the first to sense whether objectives they have been set by high-level policy-making do not marry up effectively on the ground. There is a risk that multi-agency working could start to be undermined if different professionals do not have a united purpose in what they are trying to achieve, particularly at a time when austerity cuts are leading services in all sectors to concentrate on meeting official targets first and foremost. Policy-makers would be better able to communicate their vision to these professionals by appreciating the changing needs of children under five at different stages within the age range.

Taking the three policy drivers identified in Chapter 1, it is easier to see how they might have more strategic importance at particular stages of ‘0-5’ development. For example if policy-makers wish to improve maternal employment rates they might want to concentrate on enhancing childcare options from ‘1-5’ given that a majority of mothers are likely to opt for some form of maternity leave during most of the child’s first year of life. Alternatively if the foremost policy objective is to improve universal outcomes for all children then greater emphasis might be placed on galvanising maternal mental health at age ‘0-2’, when the incidence of post-natal depression is most likely to occur – a condition where at present there is limited research suggesting any causal association with factors such income or education.79

79 A recent report – ‘Poverty and postnatal depression: a systematic mapping of the evidence from low and lower middle income countries’ (LSE, 2012) – suggests that poverty is “likely to be important” in influencing PND, but noted the difficulty of collecting “valid and reliable” data to definitively prove this. In any case, as the study was conducted across lower and middle income countries, it is unclear whether the report’s conclusions could be readily applied to the UK as a richer nation.
However, policies that reflect a more nuanced appreciation of age perhaps have the most important implications when considering how to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged children and the rest. An increasing body of research into understanding how children learn and develop already allows policymakers a greater range of closely age-specific interventions than ever before. The introduction of the new Early Intervention Foundation in 2013 promises to collate, evaluate, and evidence successful programmes on a more systematic basis than has been attempted before in the UK, many of which are likely to be designed for very specific stages of a child’s development, not a one-size-fits-all ‘0-5’ approach.

Evidence-based programmes will be less effective, however, if they are not able to be applied properly due to a lack of appropriate services in which to operate them. Policy-makers must be bolder in using the evidence not only to articulate their vision for different age groups, but also to suggest the changes which should be made to ensure effective delivery. For instance due to the predominant role of health in the life of a child up to age two, a greater emphasis should be placed improving the healthy development of families, including parental mental health – therefore maybe the Department of Health should assume primary responsibility for outcomes for this age group, and perhaps Children’s Centres should be adapted to facilitate better integration with local health provision?

Similarly, as what constitutes ‘education’ becomes conceptually easier to distinguish as the child becomes older, the policy focus from 2-5 years should move towards educational development, the Early Years Foundation Stage and learning readiness for school – possibly with a greater role for schools in supporting local early years providers around the transition into learning. Parenting support, by contrast, is likely to be required throughout the age range – albeit within age-specific contexts – and could continue being usefully viewed through the ‘0-5’ prism, albeit with consideration about how and where parents might want to access support more flexibly.

Many services already understand this on the ground already. Where Children’s Centres work well, for example, they can create a holistic hub for services allowing a child and their family to move seamlessly from the post-natal period through to learning and development simply by moving from room to room. But without the overarching vision to guide these services – under a banner of ‘early intervention’, for example – provision nationwide will continue to be patchy and subject to ‘mission drift’.

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80 This broad idea has already been advanced in the work of the Wave Trust and the ‘1001 Critical Days Manifesto’, which suggests just such a focus on the period from conception to age two.

81 The present government has consistently stated its support for greater integration of the early years with schools. For example in a recent speech in April 2014, Liz Truss, the responsible minister, stated “…we think schools should lead improvement in the early years....” Department for Education, ‘Elizabeth Truss speaks about early years teachers’, April 2014, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/elizabeth-truss-speaks-about-early-years-teachers
A more nuanced approach to policy making for the under-fives may require some changes in delivery and monitoring frameworks, but these should not be seen as an insurmountable obstacle to achieving greater clarity of purpose in relation to policy for our youngest citizens. Cross-party and cross-governmental support, particularly from HM Treasury, has already helped to shift discourse around early intervention from a position of ‘should we do this?’ to ‘how can we do this?’ However, at present the trend in social policy appears to be towards aggregating services into larger age ranges not smaller. For example, a relaxation of the Children’s Centre core purpose (which previously explicitly stated they were exclusively for children under five and their families) by DfE earlier in the present parliament, has subsequently led to cash-strapped local authorities increasingly extending the focus of their local Children’s Centre provision to cover older age groups such as ‘0-7’, ‘0-9’, or even ‘0-19’ in some areas. Similarly, the government and Ofsted have both recently signalled their desire to see schools taking in children from as young as two years-old. This could potentially risk approaching the design of education policy for these young children solely through the prism of school-based education (‘2-9’? ‘3-16’?), without fully appreciating the existing differences between pre-school and school approaches to education policy that come from operating within separate sectors.

**Recommendation**

In conclusion, though, administration structures and service organisation are secondary issues. First policy-makers must break out of their tendency to think of artificially defined stages of child development dictated by how provision (or lack of it) has historically been organised. Nowhere is this approach to policy-making more vital than during the earliest years of a child’s life when their development is mapped in weeks and months, rather than years. Only by getting this right will government be better placed to articulate its overarching objective for the early years.

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7. A better qualified workforce

James Kempton, Associate Director, CentreForum

Introduction

The debate about the preferred outcomes for the early years is a complex one. A strong society will want to promote child development, tackle disadvantage and offer all parents a genuine choice about how they organise their family life. This chapter argues that, in particular for the first two outcomes, a better qualified workforce is critical to making progress.

In schooling it is now widely accepted that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and their work. There is also a growing consensus backed by good evidence and international practice that in early education too, the workforce has the biggest influence on quality. High-quality early years provision also narrows the attainment gap between disadvantaged and other children. Ensuring a better-qualified workforce delivers the early years foundation stage (EYFS), and in particular increasing the number of qualified teachers working in early years, is an essential component of any move to both improve standards in the sector and improve social mobility.

The evidence on the role quality plays in facilitating maternal employment is less certain. But the fact that only a third of parents look at Ofsted reports to help choose an early years provider and only just over half of them cited early years qualifications, training, skills and knowledge as key factors they were looking for, implies this is likely to be less significant than other factors.

Parents using early years services to enable them to work are using a combination of centre-based and informal childcare. This chapter specifically addresses the provision of early years education in centres in both the maintained and the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector.

The 0-5 period is crucial to a child’s development. And as the first educators outside of the family, high-quality early years settings have been shown to have a range of improved outcomes, from higher test scores at the start of their school careers to (in some evaluations) better outcomes into their adult lives. This impact is more pronounced for children from disadvantaged areas, with less-educated parents or for whom English is a second language. High-quality early years provision is a huge enabler of social mobility. It can help to level the playing field when children start school, and also improves later life chances.

Graduates

Despite the evidence of the importance of trained early years teachers in improving children’s outcomes, early years education is a long way away from being a graduate profession. While every nursery and reception class will have a dedicated qualified teacher, this is true in fewer than half of PVI settings and, where they do so, the most common pattern is to have a graduate leading practice across a number of rooms or classes. Just 8% of PVI early years settings have more than one graduate-level member of staff.

Recent governments have sought to address this issue but there is a lot more progress to be made. The previous Labour administration introduced a new graduate-level professional accreditation, the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) and there are now some 11,000 EYPs across the country.

92 R Brind et al., ‘Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey’, 2012.
The Coalition government has placed more emphasis on trained teachers who are specialists in early childhood development and trained to teach across the early years foundation stage (from birth to five years old). This approach replaces the EYPS as the graduate entry route to early years. In addition the Coalition has:

- published teaching standards;
- introduced early years initial teacher training leading to early years teacher (EYT) status, equivalent to qualified teacher status delivered by accredited ITT providers;
- encouraged high-quality entrants to the early years workforce through bursaries for early years apprentices;
- extended Teach First into schools, nurseries and other early years providers in poorer areas;
- introduced the Schools Direct model into early years, starting in September 2014.  

This move is not without its critics. Entrants to early years initial teacher training have to meet the same entry requirements and pass the same skills tests as trainee primary school teachers. However, this is where equivalence stops. EYT s are not teachers as such and will not be eligible for teachers’ pay and conditions. A pay differential between early years teachers and school teachers with equivalent qualifications is hard to justify and is an ongoing barrier to recruiting the best candidates into early years. Given that the Nutbrown Report had highlighted the dissatisfaction of EYPs at their lack of parity with those who hold Qualified Teacher Status, it is not surprising that the move has been characterised by Professor Nutbrown as ‘one form of inequality is now to be replaced with another’.

Aiming to increase the numbers of trained early years teachers is an important priority given the small number of graduate teachers currently working outside maintained early years settings. But if the country is serious about high-quality early years and driving social mobility, we need to look beyond this to a time when not just every setting has pedagogical leadership by a qualified teacher, but where every child in the EYFS is in a class or room led by a qualified teacher. While more work is required to establish the cost and timescale for doing this, there are strong reasons why government should make an explicit commitment to this aspiration and make it a key focus for driving policy and investment in the sector.

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Level 3 qualifications

There is good evidence that the qualifications of the whole staff team are also important to quality.\(^\text{96}\) Indeed while graduates are particularly important to the education of three- and four-year-olds, the evidence points to different staffing models being required for over and under threes.\(^\text{97}\) As a society we need to raise our expectations of what it means to work with young children, and attract the best people into the workforce and challenge the image of a low skill, low pay, low status sector. Ensuring every child has access to high-quality care and education whatever type of setting they attend, requires that all early years staff hold a Level 3 qualification as a minimum.\(^\text{98}\)

In response to the Nutbrown report’s call for a more robust set of ‘full and relevant’ criteria for Level 3 qualifications, the Coalition is introducing a new Level 3 ‘Early Years Educator’ (EYE) qualification in September 2014. And to reflect the importance of good levels of numeracy and literacy among early years practitioners, the EYFS is being amended to make clear that staff holding the new EYE qualification must also have achieved GCSEs in English and maths at grade C or above to count in the existing staff to child ratios as a Level 3 practitioner. Despite these reforms, the Coalition government has so far resisted pressure to adopt Level 3 as the minimum level of qualification for the early years workforce as recommended by Professor Nutbrown’s report:

“The EYFS requirements should be revised so that, by September 2022, all staff counting in the staff:child ratios must be qualified at level 3.”\(^\text{99}\)

The recommendation is officially “still under consideration and subject to consultation.”\(^\text{100}\) This is an important and well-judged target and should not be resisted further. Indeed if funding and circumstances allow there is a very strong quality argument for doing this even sooner than 2022.

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\(^{97}\) I Parker, ‘Early Developments: Bridging the gap between evidence and policy in early years education’, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), 2013. Between 2007 and 2011, the proportion of full daycare staff qualified to at least Level 3 increased from 72% to 84%; R Brind et al., ‘Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey’, 2012, Table 6.5a, p. 97.


\(^{100}\) Department for Education, ‘More great childcare: Raising quality and giving parents more choice’, January 2013, p.41.
Continuous professional development

Access to continuous professional development is also an important component of improving the quality of early education. It also supports career progression, increasing the attractiveness of the profession to new entrants. As Professor Nutbrown notes in her report “good-quality CPD enables existing practitioners to build on their knowledge and skills, and to keep up to date with relevant research, practices and initiatives, including learning from examples in other countries.” International best practice suggests that staff should have guaranteed access to funded CPD and training.

As with school teachers’ CPD, government seems strangely reluctant to take a role here. Professor Nutbrown recommended that government should bring together a suite of online induction and training modules and that the “Teaching School” approach should be considered as a model for supporting peer-to-peer learning.

While the government has adopted the “Teaching School” approach for system development, it is leaving it to the sector/settings to draw the materials together for personal development. It is far from clear that this approach will be sufficient to change existing practice. The best early years practice is founded on the principle of continuous improvement. All staff delivering the EYFS, whether as a teacher or as a member of the wider staff team, should have the opportunity to access CPD on a regular basis whatever the type of setting they work in. One way to ensure providers pay proper attention to CPD would be to ensure that staff contracts were required to contain a minimum entitlement to high-quality CPD. Ideally this would be something that the sector should initiate for itself as part of its commitment to improving quality, though ultimately government intervention might be required.

Recommendations:

1. Government should set the long term vision for the EYFS to be delivered by qualified teachers and it should publish a deadline for achieving this.

2. Government should adopt the Nutbrown Report’s recommendation that all staff counting in the staff:child ratios must be qualified at Level 3 by September 2022.

3. All settings delivering the EYFS should ensure that a minimum entitlement to high-quality CPD is specified in staff contracts.


8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The introduction to this report reflects on the significant policy developments in early education, childhood, and care over the past twenty years. It notes that the proliferation of policy interventions reflects a lack of clarity about the social policy outcomes that are being sought, and identified three “ideal outcomes” that might be the driver for government action. These are:

a) supporting maternal employment. The availability of reliable, affordable, accessible childcare for 0-5 year-olds allows mothers and fathers the option of returning to work, supporting themselves and their family, and contributing to the economy.

b) contributing to child development, and achieving a wide range of learning outcomes that provide the necessary foundation for a successful journey through the school years.

c) tackling inequality and child poverty, and helping to “narrow the gap” between the life chances of children from disadvantaged and advantaged households.

In the following chapters, six contributors consider these “ideal outcomes” and recommend steps towards achieving them. Some argue the case for one outcome to take priority; others argue that they need to be pursued equally. Some proposed interventions support more than one outcome; others primarily contribute to one. This concluding chapter draws these contributions together and makes recommendations.

The recommendations are divided into two: Recommendations 1 - 4 (below) concern how government can improve the clarity and focus of policy irrespective of which outcomes are given priority; Recommendations 5 - 9 follow a discussion of the contributors’ views on the outcomes and concern which outcomes and interventions should be pursued.
Recommendations to improve clarity and focus in policy-making

It is easy to explain why, over the past twenty years, there has been a lack of clarity and consistency about the outcomes of government policy and state intervention – different political parties and different Ministers give priority to different issues; the policy-makers have constantly to strike a balance between the needs and desires of different parts of the population; and new evidence emerges into the policy arena.

However, the lesson from the last twenty years is that too many trade-offs confuse parents and providers, increase costs and jeopardise the achievement of the desired outcomes. The recommendations below call for this to change.

1) **Government should make an explicit statement about the outcomes to be achieved through state intervention in early childhood education and care, in order to increase the likelihood of policy interventions being designed to achieve the stated outcomes.**

2) **In preparing an explicit statement about outcomes, government will have to recognise the need for trade-offs and design a forum in which these trade-offs can be made, either as part of a party political manifesto process, or, if elected, through the machinery of government.**

3) **Ministers should ensure that plans for evaluation and evidence gathering are in place before changes begin to ensure progress can be tracked.**

4) **Government should adopt the Family and Childcare Trust’s recommendation for an independent review of childcare funding, but not until the government has come to a clear view, and made a public statement, about which outcomes it wishes to prioritise.**

Contributors’ views on Valuable Ends and Effective Means

**Supporting maternal employment through affordable, accessible childcare, so that families can choose to return to work**

Many of the contributors make the case for this to be the focus of government policy, with some also arguing that supporting maternal employment for low-income families contributes to reducing child poverty, which in turn contributes to narrowing the gap in children’s outcomes.

Ellen Broomé focuses on how a lack of affordable childcare prevents families from working, or from increasing their working hours. It highlights international examples of approaches to childcare funding and recommends an independent review focused on simplifying the English funding model.

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Kitty Stewart recommends reducing disincentives to work by extending the free entitlement to offer additional hours as parents take on additional hours of work. For example, all three- and four-year-olds would continue to be entitled to 15 hours per week but if both parents or a lone parent were in work for at least 20 hours per week, the free entitlement would extend to 25 hours.

Leon Feinstein and Donna Molloy highlight evidence from programmes in the United States of America which improve both maternal employment rates, and children’s educational outcomes.

Promoting child development, so that every child has a strong foundation for school and life

The contributors also make the case for high-quality, universal early education, arguing that, for three- and four-year-olds, it is the most effective and efficient way to provide better social and cognitive outcomes for most children.

They argue that high-quality is delivered through developing the skills and qualifications of the workforce, and support the recommendations made by Professor Cathy Nutbrown for a requirement for graduate led settings and, over time, for a workforce qualified at Level 3.\(^{107}\)

James Kempton draws attention to the value of continuing professional development (CPD), the international evidence which supports funded CPD, and the role CPD plays in attracting staff seeking career progression.

Jonathan Rallings suggests that, in the coming years, we may want to see early childhood education and care less as a single phase, but with different emphases on the “first 1000 days,” where the health service and community support has a greater role in supporting parents in their children’s learning, and a more education-based phase for three- and four-year-olds.

Narrowing the gap between the life chances of those from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds

The contributors strongly support “narrowing the gap in life chances” as a government priority. Many of the chapters draw on the EPPE evidence that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most from high-quality early education and several contributors recommend that requirements for higher qualifications and training should be introduced first for the most disadvantaged.\(^{108}\)


They also highlight the evidence for the important role of staff in working with parents in developing early language skills in their children. Funding changes are suggested, for example reforming “tax-free” childcare so that it is less regressive (i.e. it supports the least well-off as well as the most well-off) and pausing the extension of the two-year-old offer to the 40% most disadvantaged and instead investing the resources in better qualified teaching staff.

There is also strong support for retaining and developing Children’s Centres and other community-based family support approaches, as described in Naomi Eisenstadt’s chapter, as places where all families, but particularly those in deprived areas, can receive additional support over and above the free entitlement offer.

Kitty Stewart recommends accompanying an investment in quality early education with measures to increase the income available to families of young children, drawing on evidence that money matters to children’s outcomes both because it enables parents to buy healthier food and more stimulating activities for their children, but also because it reduces parental stress and depression, leading to a more positive home environment. The Family and Childcare Trust, in their June 2014 report, argue that one way to achieve this would be to pay paternity and maternity pay at the level of the minimum wage.109

Leon Feinstein and Donna Molloy argue that more needs to be done to understand what relevant child development outcomes might be, contrasting the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ3), used as part of the Healthy Child Programme, which offers a broad-based notion of child development with the “narrowing the gap in achievement” debate in schools which has focused on academic achievement only.

Recommendations to make progress in “narrowing the gap” in children’s outcomes

The argument that “narrowing the gap” in outcomes should be given priority is supported across the political spectrum. The Conservative Minister Elizabeth Truss has said this is the most important measure of success for the early years sector, the Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister has announced the Early Years Pupil Premium, and the Labour Party’s policy consultation paper says more needs to be done to break the link between a child’s background and their educational attainment.110

These statements reflect powerful themes in today’s society – that everyone should have an equal opportunity to fulfil their aspirations and succeed in life. If this is our vision for society, then the role of social policy in government should be to intervene wherever barriers to opportunity exist. The evidence is clear - that means offering high-quality education and care for all children, but especially for those children who otherwise would not develop to their potential in the early years, and especially to ensure that every child starts school able to benefit from the opportunities it offers.

The following measures should be adopted to make progress towards this outcome over the lifetime of the next Parliament:

5) **As a priority Government should be explicit about defining what “narrowing the gap in outcomes” means, and how progress will be measured including the place in this of The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, and the new reception baseline assessment.**

6) **Government should accept the case made in the Nutbrown Report and commit to investing in a better trained and qualified workforce - a graduate-led, QTS profession, and a workforce trained to L3, with English and Maths as a pre-requisite for entry.**

7) **As a first step, government should set higher qualification requirements for staff working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds, reflecting the evidence that these children stand to benefit most from high-quality early education. Stronger quality criteria for settings offering the two year-old offer, stronger conditionality around the Early Years Pupil Premium, or additional funding to disadvantaged areas are all routes by which this could be achieved.**

8) **Government should accompany investment in early education childhood and care with policies that support family income in the early years, such as extending the free entitlement to offer additional hours as parents take on additional hours of work and paying parental leave at the minimum wage.**

9) **Government should recognise the critical importance of the home learning environment and the importance of early speech, language and vocabulary development and develop ways to equip all professionals working with young children to support parents in developing their children’s early learning, especially speech and language skills.**
Final Words

This report has argued that, over the last twenty years, the case for government intervention in early childhood education and care has been accepted. However, there is still debate about the outcomes sought, leading to trade-offs and compromises which in turn mean that the outcomes are jeopardised and the system is confusing and inefficient. The time has come for politicians and policymakers to be clear about what it is they are trying to achieve, and to adopt policy interventions in that light.

This report has also argued that, while there is a good case to intervene to support universal child development, and maternal employment, the case for intervening to narrow the gap in outcomes in the early years is strongest. If the government is to intervene in the early years, it should act to promote a just society, where no child is held back by the circumstances of their birth, and every child has the chance to succeed. There is strong and growing evidence for policy interventions which support this end – the time to act is now.
About CentreForum

Through its publications and events CentreForum is seeking to build a distinctive and coherent vision of a liberal Britain. Our research focuses upon four broad themes: education and social policy, economics, globalisation, and liberalism.

Education and social policy

Social mobility has stalled in Britain. The ladder from poverty to wealth is getting longer and fewer people are climbing it. People’s chances in life are too often determined, not by their talent or hard work, but by their social background. How can government ensure that everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations? And how can we ensure that all benefit from a good education – the engine that powers social mobility?

Economics

The last 200 years have shown how free markets produce levels of prosperity that centralised states cannot. But markets need institutions and laws to constrain their excesses and to provide support in moments of crisis; great liberal economic thinkers include not only Smith and Hayek but also Keynes. The recent financial crisis has forced policymakers to revisit their assumptions about how the economy should be regulated. Our work aims to identify how capitalism can be reformed, so that a route can be plotted towards sustainable growth and shared prosperity.

Internationalism

Globalisation has delivered many benefits. The greater movement of goods, capital and people has made the UK, and the world, richer and freer. But globalisation also brings challenges – climate change, crossborder crime and terrorism chief among them. How then can we harness the benefits of globalisation while negotiating its pitfalls? Liberalism, with its easy accommodation of both the market economics that drive globalisation and the internationalist politics needed to regulate it, is a creed tailor-made for this challenge.

Contemporary liberalism

Liberalism is back in vogue and Liberals are back in government. But all three main parties seek, on some issues at least, to portray themselves as liberal, while two of the leaders explicitly use the term to define their politics. Is this liberal consensus genuine? What does it mean for public policy? And what relevance does it have for 21st century politics?
Early years: valuable ends and effective means

Over the last twenty years, the case for government intervention in early childhood education and care has been accepted. Successive governments have introduced policies to support parental employment, promote learning and development for every child and, in recent years, to “narrow the gap” in outcomes between children from disadvantaged families and their peers.

This new CentreForum report, edited by Janet Grauberg, reflects on the shifting focus of policy over the last twenty years and argues that a lack of clarity about the outcomes or “ends” to be sought has led to complexity and confusion in the “means” being deployed.

Eminent contributors from the academic study of early years policy, commentators and those who lead delivery of early years services debate the outcomes they consider should be given priority and, from the evidence, make recommendations about policy changes that should be made.

The report calls for clarity of purpose from central government, whichever outcomes are to be sought, and recommends that the primary purpose of government intervention in the early years should be to narrow the gap in outcomes. It offers a package of recommendations, which, if adopted, would help to build a more just society in which every child, regardless of their background, has a chance to succeed.