

**employers**

**For Childcare**

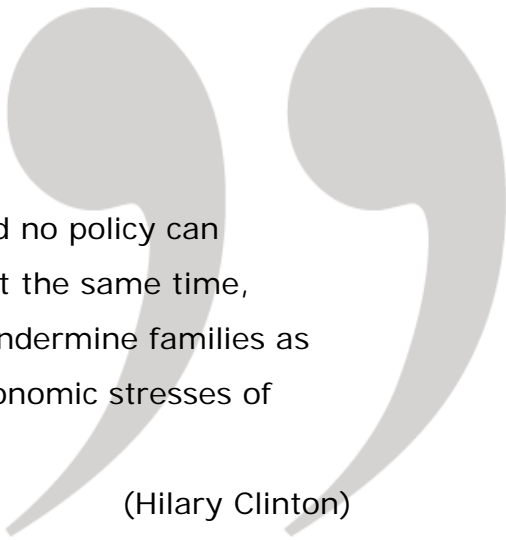
information service

# Sizing up

A comparative study of  
childcare policies within the  
four regions of the UK

Report compiled and written by  
Employers For Childcare  
June 2010





No government can love a child, and no policy can substitute for a family's care. But at the same time, government can either support or undermine families as they cope with moral, social and economic stresses of caring for children.

(Hilary Clinton)

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## **Employers For Childcare Foreword**

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I am delighted, as Chief Executive Officer of Employers For Childcare, to introduce the research report *Sizing Up*. Employers For Childcare encompasses a registered charity and a social enterprise. 100% of our profit is distributed for social good. Our mission is to make it easier for parents with dependent children to get into work, and to stay in work. We address childcare as a labour market and as an economic issue.

Childcare remains a key barrier for parents being able to access and to stay in work. We recognised the value of carrying out this comparative study, to provide a clearer picture of the policy developments relating to childcare within the four regions of the UK.

The report uses a comparative method to examine the approaches of the different regions relating to childcare policy and legislation. In so doing, it reveals a variety of approaches and developments. It is the first report of its kind to be produced in such detail within Northern Ireland.

As an organisation that focuses on helping parents with dependent children to access and to stay in work, we hope that this report will inform the future direction of policy specifically related to childcare in Northern Ireland. The report illustrates a strong need for an integrated Childcare Strategy and the need for legislative powers to ensure that families in Northern Ireland receive an equitable level of childcare provision and information to that which exists within the other regions of the UK.

## **Employers For Childcare Foreword**

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We also hope that the report is a useful source of information for those working within the area of childcare and for the community and voluntary sector.



Marie Marin  
Chief Executive Officer  
Employers For Childcare

## **MLA Foreword**

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Any assessment of the state of childcare in Northern Ireland offers a bleak picture. Despite having some of the most expensive childcare provision in the United Kingdom, childcare services in Northern Ireland are sadly inadequate. In many places, they are difficult to access, inappropriate to the needs of parents and children, and of varying degrees of quality.

The response of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland to this situation has not been heartening. We continue to wait for signs of a National Childcare Strategy, an Early Years Strategy, and even for a Government department willing to take responsibility for childcare.

These delays are making a difficult situation worse for many families, particularly those affected by the current welfare reform agenda which will ultimately shift lone parents onto Job Seeker's Allowance when their youngest child is only a year old. Though employment may offer the most lasting route out of poverty, without appropriate childcare parents with dependent children (mostly women) are simply unable to participate in the labour market.

However, there is room for hope. As Employers For Childcare's timely and comprehensive report outlines, childcare is also a policy area in which there is substantial room for innovation, and this can and should be the approach in Northern Ireland.

Requirements of the Child Poverty Act, implementation of the obligations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, hopefully, delivery of the long-awaited Early Years Strategy from the Department of Education and National Childcare Strategy from the Office of First and deputy First Minister can create a framework for innovation, for the growth of high-quality, needs-based provision, and for appropriate Government support

## **MLA Foreword**

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for the childcare sector, which provides a vital service to society and to the local economy.

In a time of rapidly shrinking public budgets, children are undoubtedly our best investment. This report highlights that principle and offers specific strategies and policy approaches to address childcare needs in a comprehensive and joined-up manner.

I commend Employers For Childcare for their work on this important issue, and for this excellent report.

Dawn Purvis MLA

## **Executive Summary**

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Employers For Childcare is a campaigning charity whose aim is to make it easier for parents with dependent children to get into work and to stay in work. Employers For Childcare recognises that there is a disparity in childcare policy and legislation in Northern Ireland and that it lags behind the rest of the United Kingdom (UK). In order to identify the gaps in policy and provision in Northern Ireland and ascertain what we can learn from the different regions, we have compiled this research report, which documents and compares existing policies and legislation in the different regions of the UK.

It is clear that childcare is more highly considered in some parts of the UK than others. Two main strands emerge; childcare is either addressed directly and specifically through policy as a fundamental issue in its own right, or it is used as a tool for addressing other issues such as poverty and disadvantage. Four key thematic areas have emerged within the context of childcare policy and provision across the four regions, namely quality, affordability, accessibility and choice. Childcare costs across the four regions are also consistently high, indicating that stronger intervention is needed in this area. The Welfare Reform agenda and child poverty legislation also emphasise the need to ensure that the necessary childcare infrastructure is in place to realise the duties and goals of both pieces of legislation.

### England and Wales

- When the Labour Party came into power in 1998, childcare was high on its political agenda. *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998) and *Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children* (2004) were strategies that reflected changing social patterns in the labour market. Within these strategies the Government realised its responsibility to provide parents with services that facilitate choice.
- The statutory obligations to address childcare provision through the Childcare Act (2006) have been instrumental in tackling the



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- challenges of childcare in England and Wales. This legislation is pioneering as it places an obligation on the two Governments to support families. This obligation is fulfilled through the Family Information Service, an impressive, holistic resource for parents.
- The integration of childcare and education is central to England's approach. Sure Start is the cornerstone of the Government's focus on childcare.
  - Substantial funding has been directed into childcare and early years services in England. Furthermore, services are constantly reviewed and evaluated to ensure that they address childcare needs.
  - Although Wales sits under the umbrella of the English Childcare Strategies and also the statutory duties of the Childcare Act (2006), the Welsh Government implemented its own Childcare Strategy, *Childcare is for Children*, in 2005 in order to address local needs specific to Wales. In addition, the Genesis Wales project identified childcare as a barrier to work (Genesis Wales, 2006) and has achieved considerable success in increasing employment opportunities in Wales.
  - The rights set out under the UNCRC are given particular attention in the Welsh Strategy.

### Scotland

- Scotland published its Childcare Strategy *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* in 1998. However, it has not been updated since its inception, although *The Early Years Framework* (2008) to some extent supersedes the Strategy. Scotland's approach is heavily research and evidence-based, with an emphasis on identifying where change is needed and assessing existing demand. Scotland has invested considerably in commissioning research that informs policy through the longitudinal study *Growing up in Scotland* (2005). This research has informed policy and led to the publication of the *Early Years Framework* (2008). Various strategies, although

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not specifically aimed at childcare and childcare provision, seek to improve the future economy through early intervention. This is a focus which belongs to Scotland.

- Like Wales, Scotland pays particular attention to the UNCRC. This is reflected through the *Child Strategy Statement (1997)*, which states that every Government policy should be 'proofed' to ensure it meets the standards set out in the UNCRC.
- Although Scotland does not have one single strategy that addresses childcare, it has implemented a number of other strategies that address childcare needs in Scotland. *The Sitter Service (2003)*, which provides childcare provision during atypical hours, and *Schools Out (2003)*, an extended schools programme, are such examples. Scotland also has a Family Information Service.
- The lack of a single, up-to-date Childcare Strategy is perhaps the main criticism of Scotland's approach.

### Northern Ireland

- Northern Ireland published its Childcare Strategy, *Children First*, in 1999. This Strategy has not been updated since its inception. A review of the Childcare Strategy was carried out in 2005 and the recommendations made have yet to be realised. Therefore, the challenges set out to be addressed in the Strategy remain outstanding and relevant to Northern Ireland.
- Northern Ireland has made progress in respect of its Extended Schools Programme (DE, 2006), pre-school education programme and the introduction of Sure Start. Since there is no statutory obligation within Northern Ireland to support families and provide information on childcare, a Family Information Service does not exist in the region.
- There is a lack of leadership and ownership in relation to the issue of childcare in Northern Ireland. Since sole responsibility does not

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lie with one Government department, there is currently no accountability.

- There is no mainstream funding for childcare in Northern Ireland, leading to a lack of transparency and a piecemeal approach to funding childcare.
- The absence of a statutory duty will remain a significant challenge in delivering on childcare services.

### The research confirms the following

- In relation to Sure Start programmes, a substantial variation in investment exists within the four regions, with Northern Ireland spending substantially less per child. Furthermore, there are 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres in England, while no such centres exist in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland Sure Start is only available in 20% of the most deprived ward areas (NIA, 2008), while England has a Sure Start Children's Centre in every community.
- Childcare costs across the UK have risen above the rate of inflation since 2001. The average weekly cost of a full-time day nursery place for a child under the age of two in England is £178, while in Scotland and Wales it is £168 and £156 respectively. For Northern Ireland, the average weekly cost is £176, meaning that Northern Ireland costs are second only to England (Cfeb, 2010).
- While England, Wales and Scotland have, to varying degrees, seen an increase in childcare places since 2003, the picture for Northern Ireland is not so inspiring. Between 2003 and 2009 Northern Ireland has seen a 7% decrease in childcare places (based on DHSSPS 2003-2009 figures). Furthermore, the ratio of childcare places across the region varies, suggesting that there is a correlation between the number of childcare places available, the level of deprivation in an area and rurality.

## **Executive Summary**

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- The employment rate for women with dependent children in Northern Ireland is 67%. This is lower than the combined figure for the other three regions which sits at 70% (DETI, 2009:5).

### Recommendations

- A new integrated Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland is needed to adequately address childcare in the region. In addition, there is a need for adequate mainstream resources in order to implement the necessary changes.
- There needs to be clear leadership and direction, with responsibility lying with one department only within the Northern Ireland Executive.
- Northern Ireland needs to recognise that childcare is both a social and an economic issue and that there are long-term benefits in investing in childcare.
- The statutory duties in place in England and Wales need to be introduced to Northern Ireland in order to address the childcare challenges that exist.
- Northern Ireland needs to give special consideration to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- While England, Wales and, to a lesser extent, Scotland have the infrastructure in place to be ready for the impact of overarching legislation such as the Welfare Reform Act and the Child Poverty Act, the same cannot be said of Northern Ireland. Each devolved administration has a statutory duty to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and this represents the first legal obligation on Northern Ireland to consider childcare. OFMDFM is required to publish its own strategy within 12 months of the Child Poverty Act being conceded. The implementation of an up-to-date childcare strategy is urgently needed to enable the Northern Ireland Executive to be in a position to deliver.

## **Executive Summary**

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### This report has concluded

- A fragmented and disjointed policy approach to childcare provision exists in Northern Ireland.
- Investing in childcare is an investment in the future of Northern Ireland's economy.
- Childcare is a barrier to employment, in particular women's employment.
- Northern Ireland can learn from the approaches of the other three regions of the UK in addressing childcare.
- It could be argued that Northern Ireland is today where England was in 1997.

# **Part 1**

## *Introduction*

Childcare is a devolved responsibility, and whilst parents are seen as having the primary responsibility for the care and well-being of their children, the devolved administrations recognise the role that they play in supporting parents and children.

It has been well acknowledged that childcare provision in Northern Ireland lags behind the rest of the United Kingdom (UK) (Higgins, 2000; Gray, 2005; Fawcett *et al*, 2008). Indeed this is recognised within the Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy *Children First* (DHSS, 1999). The purpose of this research paper is to provide a clear picture of early years related policies, specifically concerned with childcare. The research will provide an examination of each region's policies and strategies as well as a statistical analysis of childcare provision. For the purposes of the report, childcare provision will include an examination of extended school services and pre-nursery places as well as the other forms of registered childcare that parents avail of throughout the UK.

This comparative study will illustrate the progress each of the regions has made towards supporting parents with dependent children, examining childcare provision and policy in Northern Ireland along with the rest of the UK. The information will provide a clear picture of what legislation and policy tools exist within the four regions. This, in turn, will enable us to produce recommendations to ensure Northern Ireland parents with dependent children receive an equitable childcare service.

The Report is presented in three parts. Part one provides the introduction and briefly outlines the context of international and UK wide policies relating to childcare. Part 2 provides a review of the legislation, strategies and policies which exist in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (England and Wales are considered mainly together) in the form of four individual chapters. Part 3 compares and contrasts childcare related policies leading to the production of a number of recommendations

required to ensure that childcare provision in Northern Ireland is equitable to the other regions in the UK, at a level that meets the needs of parents. To the best of our knowledge this research report reflects the main childcare related policies and legislative developments within the four regions of the UK.

Employers For Childcare is a campaigning charity, with an ethos of supporting parents to enable them to access and to stay in work. We recognise childcare as a labour market and an economic issue. This report is being issued at a time when New Labour has implemented the Welfare Reform Act<sup>1</sup> to England, Wales and Scotland. It is anticipated that in the interest of parity it will be enacted within Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the Child Poverty Act 2010 has been recently implemented, and applies across the UK. Both pieces of legislation present the case that employment is the best route out of poverty. The backdrop to this is the economic downturn and the lack of childcare provision within Northern Ireland which creates a barrier to parents who wish to pursue employment opportunities.

#### Northern Ireland on childcare

Childcare in Northern Ireland, as in Great Britain, faces three main challenges:

- quality is variable
- the cost is out of reach of many parents
- in some areas there are not enough childcare places and parents' access to them is hampered by poor information.

(DHSS, 1999: 12)

#### England on childcare

For too long, the UK has lagged behind in developing good quality, affordable and accessible childcare...It is up to parents to decide what sort of childcare they want for their children.



This is not the matter for the Government. But it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that parents have access to services to enable them to make genuine choices.

(DfEE, 1998:5-6)

#### Wales on childcare

Government has a role in ensuring that the childcare parents use is safe and provides the best possible development for their children. It can use its resources strategically to ensure that childcare is of good quality, but also available locally at an affordable price.

(DfTE, 2005:3)

#### Scotland on childcare

Our children are the future of Scotland. We need to give them the best possible start in life so that they have the opportunity to play their full part in Scotland's future. Getting it right in the early years lays the foundation for the whole life of a child.

(Scottish Executive, 1999:4)

#### Methodology

This report is based on desk research. A detailed search of relevant national and regional legislation, policies, strategies and programmes has been carried out to assess the progression and development of childcare services within each region of the UK. The desk research also includes an examination of past reports, journals and studies on childcare services.

**Overarching International Strategies**

This section briefly outlines the overarching international strategies which form the context of childcare policy and legislation in the four regions of the UK.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human rights Treaty that grants all children and young people (aged 17 and under) a comprehensive set of rights. The UK Government is a signatory to the Treaty and is therefore obliged to implement its provisions and principles. Central to the principles is a rights based approach for children. Its relevance to the discussion on childcare policy and provision is highlighted in a number of Articles contained within the Treaty.

Article 2

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination...on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

(UNCRC, 1989)

Article 3

In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or

other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

(UNCRC, 1989)

Article 4

States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation.

(UNCRC, 1989)

Article 18

For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

(UNCRC, 1989)

The above mentioned articles emphasise the importance of family choices and place an obligation on the State to support parents and guardians to ensure that children have the best economic and social outcomes. The United Kingdom ratified the Convention in 1991. It is binding under international law. There is an obligation to comply with its principles and

provisions. However, the Convention has yet to be enshrined in domestic legislation. Therefore it is not part of UK law. The Convention requires States to submit detailed reports periodically to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), laying out progress in implementing the Convention. The CRC forms General Comments and Concluding Observations on progress achieved. A number of specific points are raised in relation to childcare. The CRC reports have highlighted a number of concerns regarding the adoption of some of the provisions, notably:

State Parties have a key role in providing a legislative framework for the provision of quality, adequately resourced services, and for ensuring that standards are tailored to the circumstances of particular groups and individuals and to the developmental priorities of particular age groups.

(CRC, 2005b: 31)

The Committee notes with appreciation the increase in expenditure on children in recent years. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned that the increases are not sufficient to eradicate poverty and tackle inequalities and that the lack of consistent budgetary analysis and child rights impact assessment makes it difficult to identify how much expenditure is allocated to children across the State party and whether this serves to effectively implement policies and legislation affecting them.

(CRC, 2008: 5)

The Implementation Handbook for the Convention further emphasises the importance of ensuring access to childcare services and facilities, as outlined in Article 18 (3), stating 'the importance of meeting the needs of children of working parents cannot be overestimated' (UNICEF, 2007: 239).

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination  
Against Women (CEDAW), 1979

CEDAW, referred to as an International Bill of Rights for women, was adopted in 1979. It was the first convention to comprehensively address women's rights within political, economic, social, cultural and family life. To date it has been ratified by 186 countries. The UK is a signatory state, ratifying the Convention in 1986. The Convention consists of a preamble and 30 articles, defining what constitutes discrimination against women and setting up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The implementation of the Convention is monitored by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The Convention defines discrimination against women as

any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It requires all States parties to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

(Article 3)

Every four years Governments must report to the Committee on its implementation. Submissions are made to the Committee in the form of Shadow Reports to inform progress. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) submitted Shadow Reports in 2008. The reports highlighted the

need to address the issue of childcare as key to implementing a number of Articles contained within the Convention; specifically Article 2: Obligations to Eliminate Discrimination, Article 4: Special Measures to Accelerate Equality and Article 11: Employment. Both reports state that a lack of childcare services hinders women's participation in society.

### Beijing Platform 1995

*The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)* is the global community's most comprehensive policy document for the empowerment of women and gender equality (CEDAW, 2008). The Declaration famously stated that 'women's rights are human rights'. It contains twelve critical areas of concern; the Platform highlights women's rights under its strategic objectives. Childcare impacts on a number of the critical areas including power and decision making, education and training, poverty and the economy. Another of its critical areas of concern is specifically devoted to the human rights of women, through the full implementation of CEDAW. Together, CEDAW and the Platform for Action aim to seek the elimination of discrimination against women on the one hand, and to ensure the achievement of equality for women on the other. It is widely accepted that lack of access to childcare services disproportionately impacts on women in a number of the critical areas.

### **Overarching UK Strategies**

This section outlines the overarching UK Strategies which have a bearing on how childcare is addressed by the four regions of the UK.

### UK wide fiscal policies relating to childcare costs

The Government provides assistance with childcare costs through two specific instruments: the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit and the childcare voucher scheme. Working Tax Credit is a means tested benefit that supplements low incomes. Parents may be eligible to claim the childcare element which can help to meet up to 80% of their registered childcare costs.

The childcare voucher scheme works as an employee benefit, whereby parents do not have to pay tax or National Insurance Contributions (NIC) on the first £55 per week, or £243 per month of their salary. These fiscal benefits help parents to reduce the costs of their childcare.

There is also assistance with childcare costs through a number of employment and education programmes across the four regions. The New Deal programme was the first mandatory programme to be introduced for the long-term unemployed. It recognised that childcare costs were a key barrier to accessing employment and assistance with childcare costs were provided through various New Deal programmes. They are not considered within the breadth of this particular piece of research as we recognise that this is an area of research that requires special attention.

### The Child Poverty Act 2010

The Child Poverty Act enshrines in law the Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020. This legislation ensures sustained action must be taken to tackle child poverty by the current and future Governments, by the devolved administrations, and by local Government and their partners (DCSF, 2010). The Act requires a UK wide Child

Poverty Strategy to be formed, as well as individual Strategies for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Welsh Assembly has already introduced similar requirements, and is therefore exempt from this component of the Act. The Strategies will set out what action is needed to meet the targets in the Act. There are four UK wide targets to be met by 2020. The targets are based on the proportion of children living in:

- relative low income (whether the incomes of the poorest families are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole) - target is less than 10%.
- combined low income and material deprivation (a wider measure of people's living standards) - target is less than 5%.
- absolute low income (whether the poorest families are seeing their income rise in real terms) - target is less than 5%.
- persistent poverty (length of time in poverty) - target is to be set in regulations by 2015.

The Strategies are to be structured on the eight 'building blocks'. The eight building blocks are:

1. Education: ensuring access to quality education for all children and young people and narrowing the gap in attainment of different groups
2. Health: improving physical and mental health outcomes for all children and parents, reducing health inequalities and improving support for those with disabilities and poorer health
3. Family: reducing pressures on families and strengthening their capabilities by providing as much support as possible.



4. Housing: ensuring all children grow up in decent homes that support their health and education.

5. Neighbourhoods and 6. Communities: taking action on neighbourhoods, play and green spaces, transport and crime to ensure all children can thrive in safe and cohesive communities, with equal access to work, cultural and leisure opportunities.

7. Adult Skills: building on successes in education to ensure all adults have the skills necessary to enter, stay and progress in work.

8. Employment: ensuring more parents can enter, stay and progress in work (including childcare), to help parents balance work and family life and ensure those in work can escape poverty.

Contained within Adult Skills and Employment is the recognition of childcare as a means of helping parents to access and stay in employment. The Act establishes an accountability framework to make sure progress is continuously made, and the 2020 goal is met. The Act will also establish a Child Poverty Commission, which will provide advice to the Government in preparing its Child Poverty Strategies.

Devolution has opened up scope for policy innovation. Each part of the UK now has new policies which have built on the pattern of differentiated policy provision that existed prior to devolution. We will now focus on the main legislative and policy developments in each of the devolved regions of the UK relating to childcare.

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<sup>i</sup> The Welfare Reform Act 2009. Introduced in November 2009 it currently applies to England, Wales and Scotland. It is currently being considered within the Northern Ireland Assembly. The provisions include:

Abolition of income support - The Act sets out the framework necessary for the future abolition of income support, and the movement of claimants of that benefit

to jobseeker's allowance with differing degrees of conditionality, or to employment and support allowance.

Work for your benefit schemes - These mandatory schemes will be piloted for long-term jobseekers and some jobseekers who are likely to benefit from the scheme at an earlier stage. The scheme aims to give jobseekers the opportunity to develop their work skills through undertaking full-time work-experience.

Lone parents and partners of benefit recipients - Parents with younger children (those not required to sign on) and partners of benefit recipients will be placed in a 'Progression to Work' group. Those placed in this group are not expected to immediately return to work but will instead be given a "personalised conditionality regime which is tailored to the individual's circumstances, so that preparation for work becomes a natural progression rather than a sudden step up". Those in the Progression to Work group are required to undertake action planning and work-related activities.

Employment and support allowance (ESA) claimants - Provision is made in the Act to direct and to undertake a specific work-related activity in certain circumstances. This extends the provision in section 13 of the Welfare Reform Act 2007 which requires ESA claimants (with the exception of those in the support group) to undertake a work-related activity of their choice.

## **Part 2**

*Examining childcare  
policy and legislation  
across the four  
regions*

*England*

**Introduction**

Until New Labour came into power in 1997, childcare did not register in the policy mainstream in England (Lewis and Lee, 2002: 3). In the years previous to the first National Childcare Strategy, the state provision of childcare was aimed primarily at children found to be at risk or in need of care. This was largely due to prominent social attitudes concerned with the roles of men and women, and therefore mothers and fathers, in the labour market. For most of the twentieth century social ideas about the male breadwinner and the stay-at-home mother underpinned social policies. It was not until the concept of dual earner families became conventional that social policy began to reflect these changes and an emphasis on policy for working families and childcare became prominent. The Labour Government was the first to make early years and childcare a priority.

In comparison with the wider European Union (EU), for many years the United Kingdom (UK) has lagged behind many other European countries in terms of recognising the need for childcare and putting policies and plans into place to ensure that childcare provision is adequate and available to parents (Lewis, 2002: 219).

This section will explore the key developments of the Childcare Strategy in England and Wales from its launch in 1998 until the present day. It will then explore the social and economic changes and developments over this period of time, asking if the Childcare Strategy has influenced social statistics, including the number of childcare places and employment statistics for different social groups.

**Childcare Policy and Legislation in England**

In any discussion of childcare policy in England under New Labour Government, it is important to first mention the distinction between care and education. New Labour Government's initial top priority has always undoubtedly been education. Education would give children the best start in life. Early learning was closely connected with this aim as it was seen as the 'key to ensuring that each child had the best possible start to their education' (Rahilly and Johnston, 2002:484). For New Labour the trend towards the integration of formal education, early years and childcare provision is rooted in this priority. For this reason it is easily identifiable through a closer analysis of the childcare policies, that childcare provision and early years education are often intertwined when provision is discussed and that the Government's focus is largely on education. To explain this issue the first Green Paper *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* states:

There is no sensible distinction between good early education and care: both enhance children's social and intellectual development in a safe caring environment.

(DfEE, 1998a: 10)

With the later development of the Early Years Foundation Stage<sup>i</sup> the line between care and early years education became more blurred. This will become apparent in a detailed description of the development of childcare policy. The following section details the childcare strategies and legislation, explaining their aims, plans and attributed results. It will track the development of childcare policy from 1998 to the present day and the thought process underpinning the policy.

Meeting the Childcare Challenge 1998

*Meeting the Childcare Challenge* was the first Government paper to directly address childcare. Launched in 1998 to set out the framework for a national childcare strategy, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfEE, 1998) represents a turning point in the focus and direction of the Government's view on the importance and necessity of childcare provision. The paper addressed two policy objectives, to support families (in particular disadvantaged families) during children's early years to produce better life chances for children and also to enable parents to enter the labour market (DfEE, 1998a:16).

For the first time the Government realised its responsibility in addressing the issue of childcare not only to bring the UK to the same standard as other European countries but also for parents:

For too long, the UK has lagged behind in developing good quality, affordable and accessible childcare...It is up to parents to decide what sort of childcare they want for their children. This is not the matter for the Government. But it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that parents have access to services to enable them to make genuine choices.

(DfEE, 1998a:5-6)

*Meeting the Childcare Challenge* identified three key problem areas which needed to be addressed by the National Childcare Strategy. Firstly quality - the current quality of provision varied widely. Secondly affordability - the cost of childcare was high and often families struggled to afford the costs. Finally accessibility - there was a lack of childcare provision. In 1998 there were 5.1 million children under eight living in England, but only 830,000 childcare places (DfEE, 1998a:4).

The Government developed a series of plans to address these problem areas. These are referred to as the three steps of the National Childcare Strategy, which aim to ensure the following:

good quality, affordable childcare for children aged 0 to 14 in every neighbourhood...the Strategy is founded on a commitment to promoting the well-being of children, offering equal opportunities to parents, especially women and supporting parents in balancing work and family life.

(DfEE, 1998a:7)

The first step was to raise the quality of care. This would be achieved by the creation of 25 new Early Excellence Centres<sup>ii</sup> to create new standards for early education and childcare. Secondly, the Strategy aimed to make childcare more affordable. The childcare element of working tax credit would be created to help parents afford childcare. Finally, the Government planned to make childcare more accessible by increasing the number of registered places and improving information services for parents. The aim was to create 50,000 more childcare places in England and in addition to this, plans were also in place to develop free pre-school education places for four year olds. Out of school care places were also to be expanded over the next five years. A new national helpline would also be implemented to help link parents with local childcare information services.

Childcare Partnerships were to be developed, based on the existing Early Years Development Partnerships<sup>iii</sup>, integrating early education and childcare.

The National Childcare Strategy would be delivered by the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) to meet local needs. The EYDCPs would be attached to Local Authorities (LAs) and made up of



childcare providers from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Each Partnership is responsible in their LA area to plan education for children below school age, and childcare for children aged from 0 to 14 years. £300 million of funding was required to help meet these goals, including £3 million for the creation of the extra pre-school places and £170 million to increase the number of out of school places. Much of the funding for the out of school places would be directed from the Lottery's New Opportunities Fund.

The first National Childcare Strategy was successful in increasing the number of childcare places and securing funding for the childcare sector:

- Between 1998 and 2004 the number of childcare places increased by 525,000 places, benefiting around 1.1 million children in England (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004).
- 348,000 out of school places were created.
- 524 new Sure Start programmes were developed in England catering for over 400,000 children. This was an initiative also informed by the White Paper *Fairness at Work* (DTI, 1998) to promote partnerships which would coordinate integrated packages of childcare, healthcare, early learning and play for pre-school children in disadvantaged areas.
- Government expenditure on Sure Start programmes, childcare and early years trebled during the same period.
- 12.5 hours a week of free pre-school education was introduced for all four year olds in England.
- The Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI) was developed in 20% of the most disadvantaged communities to provide high quality childcare services. 1,279 nurseries opened providing over 45,000 new childcare places for disabled children.
- High quality regulations were introduced and regulated by OFSTED and the national helpline was created (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004).

In addition to the above, in 1998 the New Deal for Lone Parents was implemented and available to lone parents with school age and pre-school age children to help them return to work. Also, to address the affordability of childcare, Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) incorporated the childcare element to help families afford the cost of childcare (Rahilly and Johnston, 2002).

*Meeting the Childcare Challenge* made many improvements to childcare structures in England; however it was not without its criticisms. Both the Strategy Unit (2002) and the National Audit Office (2004) reviewed the Strategy and its progress. In 2002, after an interdepartmental review of childcare, it was decided that more funding was needed to enhance and increase childcare provision. It was later announced that funding for childcare would more than double between 2002/03 and 2005/06 in order to create 250,000 childcare places by 2006 (Strategy Unit, 2002). In 2004, the National Audit Office published a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General examining the childcare provision available to children below the compulsory school age (NAO, 2004). The report evaluates the progress made in the sector since 1998. The report notes that between 1998 and 2004 the Government spent £14 billion on early years services. In the year 2002-03 the Government spent £3.6 billion. However, to place this in context, on an annual basis parents pay £3 billion towards childcare costs.

In the 1998-2004 period, the Government boasted that the number of childcare places had grown significantly. However, in the same period of time 301,000 places closed. This is a substantial decrease in places. *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* also commented on the variation of provision between LAs.

The National Audit Office gave several recommendations to make further progress in improving provision. This included an extended focus on more

provision throughout the day and flexible hours. The report suggests realising the potential of childminders to meet this need. The National Audit Office comments that this could be achieved with minimum additional Government funding. The Office also recommended that LAs should work with schools to encourage the development of additional early years services.

To improve sustainability, the report recommended that LAs provide childcare providers with business planning assistance as the Government's investment in new provision is at risk if providers are not viable once start-up funding runs out. The report shows concern about the quick expansion in the sector and the necessity, in the face of this, of maintaining the quality of childcare settings. The Office identified the need to encourage childcare providers to improve the quality of the care, for example by joining a quality assurance scheme and making use of available curriculum guidance.

Each of these recommendations was taken into consideration in the development of the ten-year Childcare Strategy published later in 2004, which will now be examined.

Choice for parents, the best start for children: Ten Year Strategy for Childcare 2004

*Meeting the Childcare Challenge* established the structures needed in order to improve childcare services in England. It laid a firm foundation and paved the way for further childcare plans and strategies, in particular the ten-year Childcare Strategy for childcare *Choice for parents, the best start for children*.

The ten-year Childcare Strategy looks back on the aims of the National Childcare Strategy of 1998 and the many positive changes it influenced.

Considering the developments of previous years, *Choice for Parents, the best start for children* (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004) was aimed at facing the challenges which still needed to be addressed. Its main aim was to 'set out a ten-year strategy to create a sustainable framework for childcare provision and support to balance work and family' (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004: 3).

The ten-year Strategy is framed by four objectives; choice, availability, quality and affordability. The objectives were important for ensuring that the Strategy gave children the best start in life, allowed parents to reconcile work and family life and that families' expectations for control over their lives were met. The following plans were set out to fulfil the four objectives.

#### *Choice*

The Strategy aimed to increase family friendly working policies and improve the systems of advice and information offered to parents, providing better support through children's centres.

The Government intended that LAs would have an increased role in offering advice and information to parents through the Children's Information Services. Their aim was to provide parents with the information to make informed choices about childcare by providing access to Ofsted reports and other relevant information about specific providers. They would also create links with other relevant organisations to develop a network of existing services. Children's Centres would be developed to address local needs. They would raise standards of care and integrate care, education, family support and health services. The new Children's Centres would build on and re-brand Early Excellence Centres, Sure Start local programmes and Neighbourhood Nurseries to encompass a more comprehensive service (NAO, 2004: 17) and become centres of local

advice and information. The Strategy established the aim that by 2010 all families will have access to a Sure Start Children's Centre. This amounts to around 3,500 centres, each focused on specific local needs<sup>iv</sup>.

### *Availability*

The Government's childcare vision encompasses pre-school childcare and school age childcare. In order to give every parent a childcare choice which suits their lifestyle.

Pre-school provision would ideally complement the guidelines set out in *Every Child Matters* to improve outcomes for children. Sure Start children's centres are central to this. Also, all three and four year old children, from 2006, would be entitled to a free pre-school place constituting 12.5 hours per week over 38 weeks. By 2007 this entitlement would be expanded to 15 hours a week and 20 hours per week by 2010.

By 2010, the Strategy aimed to provide all parents of children aged five to 11 years old with school-based childcare between eight am and six pm. This extended school provision would assist working parents of older children. This also extends to secondary school age children. A further aim states that all secondary school pupils should have access to extended schools services by 2010.

To deliver these services LAs would have an extended duty to ensure that there is sufficient provision to meet local childcare needs. This duty became legislation in 2006 with the Childcare Act, which will be discussed in the next subsection. A Transformation Fund of £125 million a year from April 2006 was to be supplied to invest in childcare. Childcare places also have to be socially inclusive, LAs must also ensure that there is

provision for all children, particularly those in the most disadvantaged areas.

### *Quality*

To improve the quality of childcare provision, the Government identified two areas to be addressed: one, reform of the quality of the childcare workforce, and two, reform of the inspection framework.

A commitment was given to ensure that childcare provision must be of good quality to deliver improved child outcomes. For this reason the Government aimed to reform the quality of the childcare workforce. This involved plans to implement a new qualification and career structure<sup>v</sup>. The framework for inspection of childcare providers would also be improved. By 2008, all LAs were expected to have Directors of Children's Services and Children's Trusts in place.

### *Affordability*

To improve affordability for low to middle income families, the Government would take the following steps. Firstly, from April 2005, the Government aimed to increase the childcare element of working tax credit to help more parents afford the cost of childcare, it would also extend the provision of free pre-school places. In the same year it would increase the savings on employer-supported childcare for parents. The cost of childcare in London was also to be targeted, as costs in the capital were higher than in other parts of England<sup>vi</sup>.

It is easy to see the parallels between the National Audit Office's recommendations (2004) and the plans of the Strategy, particularly in the areas of quality of childcare provision, affordability, the role of schools and the role of LAs.

*Attributed results*

By 2009 the Strategy had met many of its predicted goals. The Government's *Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare: Building on the 10-Year Strategy* (DCSF, 2009a) paper shows that by 2009:

- There were almost 3,000 Sure Start Children's Centres providing support for almost 2.3 million children. This is only 500 places short of the 2010 target.
- The provision of free pre-school places was extended for all three and four year olds for 38 weeks of the year. The plan for providing 15 hours free is still being developed and is only available in 34 areas, however, all three and four year olds should be able to avail of 15 hours from September 2010 (DCSF, 2010a).
- There was an increase of 57% more after-school places in 2007 than in 2003 for school age children.
- More than 15,000 schools provided access to a full range of extended services, including provision from eight am to six pm for primary school pupils.
- The quality of childcare has also improved with the development of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This is a curriculum for all children, up to the age of five, in registered childcare, to ensure that they benefit from a play-based framework for early learning. The qualifications for Childcarers have also improved as a result of the Strategy.

- The Government successfully changed the childcare element of working tax credit to give financial support to 72% more families than in 2004.
- The savings on employer-supported childcare were also increased to cover both tax and National Insurance exemptions in 2005.

Overall, the *Choice for parents, the best start for children* ten-year Strategy has met many of its aims and successfully implemented positive changes over the last six years. The level of childcare provision has increased dramatically, the quality of care has improved and childcare has become more affordable for many families through the changes in tax credits. However, perhaps the most positive result of the Strategy is its influence on creating the first ever Childcare Act in 2006.

#### Childcare Act 2006

The Childcare Act passed into law on 11 July 2006 (HM Government, 2006). It takes forward some of the key commitments from the ten-year Childcare Strategy. For the first time childcare was a statutory obligation. The Act includes extended duties for LAs, the need to improve outcomes for children and also ensuring the improved quality of care.

#### *Improvement of young children's well-being*

Building on *Every Child Matters*<sup>vii</sup> (DCSF, 2009b) the Childcare Act aims to improve the outcomes for children up to five years of age and reduce inequalities. This underpins the Childcare Strategy's aim of having a Sure Start Children's Centre in every community by 2010. From 2008, LAs have the duty to improve the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes in their area and reducing the inequalities between children from different backgrounds.



*Duties of Local Authorities*

The Childcare Act imposes on LAs the statutory duty to ensure that there is ample childcare provision in their area to meet the needs of local working parents. It is their responsibility to plan, support and commission childcare. They also must secure the free minimum of early learning and care for all three and four year olds.

Under the Act, LAs are also under the obligation to provide information to parents to ensure that every parent has the information to make informed choices about childcare related issues. This service is delivered through the Childcare Information Service and must be pro-active in reaching parents who may have difficulty accessing the service. From 2008, LAs have a duty to provide information and advice to parents of children and young people up to the age of 20. LAs must collect and collate information about young children to inform funding and support their duties under the Act. Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSA) must be carried out by LAs on a regular basis to allow them to assess the demand for childcare, children's services and how to better meet the gaps in provision and the needs of parents and carers.

*Quality of Childcare*

LAs are responsible for introducing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to support childcare providers in delivering quality integrated care and education for children up to five years of age. The regulation of childcare is undergoing reform as part of the Act to raise the quality and standards of care. All childcare providers (providing care for children under eight years old) are required to register on the Early Years Register through Ofsted and also to deliver the EYFS. Childcare for school age children also has to meet stricter regulations and standards.

In addition to the above, in 2007 the Government announced that LAs would also be required to use a single local formula for funding Early Years provision from 2010. However, due to the fear of implementing an underdeveloped strategy this date has been delayed by one year until April 2011 (DCSF, 2009b).

In conclusion, the Childcare Act is pioneering legislation; it is arguable that the new duties placed on the LAs have influenced the most important change in the development of childcare as a Government issue. For the first time authorities in local areas have a legal responsibility to ensure that childcare needs are met. Since 2006 LAs have worked towards fulfilling their statutory responsibilities by enforcing and working towards the agenda and aims set out by the Childcare Act 2006.

#### The Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007)

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) disbanded in June 2007. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) took over its responsibilities. At this time a Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families was appointed. The first Secretary of State was Ed Balls. He was responsible for coordinating work across Government relevant to youth justice, the respect agenda and family policy, while also taking over responsibility for education policy up to the age of 19 in England from the DfES. Dawn Primarolo was Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families (DCSF, 2010b). Since 2007, childcare, family policy and education has been operated by the same Government department. Due to the recent election (May 2010) and the new Coalition Government the Department of Children, Schools and Families has been disbanded and replaced with a new Department of Education. The new Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families is Michael Gove. The impact this change will have on the future of childcare and early years is still unknown.

The Children's Plan 2007

In 2007, the Government published *The Children's Plan* (DCSF, 2007). Its aim was to make England 'the best place in the world for...children and young people to grow up' (2007:3) and to put the needs of families, children and young people at the centre of all future plans. Although it does not exclusively address childcare, in order to meet this aim childcare is one area which is addressed. The plan focused on the most disadvantaged children and families, to give them the same opportunities as others.

The goals set out to address childcare and early years can be grouped under three headings: early years and childcare provision for disadvantaged children and families, quality of provision and joined-up services.

*Early years and childcare provision for disadvantaged children and families*

To address disadvantage and close the gap in educational achievement the Plan committed to investing £100 million to extend the early education and childcare places to 20,000 two year olds in disadvantaged communities. The quality of childcare in disadvantaged areas is also targeted. Children's Centres aim to help families through a series of programmes and services (DCSF, 2010c)<sup>viii</sup>. As a result of the *Children's Plan* Sure Start Children's Centres are required to have a minimum of two outreach workers to assist families and allow Sure Start to expand its reach into the community and target those most in need.

Access to childcare for disabled children is also specifically targeted by the Plan so that children can benefit from early education and that their parents can enter the labour market. In addition to the funding package of £340 million to transform disabled children's services through the

Government's *Aiming High for Disabled Children Strategy*, the *Children's Plan* committed £90 million for funding short break services from 2008-11. This brings the funding allocation for disabled children to £430 million (CDSA, 2008:6). Teenage parents will also be targeted through the Care to Learn scheme to help them balance childcare and their education.

#### *Quality of provision*

According to the Plan, a further £117 million was to be invested between 2007 and 2010 in the early years workforce. Stricter regulations would also be enforced to ensure that appropriate people are employed as part of the children's workforce. Furthermore, plans are being developed to raise the general qualification level of the early years workforce. To ensure that children have the best start in life the Children's Plan details that childcare and early years settings must be of a consistently high standard. To improve outcomes the Government will develop tools to help settings measure and track children's development during their time in the childcare setting.

#### *Joined-up services for children and families*

0-7 Partnerships were to be developed to provide joined-up services between schools, Sure Start Children's Centres, early years and childcare providers. This would ensure a seamless service between each of these settings to create a higher quality all round service for families. £10 million is dedicated to increasing this service. Extended funding will be committed to increasing extended services in schools; £1.3 billion was to be dedicated between 2007 and 2010. Schools must also become part of the 'joined-up services' to provide specialist services to children. Such services include health, early years and childcare, behaviour, youth and crime prevention services.

The *Children's Plan* addresses the needs of children and families, particularly the most disadvantaged children, in England. The *Children's Plan* links in with both the National Childcare Strategy (2004) and the *Childcare Act* (2006). All three work together to produce results and make important changes. Therefore, the results of the *Children's Plan* to date are a combination of all three initiatives. For example in 2009 the report *The Children's Plan – Two Years On* (DCSF, 2009c) showed that there were over 3,000 Sure Start Children's Centres, a free early learning and childcare place for disadvantaged two year olds, 4,000 people trained as early years professionals and 93% of schools offering extended services. Although The *Children's Plan* no doubt contributed to these developments it cannot take sole responsibility for the outcomes achieved.

In conclusion, the above strategies have clear parallels with the *Children's Plan*. Each strategy and the *Childcare Act* focus exclusively on children and their families and developing services around their needs. It is clear that Government constantly reviews and updates its strategies. *Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare: Building on the 10 Year Strategy* is the most recent document to be produced by the Government that focuses on the Childcare Strategy.

#### Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare: Building on the 10 Year Strategy 2009

In 2009 the Government published *Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare* (DCSF, 2009a) which aimed to review the ten-year Strategy since its development in 2004. This Strategy builds on the progress of the previous few years and aims to set out new steps needed to address the existing challenges:

In 2004 our 10-Year Childcare Strategy set out an ambitious vision to radically change early learning and childcare in this

country. Five years on we want to take stock, and address new and future challenges.

(DCSF, 2009a:5)

The Strategy is structured around five different areas: providing support for families to support children, services for 0-14 year olds, the quality of early years provision, information for families, providers and Government and financial support and managing the market.

*Support families to support children*

This area includes the support networks for families which are in turn necessary for supporting children. It involves expanding and developing Childcare Information Services, Sure Start Children's Centres and Extended Schools to take into account the needs of all parents and families. Providing research on the benefits of early years is another area to target.

*What's on offer for 0-14s*

It was recommended that LAs should draw up action plans to ensure they fulfil their duties as set out in the Childcare Act to put in place childcare for 0-14 year olds in their area, including a particular focus on the five to 14 age group. They must also ensure that they offer free early learning places to the most disadvantaged two year olds in their area. Another measure is to encourage childcare providers to register with Ofsted to enable parents to pay with childcare vouchers and tax credits.

*Quality of Early Years Provision*

The Strategy aims to ensure that anyone working in early years provision has a relevant qualification and continues to develop the quality of childcare over the next few years<sup>ix</sup>.

*Information for families, providers and Government*

This section addresses the quantity and quality of information gathered by LAs to provide to parents regarding childcare provision in their area. The *Next Steps Strategy* recognises a need for more detailed information including prices of services, vacancies and staff qualification levels (providers will be expected to supply this information). This more detailed information will be accessible to parents in a central location through an information system for parents and providers (ISPP) project. In addition to this a price comparison website will also be developed. Helplines will also be streamlined to give parents a more comprehensive service, particularly in the area of the tax credits system. A Ready Reckoner<sup>x</sup> will be developed to assist advisors and parents.

*Financial support and managing the market*

The Strategy also targets the affordability of childcare. One method of addressing this issue is to evaluate the current tax credits system which will then be tailored to the needs of parents. More help is to be given to the families of disabled children, particularly in London where the cost of childcare is historically higher than other areas.

Comprehensive guidance will be issued for parents to help them discover the financial support available to them. LAs will be responsible for actively managing the market to ensure that it meets parents' needs. Information gathered as part of the previous section, information for

families, providers and Government, will be used to strengthen LAs' applications to inform Government funding allocations.

Since *Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare* was published, its plans have been put into action. In the short space of time since it was implemented a Family Information Service has been developed to create a central location for parents to find local childcare. Family Information Direct was launched early in 2010 and provides parents with information throughout their children's lives. Undoubtedly the structure and network of LAs and their statutory duties are benefiting childcare provision as they are ensuring that such provision is sufficient in each area. *Next Steps* complements their duties as it shows the Government's commitment to childcare and its benefits for children and families.

#### Childcare - a policy mainstream issue

There is no question that childcare features highly in England's policy mainstream. Each of the strategies and legislation mentioned above is carefully developed to assess and target areas of need. Childcare is recognised as an economic and social issue which has benefits for children, parents and families. There has been a progressive timeline of strategic direction for English policy to address childcare services. The Government constantly reviews and renews childcare goals and plans to ensure that childcare is constantly addressed. However, has the Government's reform and extended focus on childcare influenced social trends? It is to this issue that the report now turns.



**Childcare Strategy and social change**

The Government's reform of childcare has been driven by three central principles. Firstly, the importance of ensuring every child has the best possible start in life. Secondly, the need to respond to changing patterns of employment and ensure that parents, particularly mothers, can work and progress their careers. Thirdly, the legitimate expectations of families that they should be in control of the choices they make in balancing work and family life (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004:2).

Each target and plan developed through the National Childcare Strategy has been developed to influence positive social change in each of the three areas. This section will explore the changes in social trends from 1998 under each of the three headings and ask if the Government's strategies have influenced them. The three principles will now be addressed to help determine if the Government's reform has influenced social trends.

A Sure Start for children

The importance of ensuring that every child has the best possible start in life.

(HM Treasury *et al*, 2004:5)

The Government's aim to give every child the best start in life through the provision of good quality early years education and childcare is admirable. The integration of early education and childcare through free pre-school education places, the Early Years Foundation Stage, a commitment to good quality childcare settings and Sure Start Children's Centres all add to this aim. The Daycare Trust comments that quality pre-school care provides a place for children to flourish by supporting their development (Symonds and Kelly, 2005:14-15). To date, as described above, many

developments have taken place to meet the Government's aim. That said, while some progress has been made, there are also some criticisms.

Every three and four year old is entitled to a free pre-school education place. In some areas two year olds are also eligible. Plans to increase the entitlement from 12.5 hours a week to 15 hours a week are to be implemented in September 2010. Figures show that the percentage of three and four year olds using free early education places increased from 85% in 2002 to 98% in 2006 (DfES, 2007). In early 2010, 95% of families took advantage of the free entitlements for three and four year olds (DCSF, 2010a). This is a popular policy. However, to date the provision has been inflexible in how the free hours can be taken. Furthermore childcare settings often do not receive sufficient funding to cover the cost of each childcare place, placing them in financial difficulty. Since the dawn of the extension of the provision the Government has issued a revised code of practice for the free early years entitlement. The statutory guidance details how LAs should guarantee parents will have greater flexibility in how they use the free offer of 15 hours a week, spread throughout 38 weeks, when it is implemented in September 2010. The Code also confirms that from 2012, parents can spread the free entitlement over one year, allowing parents more ease in balancing childcare with employment or training (DCSF, 2010a).

This development will undoubtedly benefit parents; however it also presents challenges for childcare providers in meeting the cost implications of the expanded entitlements. In *Children's Nurseries* Laing and Buisson showed that in 2008 61.5% of 6,000 nurseries surveyed could not meet their costs (Laing and Buisson, 2009). Thus meeting costs will become even more difficult in September 2010.

Purnima Tanuku, Chief Executive of the National Day Nurseries Association, commented in *Nursery World*:

A significant proportion of nurseries continue to face serious issues from the under-funding of the free entitlement. Many are doubly concerned with the move to a universal flexible 15-hour offer...the free entitlement represents a Catch-22 situation for many - they cannot afford to continue and sustain losses, yet equally they cannot afford the loss of business that would come if they pulled out of the scheme.

(*Nursery World*, 2010)

LAs must rectify this situation as the quality of settings may suffer despite the childcare strategies' focus on quality of care. In 2006/07, 4% of childcare settings in England were graded by Ofsted as 'inadequate' and around one third of settings were only rated 'satisfactory' (Waldfoegel and Garnham, 2008: 10). This is not up to the expectant standards the Government has set.

The Early Years Funding reform planned by the Government for 2011 has also received some criticism from Childcare providers. The formula is to ensure that, through the dedicated Schools Grant, money for three and four year olds is distributed fairly. Nursery schools providing additional services fear that they will lose much of their funding due to this. Furthermore, nursery chains spread across various LAs may have problems accessing the necessary funding. The qualifications nursery staff hold may also have an impact on the funds nurseries receive (Watson, 2009).

Sure Start Children's Centres are the cornerstone of the Government's strategy for improving children's outcomes. There has been a proliferation in Children's Centres since 2004. By 2006, there were around 800 designated Children's Centres which increased to 2,900 in 2008 (DCSF, 2009a). By September 2009 there were 3,109 Sure Start Children's Centres. This was only 391 Centres off the 2010 target (NAO, 2010). This target was successfully met in March 2010 (Number10, 2010).

However, Both Moss (2004) and Glass (2005) make the point that in the early period of the Government's focus on childcare, the intention was to provide services for children, to encourage their development. Sure Start programmes and therefore Sure Start Children's Centres underpinned this aim. However, as time has passed the focus has changed and now is aimed at getting parents back into the labour market:

The early Sure Start documents make very little reference to 'childcare', in the sense of somewhere where children can be looked after to enable their parents to work; it was all about child development...[however] Sure Start, originally a child centred programme, became embroiled in the childcare agenda and the need to roll out as many childcare places as possible to support maternal employment.

(Ball and Vincent, 2005:563)

Perhaps this illustrates a shift in the focus of childcare provision from 1998 to the present day. The second broad aim of the National Childcare Strategy was to help parents access work and training. Perhaps this has taken more importance as time has moved on. Other critics will argue not only this, but that the Government's main aim has always been economic. This will be discussed fully below.

Despite the above criticisms, the Government now provides a free pre-school place for all three and four years olds. Furthermore the development of the Early Years Foundation Stage further enhances the benefits of childcare for children's development. The increase in the provision of childcare across England means that more children have the opportunity to access care and reap the benefits.

The Daycare Trust promotes the benefits of high quality childcare, stating:

High quality childcare improves the life chances of all children – especially disadvantaged children, children from poorer homes with fewer opportunities. It boosts children's learning and gives them the chance to mix with others from a wide variety of backgrounds.

(Daycare Trust, 2009b: 3)

The Trust's report *The Benefits of High Quality Childcare* (2009b) states that research shows that good quality pre-school education for children aged between three and five years old helps them achieve more at primary school level and beyond. The report acknowledges research by the Institute of Education which showed that children's achievements in language, reading and numeracy increased in proportion to the length of time they spent in pre-school. Furthermore, by the time children who attended pre-school reached the age of five they were between four and six months ahead of children who did not attend pre-school (2009b: 4-5). Previous research, also by the Daycare Trust, in 2004 shows similar results. Quality pre-school care supports social development and secures cognitive development. It also contributes to an increase in lifetime earnings and economic productivity (Symonds and Kelly, 2005: 14-15).

### Childcare and patterns of employment

The need to respond to changing patterns of employment and ensure that parents, particularly mothers, can work and progress their careers.

(HM Treasury *et al*, 2004:5)

The second broad aim of the National Childcare Strategy is to ensure parents, in particular mothers, can work and progress their careers. The availability of childcare is essential to this. Since the National Childcare Strategy was introduced in 1998, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of women and lone parents in employment. The number of workless households has also decreased.

### *Women in employment*

The employment rate has increased for all women over the previous few decades, however, for mothers it has increased particularly rapidly — more than tripling between 1951 and 2008. In 1951, about one in every six mothers was in employment; by 2008 this had risen to four in six (DCSF, 2010d).

Yet, mothers are still seen as the main carers and this affects their employment rates. This is particularly evident in a comparison with fathers' employment rates. Having dependent children has a clear effect on the employment of both men and women. Fathers are more likely to be working than other men (82% compared with 76%), yet, mothers are less likely to work than other women (64% compared with 75%) (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004). However, over the last decade, the employment rates of women with dependent children increased from 57% in 1992 to 64% in 2008 (DCSF, 2009a).

Furthermore, working women with children are more likely to be working part-time than other women. 59% of mothers in couples work part-time and 41% work full-time. By contrast, only 32% of employed women without dependent children under 16 work part-time, while 68% work full-time (DCSF, 2009a).

The age of the dependent children is also a factor in mothers' employment. 62% of mothers in a couple whose youngest child is under five are in employment, compared to 82% of mothers whose youngest child is between 12 and 15 (DCSF, 2009a). Therefore the need for childcare is extremely high for mothers with pre-school children, but this is not to say that out of school childcare is not necessary as well.

Another noteworthy point is the difference in the working patterns of women according to their household structure. Mothers in couples are much more likely to work than lone parents, especially when their children are pre-school age. In 2004, 58% of mothers in couples with children under five were in employment, compared with only 33% of lone parents (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004). The gap in activity rates between mothers in couples and lone mothers closes as children get older. When their youngest children are between 16 and 18 years of age, 80% of mothers in couples work compared with 72% of lone parents. These employment rates are higher than the equivalent rates for women without children, which are 77% for women in couples and 67% for single women (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004).

#### *Lone parents in employment*

In 2009, 24% of children in England lived with a lone parent (DCSF, 2010d). Since 1997 the number of lone parents in employment has grown from 45% to 56% in 2008 (DCSF, 2009a). The age of the dependent child/children is a factor in lone parent employment rates.

Parents with younger children are less likely to be in employment compared to those with older children, this is a similar trend to that of working mothers with young children mentioned above. However, the trend is not so noticeable in lone parents as across the ages the employment rate of lone parents is consistently below that of mothers in a couple (DCSF, 2009a).

Lone parents who are mothers are more likely to work part-time (55%) than full-time (45%) (DCSF, 2009a). Although the percentage of lone parents in employment is growing, of the total number of workless households, the workless household rate was higher for lone parent households (40.4%), than any other household type (Office for National Statistics, 2009).

### *Worklessness*

In 2009, 5.9 million children lived in working households. However, 1.9 million children lived in workless households. This number has increased by 170,000 since 2008. Overall, the proportion of children in workless households has fallen from 18.7% in 1997 to 16.8% in 2009 (DCSF, 2010d).

In general, since 1997 married/cohabiting fathers have had the highest employment rate. This has remained at around 90% consistently from 1997 to 2009. People without dependent children have the next highest employment rate over the same period of time. Married/cohabiting mothers have a lower employment rate, however lone parents have a much lower rate by comparison (Office for National Statistics, 2009). The group with the most significant increase in employment figures is undoubtedly lone parents. From 1997 the employment rate has grown by



11 percentage points, compared to a three percentage point increase in women's employment rates.

It is interesting to note that the gap between male and female economic activity rates is now only 8.3%, compared to 35.7% in 1971 (TUC, 2010: 11). A recent study by TUC recorded that 41% of economically inactive women (25.6% of women are economically inactive) who want a job are looking after a home or family (TUC, 2010: 13). The same study showed that over 1.2 million economically inactive women said they would like a job. TUC concludes that this figure 'is likely to reflect factors including unmet demand for more flexible working and for quality affordable childcare' (TUC, 2010: 11).

Overall, the employment rates for mothers, lone parents and workless households have changed positively over the last few years. It could be argued that the National Childcare Strategy has influenced this change and if this is the case then this is a positive development and a success for the Strategy. Helping parents enter the labour market was only one of the three aims of the Childcare Strategy; however, some critics argue that this is the Strategy's main aim. In 2003, before the ten-year Strategy was introduced, Duncan *et al* said that the Government's vision of the National Childcare Strategy was seen in economic terms:

Affordable childcare is seen as a matter of enabling parents (for which read mothers) to take up paid work. In turn, this will help reach other economic and social objectives, such as improving productivity and competitiveness, reducing child poverty, achieving greater gender equality and reducing crime.

(Duncan *et al*, 2003)

Furthermore, Duncan *et al* argue that the Government assumes that parents also share this opinion of childcare. This is a view shared by Odone, in 2009. She argues that the Government is unaware of what women actually want and is pushing women into the labour market for its own gain:

The Government has been determined to push women into work, and their children into institutionalized care. It is clear what the Government stands to gain, in economic terms, from more working women: a bigger tax base from which to draw revenue, fewer dependents on the state, the £23 billion that, according to calculations, working women bring to the economy.  
(Odone, 2009:9)

### Choice for parents

The legitimate expectations of families that they should be in control of the choices they make in balancing work and family life.

(HM Treasury *et al*, 2004:5)

The Government's final aim was to give parents control over their own work-life balance. Providing parents with available and affordable childcare would help meet this aim.

There is no doubt that the Government's measures have contributed to the increase in childcare places across England. The number of registered childcare places (including early education places) almost doubled between 1998 and 2008. In 1998, when the first National Childcare Strategy was launched, there were 830,000 childcare places (DfEE, 1998a: 4). This number had increased to 1,553,100 in 2008. However,

the number of places dropped to 1,332,976 in September 2009 (Ofsted, 2010). It dropped a further 11,000 places between September 2009 and February 2010 as a result of the recession (Defires, 2010).

In 1997, there was one childcare place for every nine children under the age of eight. In 2003, this ratio increased to one place for every five children (Daycare Trust, 2003). By 2007 there was a registered childcare place for every one in four children under eight years old (DCSF, 2007:5). In 2010, the figure is now one in three (Garnham, 2010).

However, there are still gaps apparent in the level of provision. Three particular areas stand out, namely out of school care for secondary school pupils, childcare during atypical hours and childcare for children with disabilities (Waldfogel and Garnham, 2008: 3). Furthermore under the Childcare Act 2006 LAs are required to complete sufficiency assessments in their areas. In April 2008 a selection of the evidence published showed that 93% of LAs reported gaps in provision, including out of school care, seasonal care and provision for children with special educational needs (Waldfogel and Garnham, 2008: 3).

In terms of the cost of childcare, this is still a prohibitive factor for many parents.

Since 2001, the cost of childcare provision has risen above inflation rates and increased sharply. In 2001, a full-time nursery place for a two-year old cost around £110 per week. The cost of a childminder was £90 per week (Daycare Trust, 2001).

Between 2001 and 2005 the cost of a typical nursery place for a child under two increased from £110 to £141 per week (Daycare Trust, 2005).

By 2006, the average cost of a nursery place for children under two years old was £144 a week and £134 for children two and over. Childminders' rates were lower at £132 for children under two and £129 for two year olds and older (Daycare Trust, 2006).

The 2009 Childcare Costs Survey showed that, as in previous years, the cost of provision rose above inflation. For example, a typical full-time nursery place for a child under two was £167 per week. The costs increased by 5% between 2008 and 2009, whereas inflation stood at 3.1% (Daycare Trust, 2009a).

Fees for childminders were at an average rate of £156 for a child under two and £152 for a child two and over. These increases were slightly further above inflation compared to the previous year, at 8% and 7% respectively. Childcare costs are typically higher in inner London and the south-east of England. Furthermore, nursery care is more expensive than paying for a childminder (Daycare Trust, 2009a).

By 2010, the cost of a nursery place for a child aged two and over increased by 5.1%, and by 4.8% for a child under two. The average cost for a full-time (50 hours per week) nursery place in England for a child under two is £176 a week. The gap between the cost of childminders and nurseries is narrowing, with costs for childminders rising by 9.2% for a child aged two and over and by 6.4% for a child under two. Furthermore, the average cost of an out of school club place in England has risen by 12.5% (Daycare Trust, 2010).

The Government has introduced a number of fiscal initiatives to help parents with childcare costs through tax credits and employer supported childcare. However, the brunt of the cost is paid for directly by parents themselves. In 2008, 450,000 parents claimed the Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit (HMRC, 2008). This is a significant increase of

approximately 27,000 parents claiming childcare help through Family Credit in 1999, before it was replaced by Working Tax Credits. However, in 2008 only 26% of families claiming Working Tax Credit also received the childcare element. The help parents received through Employer Supported Childcare has increased from 7% in 2004 to 19% in 2007 (Kazimirski *et al*, 2008).

HMRC snapshot data from December 2009 shows that the amount spent per day helping parents pay for childcare through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit alone is now £4.8 million (DCSF, 2010d).

The foregoing discussion raises the question: why is childcare so expensive? The Daycare Trust comments that staffing represents 80% of providers' costs, yet childcare workers remain the most poorly paid in the children's workforce. Furthermore, the cost of premises and utilities overheads may also influence large costs for childcare providers (Daycare Trust, 2008b).

Furthermore, the Government's aim to raise the quality of care in the sector impacts on costs. The Daycare Trust comments:

While we applaud the excellent progress made by the Government over the last ten years, and the effort to raise quality in the sector - such as graduate-led settings by 2015 - this will continue to increase the costs of providing childcare. These are commendable measures to be pursued, but they cannot be allowed to push up costs to parents any further - especially as high-cost childcare is only likely to hinder efforts to revitalise the economy.

(Daycare Trust as quoted in *Nursery World*, Jan 09)

The Daycare Trust therefore states that the Government should increase the amount of help parents receive with their childcare costs. For

example one recommendation is to provide subsidised (or ultimately free) out of school activities for all 11-14s and for younger children from poorer families. They also call for an increase in the proportion of help the Government gives parents through tax credits towards the cost of childcare, from the current rate of 80% of costs to 100% (Daycare Trust, as quoted in Nursery World, 2009).

This recommendation is also supported by Waldfogel and Garnham. They comment that the Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit should either be included under Child Tax Credit or as a separate programme. In addition to this the requirement of hours worked to receive this help should be eliminated to facilitate low-income families (Waldfogel and Garnham 2008: 26).

### Conclusions

The snapshot of statistical change detailed above certainly illustrates the positive changes which have occurred over the last decade. The childcare strategies and legislation aimed to increase the quality and quantity of childcare places in England, to address the choice parents have, the development needs of children and to help parents enter the labour market. Although the figures above cannot be wholly attributed to Labour's childcare strategies there is a clear correlation between the two.

Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland each have a responsibility to target childcare needs in their own jurisdictions. The report will now address their plans in turn, beginning with Wales.

<sup>i</sup> The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets standards for the development, learning and care of children from birth to five. All registered providers of Early Years care are required to use the EYFS statutory framework. See <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/earlyyears> (DCSF, 2009e) for more information.

<sup>ii</sup> Early Excellence Centres offered integrated education and day care for young children, and services and opportunities for parents, carers, families and the wider community (DCSF, 2010e).

<sup>iii</sup> Early Years Development Partnerships were established by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to coordinate Early Years Education in each LEA area.

<sup>iv</sup> The Department of Children, Schools and Families set up Sure Start Children's centres in three phases (NAO, 2010):

- Phase 1 (2004-06) – During phase one centres were set up in the 20% most disadvantaged areas of England
- Phase 2 (2006-08) – the reach of the centres expanded to include the 30% most deprived areas
- Phase 3 (2008-10) – the final stage extends to all remaining 70% less deprived areas of England, with an overall aim of having one centre in every community by March 2010.

Children's Centres offer a range of services for children under five years of age. These can include:

- Integrated full day childcare and early learning
- Parenting advice and support
- Support for childminders
- Child health services
- Maternity services
- Links with Jobcentre Plus for training and employment advice (NAO, 2010).

<sup>v</sup> A children's workforce Strategy was developed in 2006. It focuses exclusively on the workforce reform as part of *Every Child Matters*.

<sup>vi</sup> The Childcare Affordability Programme (CAP) also aims to help parents in London afford childcare. CAP was formed in 2005 as part of a three year funding package with the London Development Agency (LDA) and the Government's Sure Start unit. It aimed to address childcare in London through the provision of subsidised day care places, which would be affordable, flexible and of greater quality. It planned to assist parents to stay in or return to full time or part time employment.

The pilot, Childcare Affordability Programme 05 (CAP05), ended in December 2009. It helped over 10,000 parents to enter or sustain employment. It was replaced by the Childcare Affordability Programme 09 (CAP09), which was

launched in December 2009 and aims to help 1,600 parents to enter and sustain employment for 12 months (London Development Agency, 2010).

<sup>vii</sup> *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (DfES, 2004) sets out the national framework for local change programmes to build services around the needs of children and young people. The aim of the Every Child Matters programme is to give all children the support they need to: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.

<sup>viii</sup> See

**<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/earlyyears/surestart/aboutsurestart/aboutsurestart/>** for more information on Sure Start Children's centres.

<sup>ix</sup> The Children's Workforce Strategy focuses exclusively on this area. See Department for Education and Skills (2007) *Children's Workforce Strategy Update – Spring 2007*, HM Government.

<sup>x</sup> A Ready Reckoner is designed to give information at a glance, it usually takes the form of a series of tables containing pre-calculated values. It can also be a computer program which calculates values, for example an individual's entitlement to tax credits.



*Wales*

**Introduction**

Historically, Wales has been integrated into the English Kingdom. Legislature, as illustrated with The Childcare Act 2006, provides statutory measures which include both England and Wales. However the devolution landscape in Wales has changed significantly in the last few years. In response to the Government's first National Childcare Strategy in 1998, the Welsh Assembly Government set out its own childcare strategy to meet some of the more specific needs of the Welsh nation. The Strategy builds on the National Childcare Strategy but focuses on local needs. This began in 2002 with the *Childcare Action Plan*.

**Childcare Policy and Legislation in Wales**Childcare Action Plan (2002)

The Welsh Assembly Government's *Childcare Action Plan (2002)* set out the aim that children should be at the heart of childcare policy in Wales. In February 2001, a task force to review the progress of the National Childcare Strategy in Wales was set up. The 2002 Childcare Action Plan sets out measures based on the task force's review. Specific measures for Wales included setting up a unified grant to provide financial support for childcare, Cymorth, the Children and Youth Support Fund. To ensure the quality of childcare, the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales was set up in 2002 to inspect day care for children up to eight years of age (Child and Family Programmes Branch, 2002).

In 2004, another Childcare Working Group was formed to analyse and build on the progress of the *Childcare Action Plan*. A report was developed with 77 recommendations. In response to this report the Government implemented the Childcare Strategy for Wales, *Childcare is for Children (2005)*.

Childcare is for Children (2005)

The Welsh Childcare Strategy focuses on similar areas to the National Childcare Strategy. The Assembly Government states:

Government has a role in ensuring that the childcare parents use is safe and provides the best possible development for their children. It can use its resources strategically to ensure that childcare is of good quality, but also available locally at an affordable price.

(DfTE, 2005: 3)

The Childcare Strategy has three objectives:

- To ensure that childcare provision supports the development needs of children in Wales.
- To ensure that childcare is widely available and affordable, to enable parents to train or work and therefore raise the levels of economic activity in Wales.
- To provide childcare so that parents can have flexibility and choice in how they balance family, work and other commitments within their lives, and in doing so promote gender equality within the workforce (DfTE, 2005: 4).

The Strategy considers the progress made in Wales since the implementation of the National Childcare Strategy in 1998, for example between March 1999 and March 2005 the number of childcare places (for children under eight years old) increased by nearly 18,500. The Assembly Government has also delivered a free part-time pre-school place for all three year olds (DfTE, 2005:4) and the New Opportunities Fund also helped create 22,000 out of school childcare places in Wales (Bryson *et al*, 2006: 10).

Much progress had been made; however, to meet the aims mentioned above, the Assembly Government acknowledge that there are other challenges to overcome. The Strategy sets out commitments to increase funding to aid the additional development of childcare services in Wales. They secured £12.5 million over three years from European Structural Funds for childcare. The Cymorth grant scheme also received funding (Bryson *et al*, 2006: 4). This funding was to be aimed at disadvantaged areas and included the development of Sure Start Programmes, known as Flying Start. The quality of care would also be targeted with new regulations which would 'make children's experiences the central focus of regulation, and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens' (Bryson *et al*, 2006: 10). To encourage providers to raise the quality of their services the Assembly Government planned to implement quality assurance schemes. These schemes would cover different types of childcare. The 'Aiming High' scheme is for out of school care, 'Y Cylch Rhagorol', for Welsh medium playgroups and 'Children Come First' for childminders. As with the National Childcare Strategy, parental choice and the availability of childcare is a key issue in Wales. Therefore, the Strategy also aimed to promote Children's Information Services to help parents find and use childcare. Both the information services and the childcare provision offered must meet the needs of local parents and children, including ethnic minority groups, for example the inclusion of the Welsh language.

#### Genesis Wales 2006

Genesis Wales is a project which aims to help individuals overcome many of the barriers which stop them from entering training or employment. The project can offer financial assistance and other support for them to access courses and work opportunities (Genesis Wales, 2009).

The key objectives of the project are:

- To improve the economic activity of women (free childcare is provided to eligible parents entering training).
- To increase the gross domestic product in areas of disadvantage by improving the employability of women and by removing one of the greatest barriers to female employment – lack of affordable, flexible childcare.
- To contribute to the lifelong learning agenda.
- To break cycles of poverty and disadvantage by encouraging women to take charge of their lives by helping them to recognise their strengths and abilities. Again, free childcare will be provided ensure that all women are enabled to access learning opportunities. In general, the availability of affordable childcare will enable more women to take full advantage of career opportunities (Genesis Wales, 2009).

The Genesis project is supported by the Welsh Assembly Government and funded by European Structural Funds with an approximate investment of £26 million. By 2008, the project had helped over 15,000 people by increasing their employment opportunities by addressing barriers such low skills and lack of training (Genesis Wales, 2009).

In 2008 Genesis Wales was replaced by Genesis Cymru Wales 2 which set out to help 20,000 people through a comprehensive package of advice, mentoring, training and childcare. The new scheme aimed to help Wales' hardest to reach individuals, in deprived areas. £35 million funds the scheme from the European Social Fund through the Welsh Assembly Government. The project aims to build on the aims of the first Genesis

Wales project to increase the number of childcare places, develop training and education targets and increase women's labour market participation (Genesis Wales, 2009).

### Children and Young People Plans

Under the Children Act 2004, LAs are required to publish Children and Young People Plans (CYP). The CYP plans are underpinned by the UNCRC and are intended to support the local delivery of key Assembly Government priorities for children and young people.

The first CYP plans were published in 2008 and cover the three-year period to 2011. CYP plans must be published every three years. Plans are based on local priorities, but may also include some national priorities identified by the Welsh Government. CYP plans must address:

- Support for families, including parenting, childcare, financial and material well-being, and intervention when needed
- Support for children with additional learning needs and /or disabilities
- Support for the social, emotional and psychological needs of children and young people
- Action to reduce NEETs and youth unemployment
- Action to tackle educational underachievement
- Support for interagency work on child protection.

(Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People, 2010)

Therefore LAs take on tasks in addition to those set out in the Childcare Act 2006. Their duties are furthermore enhanced through the Children's Budgeting in Wales process.

### Children's Budgeting in Wales 2009

In England huge effort is designated to producing detailed funding plans and strategies. In Wales this is not the case. In January 2009 the Children and Young People Committee in the National Assembly for Wales began an inquiry into children's budgeting in Wales. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Governments must show their spending on children, identify their priorities and allocate adequate resources for children. However it was identified that in Wales there was a 'lack of clarity and transparency about the draft budget spend on children and young people', furthermore 'children's rights were not being prioritised in budgetary decision making' (Children and Young People Committee, 2009:6). The inquiry highlighted that in order to make adequate budgeting decisions the Government needed to show the outcomes of their spending. The inquiry made several recommendations, each of these were based on the requirement of the Government publishing a single budgeting strategy for children. They include each LA setting out their own outcomes based on the budgetary measure. Children and Young People's Budget Statements will be published each year. Spending can therefore be reviewed and evaluated against projected outcomes. The system would become transparent and measurable. The Auditor General would monitor the publication of Children and Young People's Budget Statements. The expenditure on children and young people will be discussed under the next heading.

### Conclusions

Overall, despite falling under the Childcare Strategy in England, Wales has developed a strategy to meet the specific needs of its own children and families. It is arguable that the influence of the English strategies and legislation, and its own strategy, have had an important impact on social patterns in Wales, this is discussed below.

### **Childcare Strategy and Social Change**

Although much of the data collected for England encompasses Wales, it is important to outline patterns of social change which have taken place exclusively in Wales in order to assess the impact the Childcare Strategy may have had.

The Childcare Strategy, *Childcare is for Children* (2005) has three main objectives, similar to the National Childcare Strategy: to ensure that childcare provision supports the development needs of children in Wales, to ensure that childcare is available and affordable to help parents train and work, and to provide parents with flexibility and choice to allow them to balance family, work and other commitments (DfTE, 2005: 4).

Statistics show that there has been positive change in these areas. In terms of the level of childcare provision there has been an increase since 1999. Between March 1999 and March 2005 the number of childcare places (for children under eight years old) increased by nearly 18,500 (Bryson *et al*, 2006: 10). However, between 2003 and 2009 there was only an increase of 3,935 childcare places. This figure is low due to the unexplained decrease of 2,213 places between 2006 and 2007. In 2009, there were 73,645 childcare places in Wales (Statswales, 2010).

Overall provision in Wales for 0-eight year olds is approximately one childcare place for every seven children (Symonds and Kelly, 2005: 25, see also Winckler *et al*, 2009: 5). However, there is a marked difference in ratios between different areas in Wales, in particular the number of children per childcare place is much higher in the valleys than in any other part of Wales. One example is that in Blaenau Gwent there are 19 children for every place compared to three children for every place in Denbighshire (The Poverty Site, 2010). It is interesting to note that 54% of childcare places are in childminding (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009).



Therefore although there has been change, it has been at a remarkably slower rate than in England and childcare is still largely unavailable in some areas.

In 2006, The Welsh Assembly Government carried out a survey of parents' views of childcare. The study showed that the majority of families surveyed (77%) used informal childcare. Grandparents and other relatives were mostly used for childcare, two thirds of families had done so between 2005 and 2006 (Bryson *et al*, 2006, 1). Yet the Assembly Government's Childcare Strategy does not target informal childcare. This is one criticism of the Strategy.

Levels of worklessness have decreased over the last few years. As in England, women have a higher inactivity rate than men, however the gap between the male and female employment rate has more than halved since 1984 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). The inactivity rate for women in Wales has continued to fall in recent years, from around 33% at the beginning of the decade to around 27% in 2008. Looking after the family home was the main reason for inactivity among women aged between 25 and 49 in Wales. 17% of dependent children live in workless households (Symonds and Kelly, 2005:8).

In terms of lone parents' employment rates, the lack of childcare is a barrier to work. 40% of lone parents working less than 16 hours per week commented that the lack of available and affordable childcare prevented them from working more hours (The Poverty Site, 2010).

Again, as in England, women with one or more children under five years of age, have an employment rate of 51%, compared to 70% for women with children aged over five years. 47% of female employees work part-time compared to only 7% of males. 63% of women with dependent

children are in employment compared to 87% of men (Symonds and Kelly, 2005:11).

Bryson *et al* (2006) showed in their survey of childcare use in Wales, that childcare is a barrier to work. 68% of non-working lone parents and 43% of non-working parents in a couple stated that if they could arrange 'good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable' that they would work (Bryson *et al*, 2006:5). Therefore, although childcare provision has increased, there is still more progress to be made.

The Welsh Assembly Government is satisfied that it is meeting the needs of the Childcare Strategy. Annual reports by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales, show that the quality of day care services in Wales is high. The Assembly Government comments:

Childcare in Wales continues to be a developing and changing service which is progressing towards fulfilling the Welsh Assembly Government's Childcare Strategy.

(CSSIW, 2008:4)

The Government has also increased its spending on children and young people. In 2003, Save the Children reported a growth in spending between 1997 and 2001 (Children and Young People Committee, 2009:8). In recent years spending on children and young people has remained constant. Based on an estimate that 21.6% of the population is children and young people, 28% of the Government's annual expenditure was spent on children and young people in 2006. From 2006 until 2010 this percentage has remained the same (Children and Young People Committee, 2009:9).

Overall, progress has been made in Wales; social trends are changing for the better. The Childcare Strategy and projects such as Genesis Wales

will no doubt have contributed to this. Childcare provision has increased significantly. Furthermore, children's budgeting provides for a transparent process. Worklessness has decreased and general employment rates have grown. However, amongst this progress statistics such as a ratio of one childcare place to 19 children in some parts of Wales stand out. Much work still must be done.

*Scotland*

**Introduction**

In order to design effective policies, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the problems that the policies are intended to address.

(Heckman and Masterov, 2005:21)

Evidence-based policy has become a major part of the Scottish Government's approach to policy making and the machinery of Government. Surveys and research carried out by the Scottish Government work to inform policy. Pre-school and childcare statistics are also published annually by the Scottish Government. For example, *The Scottish Household Survey* added a childcare module to its questionnaire in 2003. This module examines the childcare arrangements, reasons for using childcare, satisfaction with childcare and how these differ across households (Hope and Martin, 2003). In addition, a longitudinal study *Growing up in Scotland* has been following the lives of 8,000 children since 2005.

*Growing Up in Scotland* (hereafter referred to as GUS) is one of the largest longitudinal studies in Scotland and it aims to provide information that will help develop policies affecting children and their families in Scotland:

The Scottish Government would like every child in Scotland to reach their full potential. In order to do this, they need to know more about children's circumstances; the opportunities, difficulties and challenges that they face and what happens in their lives as they are growing up. Through this long term monitoring and evaluation of its policies for children, with a specific focus on the early years, the Scottish Government,

together with the wider research community, will be better informed about the lives of Scotland's families.

(ScotCen, 2010)

This large-scale longitudinal social survey is intended to form a fundamental part of the Scottish Government's strategy for the long-term monitoring and evaluation of its policies for children, with a specific focus on the early years. Bradshaw and Wasoff, (2009:47) state that 'the young children who are at the heart of Growing up in Scotland are growing up in a world in which the Childcare Strategy for Scotland (1998) has been in place for several years, and in which early years childcare is more socialised than in previous generations' (Bradshaw and Wasoff, 2009:47).

The study is driven specifically by the needs of policy, focusing particularly on the early years of children's lives in Scotland. GUS is being carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social research (ScotCen) in conjunction with the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) at the University of Edinburgh and is funded by the Scottish Government. The evidence obtained from the study actually informed the development of the *Early Years Framework* (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008), which will be discussed later.

The evidence-based approach adopted by the Scottish Government is illustrated through the development and implementation of policies and strategies that address childcare directly or indirectly. This chapter steps through Scotland's progress, commencing with *The Child Strategy Statement* (1997).

## Childcare Policy and Legislation in Scotland

### The Child Strategy Statement (1997)

In 1997, a Minister for Children's Issues was elected to the Scottish Office. This was soon followed by the introduction of the *Child Strategy Statement*, a child proofing statement designed to ensure that all parts of the Scottish Office considered the impact on children when developing policy. A revised version of *The Child Strategy Statement* was issued in September 2000 (the original document could not be sourced) by the Scottish Executive (Scottish Executive, 2000). It explains the legislative and policy context and heavily endorses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), identifying key issues that should be considered when developing policy affecting children either directly or indirectly.

The statement recognises the importance of consulting with children where appropriate. The Scottish Office acknowledged the significance of the child proofing approach to protect the most vulnerable of families. Decisions are made every day that effect children and 'in families in danger of being socially excluded, the scope for children's needs to be overlooked is even greater' (Scottish Executive, 2000). It is for this reason that each department must consider the possible effects of policy changes on children before implementing them.

Furthermore, the *Child Strategy Statement* asserts that 'the minister also has a more general responsibility to ensure that overlapping areas of Scottish Executive policy are properly co-ordinated and developed in the best interests of children'. The Statement recommends that the Scottish Executive develops effective systems for liaising with outside agencies working with children and families that are likely to be affected by the policy initiative. It may also be necessary to invite the views of statutory

and non-statutory organisations involved with children during the policy development stage.

The Statement sets out to ensure that all policy considers the rights of children in line with the UNCRC. However, the *Children's Rights Audit 2000-01* published by UNICEF criticised the *Child Strategy Statement*, stating that it has the potential to be a means of 'proofing' all policies under the articles set out in the UNCRC, yet lacks the 'teeth' to do so. The Scottish Executive's Children and Families Division has no proactive role in ensuring the statement is maintained and there is no monitoring or public reporting on its effectiveness (Hughes *et al*, 2001).

#### Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland (1998)

In May 1998 the Scottish Office published *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland*, a Strategy aimed at supporting families, with a particular focus on raising children out of poverty. The Strategy mirrors the first English strategy and unlike England and Wales, Scotland is still under the direction of this strategy. It acknowledged that good quality childcare benefits children by supporting their development and learning, and benefits parents by enabling them to work. A diverse range of childcare provision already existed in Scotland. However, the Strategy recognised that since the formal childcare sector enables parents to enter employment or work, steps needed to be taken to increase provision.



The executive summary of the Strategy stated that its overall aim was as follows:

To make high quality, accessible and affordable childcare available in every neighbourhood for children aged 0-14. This included formal childcare, such as playgroups, out of school clubs and childminders, as well as support for informal childcare.

(Scottish Office, 1998a:3)

The Strategy highlighted four key problems:

- The quality of care could be variable
- The cost of childcare was high
- There were insufficient childcare places in many areas
- Access was hampered by a lack of information for parents on what was available within their local authority area.

(Scottish Office, 1998)

The Scottish Office sought to address the challenges in a number of ways:

- The issue of quality was to be addressed by the introduction of a new national regulatory body, the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, and new National Standards for Childcare. This was to be set up by 2001.
- Resources were to be allocated to increase the numbers of qualified staff in the childcare workforce. 5,000 new care workers were to be trained by 2002.
- A free part-time pre-school place would be guaranteed for all three-year-olds whose parents want one.
- Out of school places for 100,000 children were to be provided by 2003.

- The introduction of a Childcare Tax Credit would help working parents with the costs of childcare.
- Childcare Partnerships were to be set up in every LA area (32 in total) bringing together all those with an interest in childcare to promote its expansion in line with parental demand<sup>1</sup>.
- A Childcare Information Service was to be set up in every LA area which would meet national standards.
- Childcare plans were to be in place from April 1999 in all LA areas, demonstrating how the Strategy was being taken forward at local level and how funds from the Strategy were being spent.

Under the Strategy £25 million was made available from April 1999 for childcare in Scotland through the New Opportunities Fund (and other potential funding sources such as the European Social Fund and the Urban Programme). The importance of partnership was given due recognition within the Strategy. It identified that all interested parties (central and local Government, other statutory agencies, employers, parents, and private, public and voluntary sector childcare providers) must come together and work in partnership.

In 1998, there were just over one million children aged under 16 in Scotland, and of these children just over 300,000 were under five. It was estimated that there were approximately 300 formal childcare places for every 1,000 children under five in Scotland. The data for children of school age was more 'patchy' (Scottish Office, 1998: 11) but in general there was less childcare available. For example, it was estimated that only one in 40 primary school children had access to out of school clubs. It also acknowledged that provision varied according to locality (Scottish Office, 1998: 11).

Four out of five non-working mothers said they would work if they could access the childcare of their choice and one in seven mothers who did not

work but wanted to, highlighted childcare as a barrier in finding work (Scottish Office, 1998).

Since 2000, Scotland has offered free pre-school education to all three and four-year-olds whose parents want it. According to the Scottish Government's *Pre-school and Childcare Statistic Report* for 2004, there were 243,000 children receiving formal care (28% of all children aged 0-14) (Scottish Government, 2004). In comparison to 2003, the number of children receiving formal care increased by 7%. In 2004 there was significantly more provision in before and after school care with an increase of 25% and 19% respectively. In 2004, 69% of women with dependent children were in work, indicating a slight increase on the previous five years. There was also an increase in the number of women with children in full-time work (Scottish Government, 2004). These statistics indicate that the demand for childcare provision to facilitate working parents was growing.

The Scottish Office also found that employers had a vital role to play in delivering the Strategy and should be encouraged to support childcare and adopt family friendly employment practices in order to help employees balance work and family life (Scottish Office, 1998). Within the context of employers the Strategy specifically stated:

- Encouraging employers to review and wherever appropriate adopt the forms of childcare and family friendly employment practices which best suit the needs of the business and its employees.
- Publicising the support available to employers, including tax relief and potential contributions from other sources towards community childcare projects.
- Publicising and disseminating effective employer practice.

(Scottish Office, 1998: 1)

As part of its aim to help parents to have accessible, flexible and affordable childcare, the Scottish Government's *Early Years Framework*, published in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) in December 2008, eventually addressed this issue by making a commitment to promote childcare vouchers among employers in Scotland. The Scottish Government targeted public, private and voluntary/third sector employers in the hope that uptake across Scotland would increase. Unfortunately the impact of this awareness campaign has not yet been measured by the Government. *The Early Years Framework* will be reviewed in more depth later.

LAs are required by statute to produce two plans that directly impact upon children's services. LAs have to produce a Children's Services Plan, required under Section 19 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, and the Scottish Executive, in addition, requires LAs to produce an Early Education and Childcare Plan which demonstrates how the Government's *Meeting the Childcare Challenge – A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* is being taken forward at a local level and how childcare strategy funds are being used.

#### Making it Work Together (1999)

The Scottish Executive's document *Making it Work Together: A Programme for Government*, published in 1999, set out the Government's priorities. Essentially it was the first programme of work for the first Scottish Government. One of the commitments outlined was 'to give our children the best possible start in life' (Scottish Executive, 1999:5):

Our children are the future of Scotland. We need to give them the best possible start in life so that they have the opportunity to play their full part in Scotland's future. Getting it right in the early years lays the foundation for the whole life of a child.

(Scottish Executive, 1999:4)

It reinforced the deadlines on delivering high quality, affordable, accessible childcare, as laid out in the Childcare Strategy of 1998 (Scottish Office, 1998). The document also outlined the Government's commitment to promote social inclusion, particularly through early years intervention by supporting 60 new community schools by 2001 (Scottish Executive, 1999: 6).

### Integrated (New) Community Schools (1999)

The Scottish Executive set up the New Community Schools (NCS) initiative, now known as Integrated Community Schools (ICS), in 1999, with an initial investment of £26 million from the Excellence Fund. Its aim was to bring a single team of professionals from the areas of social work, health, psychology and other child-related professions into selected schools. The Scottish Executive recognised that 'integration of services is essential, and the school is an excellent site for this to become a reality' (Scottish Executive, 1998: 1).

LAs were invited to participate in the pilot. The first phase involved 30 LAs running 37 projects in more than 150 schools, nurseries and family centres. According to the National Literacy Trust over 400 schools were taking part by October 2002. The Informal Education Homepage and Encyclopaedia of Informal Education (infed) states that 'the establishment of the new community school initiative in Scotland (1999) was the first major implementation of the approach in the UK' (infed, 2010). In England the approach is known as 'extended schools'.

The Scottish Executive pledged to extend the ICS concept to every school by 2007, and provided £78 million to support this pledge (Scottish Executive, 2003b). It wanted every school to participate in delivering integrated children's services by 2007 (Scottish Executive, 2003c: 45). In answer to a parliamentary question in November 2006, Hugh Henry

commented that since 1998, the Integrated Community Schools project has developed and the concept is now mainstreamed into the wider integrated children's services agenda. As a result it is no longer appropriate to think of integrated community schools as a separate school-based initiative. £25.8 million is made available each year to LAs (through the National Priorities Action Fund) to help support this broader framework for delivering integrated children's services at school and neighbourhood level (Scottish Parliament, 2006).

#### Social Inclusion Strategy (1999)

In 1999, the Scottish Office published *Social Inclusion – Opening the Door to a Better Scotland: Strategy* (Scottish Office, 1999). It was lead by the Scottish Social Inclusion Network<sup>ii</sup>, an advisory body on social inclusion policy. The Strategy acknowledged the complexity of interrelated problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown (Scottish Office, 1999:1). It identified the importance of agencies and organisations engaging and working together to deliver positive outcomes. Part of its vision was to have a Scotland in which:

- every child, whatever his or her social or economic background, has the best possible start in life.
- there are opportunities to work for all those who are able to do so.

(Scottish Office, 1999:2)

In order to deliver this vision the Government recognised the need to increase participation in the labour market. The Scottish Office's summary of the Strategy identified 'lack of affordable, local childcare' (Scottish Office, 1999a:4) as a barrier to inclusion. Thus, tackling child and family poverty and improving childcare provision were considered crucial to improving social inclusion. The Scottish Office therefore

dedicated an extra £91 million in Scotland for the following three years to help provide quality, affordable childcare, enabling more parents to enter the labour market or embark on training (Scottish Office, 1999a:4).

In the Scottish Executive's report on indicators of success, it was found that the percentage of children living in workless households had fallen from 19% in 1997 to 16% in 2003 (Scottish Executive, 2003:1). In terms of the milestone for all children to have access to quality childcare and early learning before entering school, the report found that there was indeed an increase in the number of three and four year olds receiving pre-school education. The number of four year olds receiving a place increased from 97% in 1999/2000 to 99% in 2002/2003. The number of places for three year olds also increased from 68% in 1999/2000 to 88% in 2002/2003 (Scottish Executive, 2003:17). These statistics illustrate the Scottish Executive's progress in increasing labour market participation and quality childcare provision for three and four year olds.

Sure Start programmes were included as part of this strategy to help target families in need and were introduced in 1999. The overall aim of Sure Start Scotland is to promote social inclusion. Very little information has been available on Sure Start programmes in recent years.

Funding for Sure Start programmes in Scotland has increased since it was first introduced. Between 1999 and 2000 £9 million was provided. By 2003-2004 it increased to £23.1 million. In 2005-2006 it increased to £56.9 million and by 2007-2008 the annual spend was £59.9 million (Scottish Government, 2007c).

In 2009 the Scottish Government changed its focus from Sure Start to the *Early Years Framework* programme. The Scottish Executive's website states that 'it will now focus on the Early Years Framework rather than the Sure Start Scotland programme' as *The Early Years Framework* shifts the Government's focus towards early intervention rather than intervening

only when a crisis happens (Scottish Government, 2009c). In 2007/08, Sure Start expenditure in England was nearly £600 per child compared to only £380 in Scotland (Save the Children, 2009: 3).

#### Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001

The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 (Scottish Parliament, 2001) takes forward one of the main commitments of the Childcare Strategy for Scotland. At the time of its introduction the regulation of care services was inconsistent. Previously many services had been regulated under a range of legislation that was largely outdated (Scottish Parliament, 2001a:2). LAs regulated childcare in different ways. The Act was therefore designed to standardise and modernise the regulation of care services across Scotland. This in turn would instil more public confidence in the quality of services provided and ensure that the service was appropriate to the needs of families and their children. The care services included under the Act are as follows:

Homes for adults, residential care for children, children's early education, day care and childminding, adoption and fostering services, adult placement services, agencies providing care at home (including care for children), nurse agencies, independent healthcare services, day care services for adults, housing support services, care and welfare in boarding schools and school hostels and care and welfare in accommodation for offenders.

(Scottish Parliament, 2001a: 2)

The Act reformed the regulatory system for care services in Scotland and provided for an independent Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care to undertake this regulatory function. For the first time, all LA care



services were required to register and to meet the same standards as independent sector providers.

Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care (2002)

The Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care (the Care Commission) was established in April 2002 as the new, independent regulator set up under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 to regulate all adult, child and independent health care services in Scotland. Care services were previously regulated by LAs and the NHS (Care Commission, 2008: 2). Care services are required to meet the statutory requirements listed in the legislation. On an annual basis the Care Commission regulates over 15,000 care services used by almost 320,000 people. The Care Commission ensures that the Scottish Government's National Care Standards are met and works to improve the quality of care. Inspections are carried out on a regular basis and since 2005, inspection reports have been made publically available via the Care Commission's website so that parents can make informed choices in relation to childcare. This transparency was also extended in April 2008, when the Care Commission introduced and tested a new grading system (Care Commission, 2008: vi). Services had previously been awarded a single grade but under this new system services are now rated across 'quality themes' because 'it is clear that people will have different views about what aspects of care services are important to them and because [the Care Commission] want[s] to facilitate informed choice' (Care Commission, 2009: vii). The public is able to see how well care services are performing against the National Care Standards (Care Commission, 2009: 4). The National Care Standards are taken into account when the Care Commission makes any decisions about registering and inspecting services and in considering whether, and at what level, enforcement action should be taken.

The Care Commission's governance structure is currently being updated. The Scottish Government is in the process of setting up two scrutiny bodies, namely Health Improvements Scotland and Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS). The latter, which is of importance to childcare services in Scotland, will scrutinise and improve social care, social work and children's services. The new bodies are not expected to come into fruition until April 2011 (Scottish Government, 2010). The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Bill contains the requirements to establish these two new scrutiny bodies (Scottish Parliament, 2009). Part 4 of the Bill is relevant to the regulation of care services, and the Scottish Government's summary of the Bill states the following:

The Bill retains many of the functions and responsibilities of the existing bodies (for example from the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001), but places new responsibilities on the bodies, for example to promote improvement through national standards and outcome measures; and greater flexibility to tailor and focus more proportionate and risk-based scrutiny activity.

(Scottish Government, 2009a: 3)

At this stage it is not possible to say how the new body will effect the regulation and quality of childcare until further information is released.

A Partnership for a Better Scotland: Partnership Agreement (2003)

*A Partnership for a Better Scotland: Partnership Agreement* sets out the Government's commitment to childcare and outlines the Government's plans for the 2003-2007 parliamentary session:

Alongside nursery provision for 3 and 4 year olds we will aim to provide flexible childcare provision accessible to all, expanding facilities in the public, private and voluntary sectors and through co-operative arrangements.

(Scottish Executive, 2003a: 32)

The document recognises that childcare is an economic issue. It states a commitment to provide childcare support in areas of high unemployment in order to help those in work, training and education, and in particular make childcare more flexible and available. However, the document does not outline how this will be achieved and does not stipulate timescales.

School's Out: Framework for the Development of Out of School Care (2003)

The Childcare Strategy recognised that expanding and building on out of school services was crucial to helping people return to work. The Scottish Executive therefore published *School's Out*, which made recommendations to LAs and local enterprises as to how this should be achieved (Scottish Executive, 2003c). Some of the recommendations included extra funding. Funding for the Childcare Strategy increased from £16.75 million in 2002-2003 to £40.65 million in 2005-2006. Funding for Sure Start Scotland also increased from £23.1 million in 2002-2003 to £50 million in 2005-2006 (Scottish Executive, 2003c: 12). This funding made the expansion in out of school care possible. *School's Out* reported that since 1997 the number of out of school care services had doubled to 1,140 (33,600 places for 45,799 children) and that there were places in this service for approximately one in nine primary school children (Scottish Executive, 2003c: 99). The New Opportunities Fund funded over 2,300 places and enabled clubs to provide a better quality of childcare, meaning that such provision would no longer be considered as 'babysitting' services. The Scottish Executive recognised that many childminders provide out of

school care. The New Opportunities Fund therefore provided grants to the Scottish Childminding Association in order to develop childminding services across the Highlands and Western Isles for pre-school and school-age children (Scottish Executive, 2003c: 20).

*School's Out* identified three priorities for action, namely sustainability, services for older children and young people and making sure that there are places for children with additional needs. LAs and Childcare Partnerships needed to work together to expand provision and two challenging objectives were outlined to be achieved by 2006:

- to make a significant increase in high quality, sustainable OSC provision
- to ensure that there is provision throughout each childcare partnership area, ideally within every club, for children with disabilities and other needs.

(Scottish Executive, 2003c: 102)

*School's Out's* vision was for there to be an out of school place for all children whose parents want their children to attend a club. *School's Out* recommended that all LAs should audit provision and assess local need – 'local authorities and childcare partnerships can only assess progress if they have robust data in place to see what the 'baseline' position is' (Scottish Executive, 2003c: 103). The Scottish Executive therefore proposed to work with LAs and Childcare Partnerships to ensure that this information became available both at a local and national level.

It was recommended that each LA and Childcare Partnership ascertain and agree a target with the Scottish Executive and in turn tackle the areas they have underperformed in by 2006. It was proposed that progress would then be reviewed in 2005/2006 in the form of a progress report

from each LA. Unfortunately there is no up-to-date information available as to whether this has been achieved.

The Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) is the lead independent voice for school-aged childcare in Scotland. There are over 1,000 out of school care clubs in Scotland and SOSCN promotes good quality, provides over 45,000 places and believes that good quality childcare can benefit children, parents and the community. The SOSCN also advocates that 'out of school care is the second largest childcare sector in Scotland both in number of services and places' (SOSCN, 2010a:4). Due to the popularity of out of school care in Scotland, the SOSCN developed and now delivers a nationally recognised quality assurance scheme called 'Aiming High Scotland' for such clubs. This scheme has been successful in raising quality standards within clubs in Scotland (SOSCN, 2010a:6).

On 1 April 2010 the SOSCN released its manifesto on out of school care, calling on all political parties to 'commit to take action on the fact that economic recovery needs parents to be able to participate in work or education' (SOSCN website, 2010). More specifically, the SOSCN called on the parties to maintain and secure existing school age childcare services and retain and promote the Government's childcare voucher scheme to enable parents to afford childcare and seek employment. The accessibility and affordability of childcare was also addressed as well as the need to simplify the tax credits system.

The Framework recognised that 'the labour market effect of OSC [out of school care] in helping parents into work far outweighs the direct costs of setting up OSC' (Scottish Executive, 2003c:2), highlighting not only the benefits for working parents but the social benefits for children.

Sitter Service (2003)

Scotland's Sitter Service is funded by the Scottish Government to assist in establishing sitter services throughout Scotland. The Sitter Service facilitates parents that work atypical hours. The Scottish Executive defines the service as follows:

A Sitter Service is defined as a service which offers home-based childcare from early morning to late evening, seven days a week.

(Scottish Executive, 2003d:2)

Scotland's Sitter Service provides quality registered childcare in the child's own home, outside of normal working hours and therefore facilitates families where both parents work, lone parents and students (OPFS, 2009). Sitter Services are registered under the Care Commission as Childcare Agencies, which 'increases the potential for the development of this form of care' (OPFS, 2009). According to OPFS, the Sitter Service that has been operating in Dundee for over eight years 'has been used as a model of good practice for Sitter Service Development, both within One Parent Families Scotland and through agents throughout Scotland' (OPFS, 2009). Sitter Services have also been operating in North Lanarkshire since 2003, Aberdeenshire since 2005, Angus and Renfrewshire since 2006 and now Fife and Glasgow South since 2007 (OPFS, 2009).

Parents using the service pay an hourly fee according to their household income which covers care of all children. Childcare workers are police checked, have first aid training and are trained, supervised and employed by the service (OPFS, 2009).

OPFS describes the service as 'home based, flexible and affordable' (OPFS, 2009). The Scottish Executive's report on the costs and benefits

of Sitter Services concluded that ‘the direct and indirect benefits of the Sitter Service to users, their families and their communities far outweigh the costs of the service, but that further developments to meet demand are hindered by the lack of guaranteed funding’ (Scottish Executive, 2003:8). It is difficult to ascertain what the current situation is regarding funding and sustainability since the Scottish Government does not appear to have reported on the Sitter Service since 2003.

#### The Government Economic Strategy (2007)

The Economic Strategy for Scotland recognises the importance of early years and early intervention in shaping Scotland’s future and delivering an economically successful Scotland. The Economic Strategy aspires to achieving ‘a dynamic and growing economy that will provide prosperity and opportunities for all, while ensuring that future generations can enjoy a better quality of life too’ (Scottish Government, 2007a:viii). In order to deliver increasing sustainable economic growth in Scotland, the Strategy identified five Strategic Priorities that are internationally recognised to be vital to economic growth. The strategic objective for ‘Learning Skills and Well-being’ is particularly relevant to childcare provision in the early years and includes:

- A focus on giving every child a strong start in life
- A focus on school education enabling all our young people to succeed and gain the skills they will require as individuals and to contribute to the wider economy
- A supply of education and skills which is responsive to, and aligned with, actions to boost demand
- An approach to health and well-being that ensures all Scots enjoy the right level of physical and mental health to give them the opportunity to maximise their potential

- The creation of the conditions for talented people to live, work and remain in Scotland.

(Scottish Government, 2007a: viii)

The Strategy clearly acknowledges that what happens in the early years has an impact on employment and that investing early will inevitably improve the future economy.

#### The Early Years Framework (2008)

In 2007 the Scottish Government announced its intention to develop a Skills Strategy. This strategy, entitled *Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy*, set out its ambitions for skills within the context of lifelong learning, promoting equality of opportunity (Scottish Government, 2007b:iii). It is intended to remove the barriers that limit a person's future prospects. The Strategy states that 'what [children] learn and how they learn have a major bearing on wider outcomes including employability and participation in society in later life' (Scottish Government, 2007b: 14). Economists Heckman and Masterov take the same approach to childcare:

The abilities and motivations of children emerge early and affect performance in schools and the work place. Bright, motivated children do better in school, are more likely to obtain higher education degrees and participate in workplace-based training...Remediation at later ages is costly and becomes prohibitively costly if it is attempted too late.

(Heckman and Masterov, 2005: 6)

Heckman and Masterov put forward a strong economic case for early intervention, advocating that investing in the early years will give a significantly higher economic return rate than intervening at any other



stage in the education system. Indeed this is acknowledged in the *Government Economic Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2007a) and *The Early Years Framework* (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008).

Subsequently, the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) did indeed publish *The Early Years Framework* in 2008. The Framework is aimed at all those involved in planning and delivering early years services such as providers of childcare, pre-school, health and social services in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. The Framework indicates a change in approach similar to that taken in England and Wales. It represents an agreement between the Scottish Government and COSLA to set a new context for policy development, shifting away from 'intervening only when a crisis happens', to prevention and early intervention (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008: 1). The framework states:

It is about a fundamental shift in philosophy and approach that embraces the role of parents and communities and supports them with engaging, high quality services that meet their needs.

(Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008: 1)

The Framework has been developed in partnership with a wide variety of interested parties and recognises that different LA areas have different needs which are not being met under the Childcare Strategy of 1998, describing it as a 'centrally driven, inflexible approach' (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008: 1).

The Framework defines early years as pre-birth to eight years old and its approach is particularly relevant to those families needing higher levels of support. It extends to children beyond the age of eight but primarily recognises the importance of pregnancy in influencing outcomes and the

transition into primary school as critical in shaping children's lives. It recognised that intervening in the early years gives the best opportunity to make a difference, with four principles outlined:

- All children should have the same outcomes and opportunities.
- Those at risk of not achieving outcomes should be identified and steps taken to ensure that the risk does not come into fruition.
- Where the risk has materialised, effective action should be taken.
- Parents, families and communities should be encouraged and helped to develop their own solutions, using accessible, high quality public services as required.

(Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008: 3)

The Framework highlights the importance of parents and communities taking ownership in delivering these outcomes, with the help and support of the community planning process. The vision focuses on the child and how different parties (parents, carers and communities) feed into their outcomes. It is clear that the Childcare Strategy for Scotland was more parent-centred than child-centred. Indeed this was a criticism highlighted in the research paper entitled *Childcare Provision in the UK and the Republic of Ireland* (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2008: 17).

Ten elements of transformational change were identified in delivering this vision as it was felt a 'business as usual' approach would not bring about change:

- A coherent approach.
- Helping children, families and communities to secure outcomes for themselves.
- Breaking cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through early years.

- A focus on engagement and empowerment of children, families and communities.
- Using the strength of universal services to deliver prevention and early intervention.
- Putting quality at the heart of service delivery.
- Services that meet the needs of children and families.
- Improving outcomes and children's quality of life through play.
- Simplifying and streamlining delivery.
- More effective collaboration.

(Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008: 4)

The Framework highlights the importance of Scottish Government and local partners continuing to work together to bring about change. Some of the key elements are cited below:

- A renewed focus on 0-3 as the period of a child's development that shapes future outcomes.
- Breaking down barriers between education and childcare through a move towards more integrated, flexible services.
- More consistent access to intensive family support services in the early years.
- More help for informal support networks.
- Nurseries, schools and childcare centres developing their role in family and community learning.
- Developing common values in the workforce, enhancing workforce skills and developing broader workforce roles.
- Building on work already in progress through *Getting it Right for Every Child* and *Curriculum for Excellence* to provide child-centred, outcome-focused services.

(Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008: 5)

No additional funding was secured to deliver the outcomes. The Framework identifies parents most in need as those who are least likely to have access to services. It places a strong emphasis on the importance of providing flexible, accessible and affordable childcare and identifies a need to develop integrated education and childcare services. The Framework promises to increase pre-school provision from 475 hours per year to 570 hours in August 2010.

*The Early Years Framework Part II* (2008a) observes that 'a huge amount of activity goes on 'under the radar' in communities across Scotland' and that their contribution needs to be recognised in terms of support and expansion (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008a:6). However, how this will be achieved is not stated. It concludes that no single model can be applied to all LA areas. This is because the needs of children, families and communities across Scotland are so diverse (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008a:32).

The Framework also acknowledges the significant contribution grandparents make to the lives of children in Scotland through informal childcare provision, identifying that 'it is important that such informal carers have access to support to help them fulfil this role well' (Scottish Government, 2008a:22). However, the Framework does not specify how this support will be provided.

The Framework primarily identifies the need to focus on the period between pregnancy and three years, as this period is considered critical in shaping children's life chances. There is already significant work being carried out in the health service for children from the age of three and throughout their education, but there is a gap in support from 0-3. The Framework concludes that 'a key priority must therefore be to develop a coherent 0-3 service which has clear strategic leadership' (Scottish

Government and COSLA, 2008a: 32). However, it fails to outline how and when this could be achieved.

The Framework concludes that there is no single solution or approach to delivering an integrated strategy and that delivering improved outcomes will take time. The Framework is theoretical and does not provide direction in terms of goals that must be reached within a certain timescale. It stipulates that success will be measured on outcomes rather than on the implementation of specific actions (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008: 29). Indeed, Children in Scotland's (2008) consultation response to the proposed Framework identified that there needs to be 'clear leadership and direction with regards to the overall goals of a 10-year early years programme' and that the Framework focuses too much on the early identification of risk (Children in Scotland, 2008: 2). Children in Scotland instead recommended a more positive spin, namely that a similar approach is taken under *Getting it Right for Every Child* - delivering to all children through integrated, universal services.

The *Early Years Framework* incorporates, and to some extent supersedes, the national Childcare Strategy for Scotland and it is the intention of LAs to incorporate the framework into their future Children's Services Plans. The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 (Scottish Executive, 2003) established a statutory foundation for Community Planning in Scotland, placing a duty on LAs to lead and facilitate Community Planning in their areas. Childcare provision is one dimension of this. Integrated Children's Services Plans (ICSPs) are a statutory obligation for local authorities and should also be seen as a means of taking forward transformational change in LA areas. Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) are an important part of this drive towards better outcomes for children. As the Framework states 'Single Outcome Agreements are the key mechanism for bringing local partners together to identify priorities and actions to improve outcomes' (Scottish Government, and COSLA 2008: 28). They are agreements

between the Scottish Government and CPPs (within LAs) which set out how each will work in the future towards improving outcomes for the local people. SOAs allow LAs to have more discretion as to how funding will be spent, thus recognising that needs differ according to geography and social circumstances. For example, Glasgow City Council's SOA for 2008-2009 allocated £4.5 million from the Fairer Scotland Fund to improve childcare services and in turn tackle poverty in the area (Scottish Government, 2008c:8).

One of the conclusions drawn from the Framework is that Scotland has 'been left with a patchwork of services that reflects organic growth rather than a strategic approach, and that the nature of partnership will need to evolve if [the Government is] to collectively meet the challenges set by this framework' (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008a:33). As a result of the Framework the 'Integrated Services Task Group' was created (Scottish Government, 2008b)<sup>iii</sup> and one of the areas that this task group is required to address is childcare.

### Conclusion

The Early Years Framework represents a significant change in Scotland's approach to the provision of childcare. It is clear that the Framework is built on extensive research around the context of Scotland's current needs and that Scotland is moving closer to England's integrated approach to early education and childcare.

### **Childcare and Social Change**

This section explores childcare statistics in terms of cost, availability, locality and employment. By doing so, it will help to demonstrate how effective the strategies and policies reviewed have actually been.

Childcare costs

In the 2008 childcare costs survey, the Daycare Trust reported that unlike England and Wales, childcare costs in Scotland appeared to be slowing down (Daycare Trust, 2008).

The Daycare Trust has conducted a childcare costs survey in England since 2002 and in Scotland and Wales since 2005. Since 2005 childcare costs have risen in Scotland, though interestingly, in 2008 there was a distinct drop. The table below demonstrates the picture from 2005 to 2010. The figures for out of school care are based on 15 hours per week while the figures for all other forms of childcare are based on 50 hours per week.

Year	Nursery (under 2)	Nursery (2 and over)	Childminder (under 2)	Childminder (2 and over)	Out of School
2010*	£168	£156	£160	£158	£48
2009	£158	£143	£155	£154	£49
2008	£141	£128	£139	£141	£38
2007	£146	£132	£141	£140	£38
2006	£132	£122	£132	£131	£33
2005	£122	£117	£126	£124	£43

\* The 2010 survey cited childcare costs for 25 hours a week and to enable a comparison the costs have been recalculated for 50 hours a week.

Table 1: Childcare costs in Scotland

It is interesting to note the significant rise in childcare costs in 2007. Indeed, a report by the Daycare Trust and Children in Scotland stated that 'nursery fees in Scotland [were] increasing at almost double the rate of those in England, and rising at more than five times the rate of those in

Wales' (Daycare Trust and Children in Scotland, 2007: 1). However, in 2008 childcare costs in Scotland dropped, only to rise significantly again in 2009. In 2009 the cost of out of school care had also risen dramatically in Scotland. The Daycare Trust survey for 2009 states that since the Trust began publishing its costs survey, 'the increase in fees for nurseries has surpassed the rate of inflation' in England and Scotland (Daycare Trust, 2009: 2). In 2009 childminding costs also represented the most expensive form of childcare in Scotland. The figures for 2010 show a rise across the board, with the exception of out of school clubs, which were slightly cheaper (Daycare Trust, 2010). Although childminding costs have risen, the Daycare Trust remarks that 'costs have grown at a rate below inflation, equating to a stabilisation of costs in this area' (Daycare Trust, 2010: 1).

#### Choice of childcare

The Childcare Strategy acknowledged the importance of informal care in Scotland, stating that 'children are cared for in many ways and almost all children receive a mix of informal care from parents and relatives in the home and more formal care in other settings' (Scottish Office, 1998: 8). The *Growing Up in Scotland* study also drew attention to the often 'fragmented' nature of childcare arrangements experienced by children (Bradshaw and Wasoff, 2009). Furthermore, the Strategy stated that many parents actually prefer to use more informal childcare arrangements such as a partner, a grandparent or another relative (Scottish Office, 1998: 9) and this preference does not appear to have changed through the years. Indeed, the GUS longitudinal study consistently demonstrates the importance of and reliance on grandparents in supporting parents' childcare needs in Scotland (see Anderson *et al*, 2007 and Bradshaw and Wasoff, 2007).



However, not all parents can rely on informal care meaning that parents, particularly lone parents, find it difficult to access training and employment (Scottish Office, 1998:9). Formal childcare is therefore all the more important to them.

The National Centre for Social Research carried out the *Parents' Demand for Childcare Survey* in 1999 and again in 2003/2004 and 2006. Previous surveys had only questioned those already using childcare, but the most recent survey in 2006 considered it important to talk to not only those parents that use childcare, but those that do not. Trust was found to be the most important factor in parents' choice of childcare option, particularly for those who do not pay for childcare, with some parents feeling that they could not leave their child or children with a non-family member (Scottish Government, 2007:09). Cost was also found to be an issue. Thus it was concluded that 'the accessibility of family provision emerges as a key factor in childcare usage patterns' (Scottish Government, 2007c:24).

The section below explores the issue of availability of childcare, which is closely linked to choice.

#### Availability of childcare

Since 2004 the Scottish Government has published pre-school and childcare statistics reports (see Scottish Government, 2004-2009). The statistics are based on the situation in January of each year. The Government reports currently only collect information on the number of children registered with or attending each service. The reports also draw attention to the fact that children could be registered with or attending more than one service and in such cases will be multiple counted. The reports do not collect information in relation to the number of available

places within each service. Indeed as a report by the Employment Research Institute (2007) states:

Greater childcare information should be collected, and consideration should be given to altering the annual Census of Children's Daycare and Pre-school Education Centres so it can assist in providing a basis for a consistent, longitudinal picture of childcare supply and cost, in order to assist in the development and evaluation of the effects of increased public expenditure on childcare.

(Employment Research Institute, 2007:19)

The Care Commission, however, publishes annual reports which provide details of registered childcare services and places since 2004. In this section the figures are compared in order to provide a picture of childcare provision across the years in Scotland. All the statistics cited in the following table are taken from the Care Commission's annual reports from 2005-2009 and indicate the state of play on 31 March of each year.

Year	No of Childminder Places	No of Day Care Places	Total No of Places	Annual Change
2004	30,196	138,077	168,273	
2005	30,532	152,728	183,260	+14,987
2006	32,287	156,152	188,439	+5,179
2007	32,864	156,814	189,678	+1,239
2008	33,899	157,635	191,534	+1,856
2009	33,851	157,403	191,254	-280
<b>Total Change 2004-2009</b>	3,655	19,326	22,981	

Table 2: Number of registered childcare places

It is interesting to note that there was a distinct increase in childcare provision between 2004 and 2005. Overall, between 2004 and 2009 there was a total increase of 22,981 places, which equates to a 14% increase. How this compares to the other regions will be discussed in the comparison of the regions in Part 3 of this report.

It is important to bear in mind that these figures only include childcare that is registered with the Care Commission – childminders and day care facilities. Sitter Services are also registered with the Care Commission but since they are categorised under childcare agency care the number of places are not cited. This is because Sitter Services are registered to provide a service and there are no limits placed on the number of service users or places available (Care Commission, 2009:100). Furthermore, it has not been possible to measure the number of children in Scotland each year against the number of available registered places as this information does not appear to be available.

Employment and worklessness

According to the pre-school and childcare statistics for 2004, 69% of women with dependent children were in work, which was a slight increase in the employment rate when compared to the previous five years (Scottish Government, 2004: 1). In addition, the report stated that there was also an increase in the proportion of women with children working full-time. Not surprisingly, the Scottish Government's GUS project has also consistently found that the use of childcare is closely correlated to parental employment, in particular the employment of the mother.

The Scottish Government boasts to have the highest employment rate of all the countries in the United Kingdom, noting that it has steadily risen since the 1990s (Scottish Government, 2010a). During April - June of 2007 the employment rate reached a peak of 77.1%. Scotland's employment rate between October – December of 2009 was 73.5% whilst in England it was 72.6% (Scottish Government, 2010a). This drop is not surprising given the current economic climate and Scotland still has the highest employment rate of all the regions in the UK.

*Workforce Plus*, an employability Framework which was launched in 2006, set out the Government's plans to help people in Scotland move from welfare to work (Scottish Executive, 2006). The programme identified that there are a mixture of barriers that effect workless groups, particularly lone parents, in terms of childcare costs, loss of benefits and the availability of work (Scottish Government, 2006: 46).

According OPFS, it is estimated that there are 174,000 lone parents with 295,000 children in Scotland (OPFS, 2009a: 4). OPFS also states that nine out of 10 lone parents are women and 22% of all households with children are headed by a lone parent, 90% of which are female (OPFS, 2009a: 4).

*Scotland's People Annual Report: Results from 2007/2008* states that there are high levels of employment amongst men and women in Scotland (49% of all men and 29% of all women) although 'there remains some evidence of the traditional model of caring for home and family being a female role' (Scottish Government, 2009b: 41). 11% of the women surveyed said that they were looking after the home and family in contrast to 1% of men. Thus, it is clear that women are still seen as the main carers.

Women's participation in the labour market has increased over recent years, with almost two-thirds (65%) of working age women in some form of paid work. 22% of working women work part-time and 14% do not work at all because they are looking after their home and family (Scottish Government, 2009b: 44).

46.4% of families in Glasgow are headed by a lone parent, which might explain why Glasgow has one of the highest rates of unemployment in Scotland (OPFS, 2009a: 5).

#### Childcare and demographic issues

As *Children in Scotland* states 'tackling the problems associated with enabling families to access childcare services poses a major challenge to those trying to develop and sustain provision in rural Scotland' because 'much of Scotland can be defined as 'rural'' (Children in Scotland, 2000: 1). According to this report what was then the Scottish Office classified 14 of the 32 LA areas 'as being entirely or predominantly rural, and most of the other 18 as having large rural areas within their boundaries' (Children in Scotland, 2000: 1). Therefore, the ICS initiative, where services are brought together under one roof, is crucial to Scotland's families and, in particular, Scotland's working parents.

Sustaining such services in rural areas, however, continues to be a challenge.

The policy research reviewed in this chapter highlighted parents' reliance on help with childcare from grandparents. The GUS project revealed that parents living in remote or rural areas were half as likely to receive help with babysitting and childcare from grandparents as those living in urban areas (Anderson *et al*, 2007:74). As Anderson *et al* state 'it is likely that due to the constraints of geographical distances, parents in remote rural areas receive lower levels of support from grandparents than those in other areas' (Anderson *et al* 2007:95). The cost of childcare was also found to be lowest in remote areas (Anderson *et al*, 2007:158).

According to the research report entitled *Growing Up in Rural Scotland* 'families with very young children make less use of formal childcare in rural areas and are more likely to come from more advantaged backgrounds' (Scottish Government, 2008a:1). According to the report, in rural Scotland mothers tend to be older, children are less likely to be living in lone parent households and mothers are more likely to have qualifications to degree level (Scottish Government, 2008:1). For parents of both babies and toddlers, the report stated that childminders were a more common choice than nurseries in rural areas.

### **Conclusions**

The Scottish Government has gone to great lengths to understand the context of childcare and the needs of working parents in order to help inform policy. The Government has invested significantly in establishing a knowledge base. Although Scotland is perhaps behind in its policies on paper, it does demonstrate a commitment to identifying need and acting on need, as outlined by the breadth of policy research it has commissioned through the GUS project.

Having reviewed the strategies and policies in place, it is clear that the Government does not report sufficiently on progress made to date, making it difficult to ascertain whether the targets set in a particular policy or Strategy were actually met. Indeed, this is an issue which was acknowledged in *The Early Years Framework*, where it was stated that ‘a priority area for ongoing partnership will be developing a systematic way of recording, reviewing and learning from innovation and evidence’ (Scottish Government, 2008: 29).

A recurrent theme underpins all of the research reviewed – childcare is an economic issue and in order to give every child the best start in life, this needs to be acknowledged. Unlike Northern Ireland, where there is a distinct gap in evidence and understanding of the context (this will become apparent in the forthcoming chapter), Scotland is clear about the context in which it lives and what it needs to do to move forward. Scotland has introduced innovative projects, in particular Integrated Community Schools (ICS), which came into existence before extended Schools in England, but could still learn from England’s more direct and pragmatic approach.

Scotland’s Sitter Service also offers parents flexibility to enable parents to work atypical hours and pay for childcare at a rate they can afford. Though Scotland may not have updated its Childcare Strategy of 1998, it has made significant inroads in relation to childcare and childcare provision, and has a sophisticated knowledge of the childcare and economic needs that currently exist in Scotland.

Furthermore, this chapter has demonstrated that the Scottish Government continues to identify childcare as a social and an economic issue in many of its strategies. However, it lacks a clearly defined and updated strategy similar to that in England, with clear, defined goals which are measurable.

<sup>i</sup> Partnerships should ensure that the following groups are represented: the Local Authority including education and social work interests; the Local Enterprise Company; local employers, possibly represented through the Chamber of Commerce; private sector education and childcare providers; out of school forums; voluntary sector providers of early years education and care; further education colleges; the National Health Service; registered childminders; employment service/New Deal Partnerships and parents, including working parents (Scottish Government, 2010).

<sup>ii</sup> The Scottish Social Exclusion Network was established in 1998 to assist the Government in developing a strategy for promoting social inclusion, and to encourage partnership between agencies in considering this issue. Representatives include Government officials, other agencies for example COSLA, the STUC, Scottish Enterprise, and individuals with direct experience of tackling social exclusion (Scottish Parliament, 2000).

<sup>iii</sup> The Integrated Services Task Group consists of around 30 members from Scottish Government, COSLA, local authorities, the NHS, voluntary and private sector organisations and regulatory and inspection bodies. The Task Group agreed to form three sub-groups to look at childcare, pre-school and interventions beyond pre-school (Scottish Government, 2008b).



*Northern Ireland*

**Introduction**

The evolution of childcare services in Northern Ireland has not been targeted extensively or exclusively by an overarching strategy or piece of legislation. However there have been a number of incremental changes to childcare services that have been influenced by a number of strategies, policies and programmes.

It is important to be cognisant of the impact of 'the Troubles' on policy development in Northern Ireland. Devolution was suspended in 2002, with a return to direct rule for a five year period. Devolution was restored in 2007. The piece meal and ad hoc approach to childcare policy has been influenced by the political circumstances that exist within Northern Ireland.

Below outlines the development process commencing with The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

**Childcare Policy and Legislation in Northern Ireland**The Children (Northern Ireland) Order, 1995

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (referred to as the Order hereafter) is the main statute governing the care of children in need in Northern Ireland. It is an important source of child law as it affects all who work with and care for children, whether as parents, paid carers or volunteers (DHSSPS, 2002). At the time of its introduction it was viewed as the most significant reform of child legislation for decades in Northern Ireland (McColgan, 1995). The Order introduced 'parental responsibility' as the central theme in child law. There are essentially three layers to the Children Order 1995; layer one is the primary legislation, layer two is the subordinate legislation, also referred to as regulations, and layer three is

the guidelines issued to compliment and explain the obligations the Order places.

Under the Order, children's services are prepared only in respect of children in need. Attention is given to registered childcare mainly in Part 11 of the Order. It contains provisions to protect the welfare of young children who are in day care or looked after by childminders. The Order also places duties on Health and Social Services Trusts (now called Health and Social Care Trusts) to maintain a register of persons who act as childminders or provide day care. Provision is also made for a person authorised by the Trust to carry out inspections in relation to premises used for childminding and day care. Part 13 imposes a duty on the Department of Health and Social Services to keep under review the adequacy of childcare training in both the statutory and voluntary sectors and provides for the financing of research and training.

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (Amendment) 1998 introduced regulations that placed a statutory obligation on Health and Social Services Boards to prepare and publish children's plans in respect of services identified in the main 1995 Order. It is noteworthy that there is a statutory duty under the Order on Health and Social Services Care Trusts to consult with partner agencies, but no statutory obligation on these partner agencies to engage. Also, the children's plans are only required for children and young people deemed to be in need.<sup>i</sup> The Order places a duty on Health and Social Care Trusts to publicise information on the services provided by others, including information on childminding, day care and supervised activities. Childcare provision is not considered directly within the Order. It extends to duties relating to regulation, inspection, training and information services relating to childcare.

Investing in Early Learning, Department of Education, 1998

Some three years later the then Minister for Education, Tony Worthington, launched a Government initiative to increase the investment in early learning in Northern Ireland. The *Investing in Early Learning* policy outlined the Government's commitment to increase pre-school education. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 defines pre-school education as:

Education provided for a child (whether at a school or any other premises) at any time after he/she has attained the age of two years and before he/she has reached compulsory school age (four years), other than in the reception class of a primary school.

(Education (Northern Ireland) Order, 1998)

The aim of the programme was to provide a free, quality pre-school education place in the year before the child goes into Primary one. It initially targeted children from socially disadvantaged circumstances and the oldest children in the pre-school cohort. The provision of pre-school education in Northern Ireland is not a statutory requirement. *Investing in Early Learning* led to the establishment of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (DENI, 1998b). The Government set a target to provide one year of pre-school education for every child whose parents wanted it. By 2002-2003, the final year of the expansion phase, a net total of over 9,900 new funded places had been created, which increased provision to cover approximately 91% of children in their immediate pre-school year (NIAO, 2009).

Launched in 1998, it was viewed as one strand of the Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy, *Children First*, which was due to be published the

following year. The Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) was established to advise on developments to meet the core aims of the Programme and comprised representatives from Education and Library Boards, Health and Social Care Trusts, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, Comhairle Na Gealscolaíochta and the voluntary and private Community Pre-School Care Sector. A review of the Pre-School Education Programme was carried out in 2006 and this will be discussed in more detail later.

Children First: Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy (1999)

The first regional Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland was published in 1999. It drew parallels to the challenges that existed in the other three regions; quality, costs, provision and lack of information. The Strategy recognised that:

current services fall far short of the Government's vision. Provision is uneven and poorly co-ordinated. Care for school age children and children with special needs is particularly limited.

(DHSS, 1999:6)

Quality was recognised as being variable: 'there is no consistent definition of quality standards which is recognised across childcare settings. Only half of all childcare workers in Northern Ireland have any relevant qualification' (DHSS, 1999:6). A commitment was given to invest in the childcare workforce to help address quality standards in childcare services. *Children First* also indicated that the Training and Employment Agency would 'develop a childcare training strategy for Northern Ireland' with the aim of ensuring that 'the resources available are used as efficiently and effectively as possible' (DHSS, 1999:13).

Lack of access to provision and information was noted as key to parents not being able to avail of childcare, stating that 'the quality and accuracy of information on the availability of childcare is not sufficient' (DHSS, 1999: 7). Provision was to be addressed through improved financial resources. £61 million was secured to improve childcare provision and quality, including £9.9 million for Sure Start schemes to be established from April 2000, £27.4 million for pre-school education expansion, New Opportunities Fund to support out-of-school childcare, £7 million for training under the New Deal for workers in childcare, £1.9 million for childcare allowances for Training and Employment Agency trainees and £4.9 million for the Childhood Fund. The Strategy also established four new Childcare Partnerships, made up of statutory agencies, employers, parents, voluntary and community organisations and childcare providers. £0.6 million was ring fenced for the infrastructure development of the Childcare Partnerships.

*Children First* envisaged an integrated move towards marrying early childhood education and care, with a key focus of the Strategy on the integration of education and childcare:

Education and day care services for young children, and services for their parents, should be better co-ordinated, and provided as close together as possible.

(DHSS, 1999: 10)

Three Departments were assigned responsibility for childcare; the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) (now the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety), the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) through the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) and the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DE). A number of principles were outlined; social inclusion, quality, affordability, access, family friendly work practices, information and partnerships. The

Government's aim was to ensure high quality, affordable childcare for children aged up to 14 in every local community in Northern Ireland.

The strategic body tasked to implement the Strategy was the Inter-Departmental Group on Early Years (IDGEY). IDGEY was first established in 1995. It consisted of membership from the Department of Education (DE), the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL), viewed as the oversight body. It was responsible for developing a regional Action Plan to monitor the implementation of the actions of *Children First*. IDGEY stopped monitoring the implementation of the Strategy in 2003, pending a review of *Children First*. The four CCPs were the operational bodies tasked to implement the actions to realise the strategic aims.

#### *Sure Start Schemes*

Sure Start was introduced to Northern Ireland in July 2000 with Ministerial approval for an initial 15 projects; a further eight projects were created by 2001. There are currently 32 Sure Start programmes operating in Northern Ireland. The Sure Start policy objective is 'to improve the health and well-being of families and children before and from birth, so children flourish at home and when they go to school' (DHSSPS, 2002:5). When introduced the Sure Start Programme was viewed as a radical, cross-departmental strategy to improve services for young children and families. It was seen as key to the Government's drive to prevent social exclusion, raise educational standards, reduce health inequalities and promote opportunities for families. The main stakeholders involved in Sure Start schemes are children under the age of four, DHSPSS, DE, parents, community and voluntary organisations, the private sector and the four Childcare Partnerships. Early Years responsibility transferred from DHSSPS in 2006. DE is now responsible for the strategic direction of Sure

Start. DHSSPS is involved at an operational level. There has been recognition that the Sure Start Programme in Northern Ireland has not received a similar level of investment to that which is provided in the rest of the UK. In answer to a question tabled at a Northern Ireland Assembly debate last year on the long term sustainability of Sure Start schemes, the Minister for Education stated the 'Department of Education is to maintain Sure Start coverage of the 20percent most deprived ward areas in the north of Ireland, as ranked by the Multiple Deprivation Measure Score' (NIA, 2008).

*Children First* aimed to address a number of key challenges through specific aims. It proposed actions to address quality, improve integration of childcare and education, develop information networks for parents and address the challenges of high childcare costs. A review of *Children First* was carried out in 2005. The Review set out to scrutinise whether the Strategy was successful. The Review is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Programme for Government, Making a Difference 2001 -2004, Northern Ireland Executive (NIE)

The first Programme for Government (PfG) was published in April 2001. The PfG set out the Executive's proposed strategic aims and priorities over a three-year period. It established five priorities; Growing as a Community, Working for a Healthier Community, Investing in Education and Skills, Securing a Competitive Economy and Developing Relations. Under each priority it set a number of sub priorities. It established five Executive Programme Funds (EPFs), one of which focused on children, namely the Children's Fund. The establishment of the Children's Fund was the Government's recognition of the importance of children's services. The main focus of the Children's Fund was to 'support...children in need and young people at risk' (PfG, 2001:13). The key priority of the Fund



was focused on child protection. Funding was not ring fenced for childcare services. A commitment was given within the programme to extend pre-school provision: 'To ensure the highest standards of achievement by all our young people, we need to give them the best possible start by expanding and enriching pre-school provision' (PfG, 2001: 39).

A Taskforce on Employability was established from the PfG. The group was set up 'in recognition of the fact that too many people were marginalised and excluded from social and economic progress and acknowledging that unemployment is one of the most profound causes of poverty' (DEL, 2004: 2). The Taskforce carried out an analytical study of the concept of employability. Key themes were identified and the consultation process reinforced the view that 'there are many complex factors that impinge on an individual's ability to enter and remain in employment' (DEL, 2004: 5).

Childcare was highlighted

as a major factor affecting women in particular as a barrier to employment. In the context of the Taskforce, Childcare refers to day care, the primary purpose of which is to enable parents to take up or remain in work, training or education.

(DEL, 2004: 5)

The report's recommendations aimed to strengthen the development, coordination and implementation of policies affecting day care. The report emphasised the need for strong interdepartmental leadership and commitment to address issues pertinent to childcare. It called for a review of *Children First* through reports published in 2002 and 2004.

Programme for Government, Making a Difference 2002 -2005, Northern Ireland Executive (NIE)

The second PfG continued with the Executive Programme Funds (EPFs). It stated that 'one of the most tangible ways in which we are promoting a more coherent approach to policy and programme development is through the use of Executive Programme Funds (EPFs)' (PfG, 2002-2005:8). It referenced the work of the Taskforce on Employability and Long-Term Unemployment Implementation Group. A commitment was made to introduce a childcare grant for higher education students on low incomes. The PfG provided a pledge to develop a ten-year strategy for children and young people, taking account of the role of parents and families:

This will include strategic goals in key areas affecting children and young people. It will also examine the scope for achieving a more joined up approach within the Executive to children's issues. We are maintaining coverage of the Sure Start programme which aims to improve the life chances of children under four in areas of social disadvantage.

(PfG, 2002: 17)

The PfG also made a commitment to the establishment of a Children's Commissioner for Northern Ireland. The Children's Commissioner was appointed in 2003, however it was not until 2006 that the Children and Young People's Strategy was actually established.

*People and Place A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (2003)*  
*Department of Social Development (DSD)*

Launched in June 2003, this long term (7–10 year) strategy set to target those communities throughout Northern Ireland suffering the highest levels of deprivation (DSD, 2003). A number of strategic objectives were

set one of which focussed on Economic Renewal. Contained within this objective was the recognition that childcare was a key barrier to neighbourhoods being able to access employment.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

Contained within the Order are duties relating to legislative and policy developments relating to childcare. Specifically Article 7 outlines the duties imposed on the Commissioner that are relevant:

7. (2) The Commissioner shall keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice relating to the rights and welfare of children and young persons.

7.(3) The Commissioner shall keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for children and young persons by relevant authorities.

Building on Progress 2003 -2006, Priorities and Budgets 2004 – 2006

With devolution suspended in 2002, budgetary plans in 2003 were presented under direct rule in the form of a three-year Spending Plan. The same process applied in 2004 with a two-year Spending Plan published. A commitment was given that the priorities outlined within previous PFGs would remain as an important focus.

Both Spending Plans referenced the importance of children's services. A commitment was given for a new cross-departmental strategy for children and young people to be developed by March 2004. This pledge was given with a more definitive timetable in the 2004-2006 Spending Plan that by 31 December 2004 'a 10 year overarching strategy for children and young people containing high level strategic outcomes' would be

implemented (PfG, 2004: 20). As with the previous budget plans, no central funding was ring fenced to consider childcare services.

#### Priorities and Budgets 2005 -2008

In 2005, Spending Plans under direct rule were reshaped. The *Priorities and Budget 2005-08* outlined three key overarching and interlinked themes. One, Economic Competitiveness, to make Northern Ireland a more competitive and productive region; two, Building Equality and Community Cohesion, to increase opportunity for all and ensure stronger communities; and three, Better Public Services, to ensure excellent and efficient public services for all (Priorities and Budgets, 2005:18).

The Children's Fund was subsumed into core departmental budgets, a change that raised concern amongst the community and voluntary sector as many key children's services were funded through this mechanism. No direct commitment was provided to childcare services. Again, a commitment was given to take forward an overarching ten-year strategy for children and young people, however details on resources and timetables were not provided.

#### Review of Children First (2005), The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) commissioned a review of the *Children First* Strategy in 2005. This was a comprehensive report that provided an analysis of change since the introduction of the Childcare Strategy in 1999. Recognition was given to the developments that had been made within childcare policy in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. The report set to answer two overarching questions:

- To what extent have the aims of *Children First* been achieved?
- To what extent are the aims of *Children First* relevant today?

(DHSS, 1999:9)

The report acknowledged that significant progress had been achieved to deliver on the actions of *Children First*. The CCPs were cited as the key drivers in the implementation of the actions achieved. Among the successes included were the implementation of Sure Start, the introduction and expansion of the pre-school nursery places and the increase in the number of overall childcare places available. The Work Life Balance campaign was run by the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) between June 2000 and December 2003. The campaign was to raise awareness among employers of the importance of implementing flexible working policies to achieve a better balance between work and life, and was also a success story that led from *Children First*.

However there were a number of critical issues highlighted. A summary of the key issues fell under four key themes namely, Funding, Strategy, Accountability and Integration. The lack of a co-ordinated approach of ownership and accountability were raised. IDGEY's co-ordination role were called into question.

It was reported that IDGEY has been unsuccessful in terms of its ability to integrate the interests of its three member departments. The general view is that *Children First* did not benefit from a shared, inter-departmental vision on childcare. Instead it has relied on the statutory remit, role and priorities of individual departments which are related to childcare.

(DHSSPS, 2005:50)

The report highlighted a number of key goals required to progress any new strategy:

- Make the inter-departmental body accountable to a Minister.
- Appoint a lead department to coordinate and drive childcare issues at departmental level.
- Strengthen inter-departmental focus and direction through focused policy, robust strategy and action planning.
- Ensure the Childcare Strategy is clearly visible across Government departments by ensuring childcare becomes part of Priorities for Action.
- Broaden representation of the inter-departmental body to include DSD.
- Cooperate at inter-departmental level to thread core themes through the childcare strategy ie care, health, education, training, workforce development, neighbourhood renewal, anti-poverty and voluntary sector cooperation.
- Integrate care and education structures at sub-regional level.
- Provide regional focus on critical functional areas through time-limited sub-groups.
- Strengthen coordination of action at the local level.

(DHSSPS, 2005: 63)

Six recommendations are proposed to achieve a phased movement from a silo based status quo to an optimum delivery model which is fully aligned with any future childcare strategy and future public administration structures. Any future childcare strategy should set clearly defined outcomes and targets to facilitate the monitoring and measurement of progress.

(DHSSPS, 2005: 71).

The recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1 – Reshape the childcare vision for Northern Ireland

Recommendation 2 – Allocate mainstream funding to the childcare  
Strategy

Recommendation 3 – Strengthen accountability for childcare action

Recommendation 4 – Create robust leadership structures for childcare

Recommendation 5 – Implement childcare from an integrated platform

Recommendation 6 – Strengthen local capacity to action childcare  
priorities.

(DHSSPS, 2005: 71-72).

In its conclusion it was stated that the Review of *Children First* would be an instrumental tool in informing the way forward for childcare provision and delivery in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS, 2005). Yet its recommendations have not been realised.

#### Priorities and Budgets 2006 – 2008

A new funding priority, The Children and Young People's Package was announced as part of this two year Spending Plan. Its aim was to enhance the quality of life for children and young people in Northern Ireland by providing greater protection and prospects. Early Years policy was transferred to the Department of Education. It was allocated as the lead Department, with responsibility for identifying and prioritising activities and actions with other Government departments. However there lacked detail on specific plans, and there was no link to the ten-year Strategy for Children and Young People.

Outcomes From the Review of Pre-school Education in Northern Ireland,  
Department of Education (DE) 2006

In June 2004, the Department of Education issued a consultative document inviting views on issues relevant to the organisation of pre-school education and how its delivery might be improved. In particular, the Department sought views on the duration of pre-school education sessions, the admission age to pre-school education, the continued availability of reception classes and groups in certain primary schools, support for children with special educational needs, staff to child ratios, staff support and training arrangements and the funding of pre-school education. The report stated:

This Review of Pre-School Education also takes account of what is happening elsewhere including developments in the rest of the UK, particularly the key issue of moving towards greater integration of formal education, childcare, and early years services. It is important that we adopt the appropriate policies in Northern Ireland to support “whole child” early years development. This will involve continuing to ensure that policies are: focused on children and their families, rather than departmental structures; harmonised; supported by effective interfaces between Departments; and delivered in a high-quality and cost effective manner.

(DE, 2006:7-8)

The Outcomes report in 2006 recognised the importance of the whole child approach: ‘...these policies must be harmonised, with effective interfaces between Departments, to ensure the best possible use of financial resources available in support of giving every child in Northern Ireland the best possible start in life’ (DE, 2006:36). Since the introduction of the pre-school nursery programme in 1998, the



Department of Education has invested approximately £58 million (DE, 2010). Under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme the levels of pre-school education provision for children in the final year of pre-compulsory education rose from 45% in 1997 to 92% in 2003/2004 (DE, 2004). A framework of statutory, voluntary and private sector pre-school providers had been established across the five Education and Library Boards.

Yet the programme has received criticism for its 'lack of consistency across the Education and Library Boards' regarding the allocation of resources, qualifications of staff and planning (DE, 2006). The part-time nature of the programme has also been questioned. It is arguable that full-time places may contribute to the holistic development of children. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carries out inspections to ensure that quality standards are achieved. Given the extension of the programme to include private and voluntary providers, this has led to registered childcare providers requiring two inspections, one from the ETI and one from the HSC Trusts. The ETI report also highlights the inequality of access to training and support. The Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) provide training and support to the statutory sector. The community and voluntary and private sector however do not have access to this provision. Consultation responses centred on the need for more integrated approach with an emphasis on wraparound comprising play, care and education for 0-6 years olds (DE, 2006).

#### Children and Young People Funding Package, Department of Education 2006 – 2008

The Children and Young people funding introduced the Extended Schools Programme to Northern Ireland in March 2006, as well focusing on Early Years provision, looked-after children and vulnerable young adults, youth

provision, child protection and children with special needs and disabilities.

The then Secretary of State Peter Hain stated:

It provides funding for extending the role of schools to become centres of the community by offering services and learning opportunities before and after the traditional school day, making additional early years provision, providing more counselling and therapy support, increasing youth provision, making better provision for looked-after children and improving child protection arrangements.

(DE, 2006:1)

Funding focused on the extended schools services; however, there was investment in the expansion of the Sure Start programmes, in the extension of pre-school education expansion and a planned developmental programme for two year olds. The programme was seen as central to achieving the outcomes from the ten year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland. The Extended schools agenda in Northern Ireland centred on increasing educational chances and improving family opportunities through breaking cycles of deprivation. The aim was to encourage schools in Northern Ireland to become:

hubs of their local community, offering a range of activities before, during and beyond the traditional school day, engaging with their local community, connecting local people with local services.

(DE, 2006:4)

There is no typical model of an Extended School in Northern Ireland but the types of services and activities offered can include: 'wraparound' childcare, parenting support, sport and leisure activities and learning programmes for parents. DE outlined:

The eligibility criteria was targeted on children and young people who are disadvantaged, marginalised or have the most limited access to current services. This does not mean that only these children require Extended Schools, but for the purposes of the funding package this criteria was adopted. Schools outside of these parameters may also become 'extended' but will not have access to a particular funding stream from the Department of Education to achieve their goals.

(DE, 2006:7)

At the time of its release concerns were raised on how the Government allocated funding. Schools were automatically selected without the need for planned activities. There was also criticism that the package was introduced lacking the support of a Strategic Plan. It was noted that without the proper infrastructure to support its development, it failed to encourage collaboration among schools (Concordia, 2006).

Funding cuts in the Extended Schools programme in 2008 significantly impacted on the scheme. The Minister for Education announced that due to budget constraints 'there is a considerable reduction in the resources available for the Extended Schools Programme' (DE, 2008). Currently eligibility for schools is based on a mixture of pupils living in a Neighbourhood Renewal Area, in one of the most deprived wards/Super Output, the percentage of pupils with a Free School Meal Entitlement or in the case of Nursery School pupils, parents in receipt of Income Based Jobseekers Allowance at or above 37%. There are approximately 500 schools that are eligible to apply for funding. At the core of the programme was the concept of integrating childcare with educational opportunities to those in most need.

Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge: A Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006-2016, Office of First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)

The commitment to develop a Children and Young People's Strategy was finally realised in 2006, launched by the then Minister for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, Maria Eagle. It provides a framework to ensure that all children and young people fulfil their potential and thrive in the future. It sets out a number of specific outcomes:

We will know that we have achieved our shared vision for our children and young people if, after ten years, we can report progress and evidence exists, which indicates that our children and young people are:

- Healthy;
- Enjoying, learning and achieving;
- Living in safety and with stability;
- Experiencing economic and environmental well-being;
- Contributing positively to community and society; and
- Living in a society which respects their rights.

(OFMDFM, 2006: 7)

Parallels can be drawn with the Every Child Matters policy framework introduced for England and Wales. The Strategy was originally intended to be the implementation plan for the UNCRC in Northern Ireland but

concerns remain that it has not succeeded in mainstreaming children's rights principles throughout its framework and action planning process. The Strategy does not address childcare directly. However, its overarching themes are linked. Themes include: working in partnership with those who provide and commission children's services, taking account of the future arrangements following the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland (OFMDFM, 2006). One of the outcomes from the overarching strategies was the production of Children and Young People's Action Plans. The Plans set out the cross-departmental actions to meet the objectives of the Ten Year Strategy. To date two have been produced covering 2007-2008 and 2008-2011. The first Action Plan of 2007-2008 draws scant reference to childcare, with a reference to the need to expand Sure Start provision.

However, the second Action Plan, which covers a three year period and is referred to as a 'living document', details specific actions to address childcare challenges across Government departments. Outcomes include cross-departmental agreement and clarity of policy responsibility in respect of childcare (OFMDFM, 2008). This led to the re-establishment of a Ministerial Sub-Committee to examine childcare issues in November 2008. It is chaired by the two OFMDFM Junior Ministers who have responsibility for Children and Young People and all departmental Ministers are members. The Ministerial sub-group was tasked to report findings of the childcare exercise to the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People for consideration by September 2009' (OFMDFM, 2008).

Actions focused on reaching this objective included:

- Establishment of a cross-departmental sub-group of the Ministerial Sub-Committee to examine childcare issues by November 2008.

- Report findings of the childcare exercise to the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People by September 2009.
- Decisions on the way forward and further actions/targets associated with the provision of childcare. This action was focused on a £10 million funding package to combat rural exclusion.

At the time of writing, the reports commissioned have not yet been published.

Supporting the Cost of Home-based Childcare, Home Childcarer Approval Scheme, DHSSPS 2006

Home-based Childcare was introduced to Northern Ireland in 2006. The scheme approves childcare provided within a child's own home. Under the proposals, parents are able to employ a home childcarer who has been approved by Health and Social Care Trusts. At the time of its introduction concerns were raised on the disparity of criteria required with that of Childminders. Home-based Childcarers are required to attend a basic induction programme or hold a relevant qualification. Parents would also be considered as employers, which was viewed as a potential barrier. Resource implications on the administration of the scheme on Health and Social Care Trusts was also highlighted as a challenge. The benefits of Home-based Childcare hold particular relevance for ethnic families, families living in rural areas and for children who have a disability. To date Home-based Childcare has not been utilised fully. Furthermore no statistical information was available on this type of childcare provision.

Gender Equality Strategy (GES), A Strategic Framework for action to promote gender equality for women and men, 2006 – 2016 (OFMDFM)

Produced in 2006 The Gender Equality Strategy

provides an overarching strategic policy framework within which departments, their agencies and other relevant statutory authorities will channel their existing actions and initiate new actions to achieve an agreed vision, guided by a set of principles and objectives aimed at tackling gender inequalities and promoting gender equality across Government's major policy areas for the benefit of both women and men generally.

(GES, 2006: 10)

Particular attention is given to the key action areas, where gender inequalities arise. Childcare roles with men and women are given due recognition. The Strategy highlights that it will employ two tools in relation to its implementation gender mainstreaming<sup>ii</sup>, and gender action measures<sup>iii</sup>, which include positive action as provided for within the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976.

The Strategy provides a framework of objectives to direct action by decision-makers and policy-makers in Government through departmental Gender Action Plans. Departmental Gender Action Plans are currently being drafted by Government departments. It is anticipated that the Action Plans will not be issued for public consultation.

Northern Ireland Executive, Programme for Government (PfG) 2008 -2011

The third Programme for Government (PfG) produced by the Northern Ireland Executive set out the priorities, outlining the allocation of

resources and capital investment necessary to meet its aims. Together with Public Service Agreements (PSAs), the PfG offers ‘...a clear framework, at a strategic level, for the Executive to develop our policies and programmes over the next three years’ (NIE, 2008:3). Scant attention is given to the area of childcare. Only one direct acknowledgement is provided:

We will implement the cross-departmental Gender Equality Strategy and work towards the total elimination of the gender pay gap. In addition we will ensure that there are effective programmes and strategies aimed at achieving the eradication of all forms of violence against women, and examine strategies to combat the lack of women’s representation in political and public life and to ensuring access to affordable quality childcare.

(NIE, 2008:12)

Public Service Agreement<sup>iv</sup> (PSA) three looks to address the barriers to employment; however it fails to recognise childcare as a potential barrier to employment. Under PSA six is a commitment to take forward the development of an Early Years Strategy. However no budget or timescales are offered within the detail of the PSA.

Lifetime Opportunities Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy, Office of First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) 2008

In December 2008, the Executive adopted the broad architecture of Lifetime Opportunities as their overarching strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland. The Strategy views employment as the best route out of poverty. The report was initially published under direct rule in 2006. It emerged following a review of the New Targeting Social Need (TSN) policy. Reference is made to the *Review of Children*



*First* report produced in 2005, stating that the document 'will be an instrumental tool in informing the way forward for this (childcare) provision and its delivery in Northern Ireland' (OFMDFM, 2008: 25).

Sure Start programmes are outlined within the Strategy as being 'at the heart of the Government's drive to improve the quality of Early Years' (OFMDFM, 2008: 25). Support for parents is recognised as important, reference to financial support is highlighted through the tax credits system, working families can access help with their childcare costs, and legislation to promote work-life balance. Contained within the Strategy is a set of Early Years targets, some of which focus on childcare provision:

By 2020, every parent in Northern Ireland will have access to a range of information and services to enable their children to reach their potential...Provide opportunities for young children in rural areas to benefit from projects such as...day care provision, crèches and initiatives that also support their parents...By 2020, Government will support every Local Authority to identify and address gaps in provision of services for Early Years children in rural areas.

(OFMDFM, 2008: 31)

Each Government department is tasked with producing Action Plans to address poverty and social exclusion. As yet, the Action Plans have not been published. The Strategy has received criticism for setting vague and difficult to measure targets (NICCY, 2009).

Rural Childcare Investing in the Future, Rural Stakeholder Group, Department of Agricultural and Rural Development (DARD), 2008

The Minister for Agricultural and Rural Development established a Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group to look specifically at the distinct challenges

of rural childcare. Central to the report was the recognition that rural childcare played an important role in rural economic and social development (Rural Stakeholder Group, 2008). The report highlighted that one of the key constraints for rural families accessing work was inadequate childcare provision in rural areas. The report produced a number of recommendations, one of which was for Government departments to produce and implement 'properly integrated strategies and action plans'. Leading on from the report was a Rural Childcare Funding programme to enact some of the recommendations of the report.

Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework, Department of Agricultural and Rural Development (DARD) 2009

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development developed an Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework. One of the strategic objectives of the framework is addressing rural childcare needs and challenges:

Adequate provision of childcare can be seen as having an important part to play in combating rural decline, promoting economic and social development and thus raising more children out of poverty. A recent Danish study has shown that investing in rural childcare is the most important factor above housing, transport, schools and recreational facilities for economic investment in rural areas.

(DARD, 2009)

Rural Childcare Funding Programme, (DARD) 2009

On the back of the Rural Childcare report, *Investing in the Future*, DARD launched a £1.5 million Rural Childcare Programme aimed at improving childcare provision in rural areas. The focus of the programme was to provide solutions that address the particular and distinct challenges faced

by rural communities in childcare provision. Applications to the Rural Childcare Programme were sought in June 2009 for pilot or demonstration projects run by community organisations or Northern Ireland wide representative organisations. The call sought projects that would address the priority areas of access, early years integration, quality, sustainability and affordability in a rural context. The programme has a key goal of establishing good practice examples and to inform future childcare policy (DARD, 2009).

Families Matter: Supporting Families in Northern Ireland, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) 2009

Produced in 2009, the central theme of *Families Matter* is how it can support parents and families. The Strategy gives priority to prevention and early intervention focusing on the availability of, and access to appropriate information and services for both parents and relevant professionals to assist them in providing care for children and young people. In the main the Strategy focuses on families and children in need of extra support. The Strategy does not focus on childcare, apart from a scant reference to Sure Start schemes, and a reference to Children's Centres in England. The Draft Regional Family and Parenting Strategy proposed the establishment of six new Children's Centres in Northern Ireland by April 2008 (EYSA, 2008).

Rural White Paper, Northern Ireland Executive 2010

The Northern Ireland Executive is currently drafting a *Rural White Paper* which, '...seeks to set out a long-term strategic vision for the development of rural areas throughout the North' (DARD 2009). Rural services will form an important aspect of this report. A set of papers were produced, one of which focused on the issue of rural childcare. It is envisaged that the Rural White Paper will go out to consultation early in 2011. DARD has

recognised the importance of childcare and it is anticipated that the Rural White Paper will consider childcare as an integral service. It is unknown what weight the Rural White Paper will carry. Usually white papers are the precursor to legislative changes.

#### Early Years Strategy 0-6 year olds, Department of Education 2010

At the time of writing this report, the Department of Education is due to release an Early Years Strategy. The Early Years policy lead transferred from DHSSPS in November 2006. It is anticipated that the Early Years Strategy will focus on the development of an Early Years Strategy for 0 – six years. It will be considered in four key thematic areas namely, good practice, equality, delivery arrangements and a workforce strategy. It is envisioned that the Early Years Strategy will direct the future strategic development of early years services. It will bring the various different elements and funding streams together, including the Sure Start projects. A commitment has been given that this Strategy will join up other Government priorities such as OFMDFM's ten-year children's reforms and the Anti-Poverty Strategy (NIAO, 2009).

#### The Child Poverty Act 2010

Although this is an overarching strategy across the UK, it is noteworthy that there will be a statutory requirement on OFMDFM to draw up a Child Poverty Strategy and to report to the Assembly on a yearly basis regarding how they are progressing against targets.

The Northern Ireland Executive has also given a commitment to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2010 and to work towards the elimination of severe child poverty by 2012 (OFMDFM, 2010). The latter target is a unique for any jurisdiction in the UK and Northern Ireland is the first to

set such a target. Given that the Government repeatedly state that employment is the best route out of poverty, the importance of childcare policy and provision to support parents' choice to return to work will impact on achieving the targets set. In response to an Inquiry into child poverty in 2008, a commitment was made by the Northern Ireland Executive to the development of a Childcare Strategy.

The subcommittee on Children and Young People established a sub-group to proceed with work on child poverty. The group is chaired by a senior official from OFMDFM and is comprised of representatives from the Department of Education (DE), the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). Affordable childcare has also been identified as a key area for the sub-group to consider, and work is ongoing to introduce detailed recommendations (OFMDFM, 2010).

An economic appraisal has also been commissioned by OFMDFM on the future delivery options for childcare. Recognition was given to the importance of quality childcare 'as crucial for children's development, and at how cost and availability of childcare is a barrier for parents seeking to enter or re-enter the labour market. As well as the current economic appraisal options that are being carried out by OFMDFM, the Department of Education is currently reviewing the Sure Start programmes in Northern Ireland (NIA, 2010).

### Conclusions

Since the introduction of the Children's Order in 1995, a raft of policies and strategies has been produced within Northern Ireland that focus

directly or indirectly on childcare. The Children's Order, the only legislative tool that exists for Northern Ireland regarding childcare addresses issues of inspection, information and protection and not childcare provision per se. The main policy development tool to date was the introduction of the first Childcare Strategy *Children First* in 1999. Central to *Children First* was the aim to integrate childcare and education. The Children and Young People Package represented a significant investment in early years, leading to the establishment of extended schools, the expansion of the pre-school nursery programme and the Sure Start programme. *Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge*, a much anticipated strategy, failed to prioritise childcare. As illustrated Government departments have been working to address the issue of childcare through an array of individual strategies, policies and programmes. One of the main criticisms is the lack of a co-ordinated approach across Government departments (DHSSPS, 2005). Having stepped through the various policy developments within Northern Ireland, it is evident that a shared agenda across the Government departments to integrate and prioritise childcare is lacking.

As highlighted in the DHSSPS review in 2005, there is no central funding stream within the devolved administration. Private, public and community and voluntary childcare providers have explored an array of funding sources to establish and sustain childcare services. Below is a list of some of the funding sources that childcare providers from the private and community and voluntary sectors have availed of to date:

- Modernisation Fund
- Early Years Development Fund
- Peace I and II
- New Opportunities Fund
- Pre-School Expansion Programme
- Extended Schools Services

- Local Strategic Partnership (LSPs)
- Social Services – Early Years teams
- BBC Children in Need
- Rural Development Programme.

This list is not exhaustive, and other grants-funding sources have been utilised. However the list is an illustration of the piece-meal approach to funding that exists in Northern Ireland. ‘Efficiency savings<sup>v</sup>’ have impacted on the delivery and the long-term sustainability of a number of early years services. Funding remains insecure irrespective of the need or the success of the service provided, albeit Sure Start, Extended Schools or other childcare services. Funding sustainability remains a challenge. The three year spending programmes and budget cycles to date have not given childcare the focus required to reach a stage to address the challenges that individual Government departments are working to address. The PfGs to date have not prioritised childcare and consequently it is not embedded into departmental priorities. The Minister for Finance and Personnel published the Revised Spending Plans for Government departments in April 2010. The revised Spending Plans for 2010-11 incorporate changes to the departmental budget allocations. The next Programme for Government is due in 2011 – 2014. Due to the continuing pressures on Government department budgets, the need for cross-departmental co-operation to protect and enhance childcare services is paramount.

Child poverty has been riding high in political debates, however extra financial resources to meet set targets are not forthcoming. In a recent Assembly debate on Child Poverty the Junior Minister highlighted this very point, stating that ‘there is no indication that additional resources will be made available’ (NIA, 2010). Given the ambitious targets set it is difficult to envision how they will be met. Contained within the Act is the caveat that the economic and fiscal circumstances must be taken into

consideration. The resource implications on Government departments must also be considered when setting and measuring child poverty targets within Northern Ireland.

Pre-school provision in Northern Ireland is Government funded and quality assured in all statutory sector settings (nursery schools and units) and in many voluntary/private sector settings (playgroups and day care facilities). Following the introduction of the Pre-school Programme to Northern Ireland OFMDFM highlighted that only 4% of households in Northern Ireland are without a childcare place (OFMDFM, 2008). However a report commissioned by the Women's Centre Regional Partnership (WCRP) in 2009 remarked:

To report that only 4% of households with pre-school children had an absence of a childcare arrangement gives the impression... of universal childcare provision... and to look at some of the questions which underlie the reliance on family support.

(WCRP, 2009: 41)

There is a general recognition that within Northern Ireland informal childcare arrangements (ie the use of family and friends) are widely used (WCRP, Gray, *et al*). In a report carried out by Bruegel and Gray it was highlighted that 'the proportion of families using unregistered childminders in Northern Ireland is strikingly high' (Bruegel and Gray, 2003: 11). The authors also remarked that the expansion in pre-school places has a tendency to create 'an awkward part-time demand for the rest of the working day' (Bruegel and Gray, 2003: 17).

The DHSSPS Review carried out in 2005 highlighted that '[a]lthough, pre-school provision is not driven by the need for childcare, but instead education, it does form part of the *Children First* policy and has



successfully supported the aim of making childcare more affordable within this context' (DHSSPS, 2005:47). As raised in the WCRP report it is important for policy makers to be aware of what constitutes childcare services and provision for children.

In recent times childcare policy and provision has been given considerable attention within the Northern Ireland Assembly. In April 2009 an Assembly debate received the endorsement of all of the political parties on the need to address the lack of affordable, accessible, age appropriate childcare. The motion stated that 'this Assembly expresses its concern at the lack of affordable, quality childcare; and calls on the Executive to implement a coherent and properly resourced childcare strategy' (NIA, 2009).

The Northern Ireland Executive departments have produced a series of policies, strategies and programmes that directly and indirectly influence and impact on childcare services. Interestingly, the issues that prompted the *Children First* Strategy of 1999 and indeed the recommendations produced in the DHSSPS review in 2005, have still to be addressed in 2010. Although there have been some significant developments with the establishment of key childcare services including Sure Start schemes and the Extended Schools Programme, longevity of childcare services remains a concern. Issues of cost, provision and accessibility still remain a challenge. This contradicts the widely accepted view on the benefits of early intervention, and of directing resources and expertise to Early Years services.

Currently there are a number of reports that have been commissioned to examine childcare. It is anticipated that the economic appraisal commissioned by OFMDFM will inform the strategic direction of a new Childcare Strategy. A set of recommendations is due in the area of affordable childcare from the Child Poverty sub-group of the

subcommittee on Children and Young people's work into child poverty. A review of the Sure Start programme is to be carried out by DE.

We await the publication of the Early Years Strategy from DE which was originally due for publication in 2007. There is now a statutory duty on the Northern Ireland Assembly to produce a Child Poverty Strategy from OFMDFM, and childcare, as one of the key building blocks, will have to be addressed within this. The Rural White Paper from the Northern Ireland Executive should also consider the challenges and opportunities of rural childcare. Also, it is assumed that Departmental Gender Action Plans will address the area of childcare. There is substantial work currently being processed. Recognition of the importance of strategic links and the integration of all of the above strategies and policies must be key to the success of addressing the many challenges that childcare services present in Northern Ireland.

It is important to consider the recent Welfare Reform legislation already in place in England, Scotland and Wales. The Northern Ireland Assembly is responsible for legislating on this issue. The conditionality attached to the reforms will see the abolition of Income Support, with claimants moving to Job Seeker's Allowance or Employment Support Allowance. Parents with children aged seven or over will be required to actively seek employment. Without the necessary childcare infrastructure in place, it is difficult to envision how this could be introduced to Northern Ireland in its current format.

A criticism of *Children First* was the lack of the whole child model approach, a key principle of the UNCRC. Given the collage of strategies, policies and programmes that have been produced, it is difficult to assess the level of spend committed to childcare services since the introduction of The Children Order in 1995. The lack of transparency conflicts with the UNCRC. Indeed a number of General Comments and Concluding

Observations point to the need to address childcare services. A key recommendation from the DHSSPS Review to develop a strategic integrated approach to develop and deliver a Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland still remains pertinent.

As highlighted in the DHSSPS review in 2005 there is no central funding stream within the devolved administration. The next table provides an outline of funding sources from Government departments relating to childcare from 2007 – 2010.

**Part 2**

**Northern Ireland**

<b>Programme/Dept.</b>	<b>2007-2008</b>	<b>2008-2009</b>	<b>2009-2010</b>	<b>Total</b>
Rural Childcare Programme (DARD)	£ N/A	£ N/A	£1.3m	£1.3m
NICMA Funding (DE)	£68k	£69k	£70k	£207k
Steps to Work Programme – The Childcare Allowance Scheme (DEL)	£587K	£585K	£633K	£1.8m
Further Education-Care to Learn (DEL)	£150K	£326K	£351K	£827k
Further Education Awards (DEL) *	£99K	£213K	£379k	£691k
Further Education - Support Funds (DEL)	£111K	£137K	£ Not available until July 2010	£248k
European Social Fund (DEL)	£230K	£394K	£383K	£1.0m
Children and Young People’s Fund (DSD)	£881K	N/A	N/A	£881k
The Women’s Centres Childcare Fund (DSD)	£ N/A	£850K	£889K	£1.7m
Neighbourhood Renewal – Childcare element (DSD)	£630K (est)	£630K (est)	£630K (est)	£1.9m (est)
Gingerbread (Derry) Funding (DSD)	£ N/A	£ N/A	£19K	£19k
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>£2.8m (est)</b>	<b>£3.2m (est)</b>	<b>£4.7m (est)</b>	<b>£10.6m (est)</b>

Note \* FE Awards relate to the childcare costs of students and are not just FE awards i.e. student grants

Table 1: Spend on childcare services across Government departments

The breakdown provided by OFMDFM prompted through an assembly question illustrates that childcare is funded through many different routes. OFMDFM did point to the fact that the apportionment of funding to these different services however is not broken down by the various elements within the service. (OFMDFM, 2010).

The next part provides an examination of economic and social patterns over the past ten years

### Level of Provision

The latest available statistics from DHSSPS on childcare provision are up until 31 March 2009 and are summarised in the table below:

<b>Provider type</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2009</b>
No. of Day Nurseries	136	197	271
No. of places	4,828	7798	11,215
No of Childminders*		4224	3772
No. of places	18807	21164	16918
No. of Out-of-school clubs	165	212	498
No. of places	2504	4773	5341
No. of Playgroups	678	607	484
No. of places	16450	14648	11400
<b>Total number of childcare places</b>	<b><u>42,589</u></b>	<b><u>48,383</u></b>	<b><u>44,874</u></b>

\*(There was no available data on the number of childminders in 1999, only the number of places).

Table 2: Childcare provision 1999 to 2009

(DHSSPS, Children's Order Statistical Tables 2001/02,2004/05, 2008/09)

The table reveals the following:

- There has been a 5.36% increase in the total number of childcare places registered from 1999 to 2009, a rise of 2,285 places.
- The total number of registered places has decreased from 2003 to 2009, representing a 7.25% decrease.
- Childminders make up the largest proportion of childcare services in Northern Ireland. However there has been a marked decrease in the number of childminding places. Between 2003 and 2009 the numbers had decreased by 20%.
- There has been a gradual decrease in the number of Playgroups representing a 28.6% decrease from 1999 to 2009.
- The number of out of school clubs from 1999 to 2009 has increased with the creation of 2,837 additional places, representing a 113% increase.

#### *Day Nurseries*

- In 2009 the total number of Day Nurseries amounted to 271, creating a total of 11,215 registered places. The majority of places are held within the private sector accounting for 77.8% of the total.
- South Eastern Health and Social Care (HSC) encompasses Newtownards, Down, North Down and Lisburn, it has the least number of Day Nurseries, accounting for 13% of the total.
- The Western HSC takes in Derry, Limavady, Omagh and Fermanagh, it too has a low percentage of registered Day Nurseries, marginally higher at 13.6%.
- The Northern HSC has the highest number of registered Day Nurseries, accounting for nearly 30% of the total.

*Childminders*

- Currently there are 3,604 Childminders creating 16,918 designated places.
- The highest number of Childminders is within the Northern HSC accounting for 32.6% of the total. However, it is important to note this Trust has the largest geographical area.
- The lowest levels sit within the Western and Southern HSC Trusts at 14.8% and 12.8% respectively.

*Playgroups*

- The number of Playgroups totals 484, providing 11,400 places.
- 90% of playgroups sit within the community and voluntary sector.

*Out of School Clubs*

- There are a total of 498 Out of School clubs.
- Voluntary agencies account for the largest proportion of providers of out-of-schools clubs, representing more than half at 55.5%.

*Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*

- Persistent poverty in Northern Ireland stands at 21% (before housing costs) and is double that of Great Britain, 9% (JRF, 2009).
- More families in Northern Ireland experience poverty at some point than in Britain (JRF, 2009).
- 48% of children in Northern Ireland have experienced living in poverty at some time over the four-year period of 2001 to 2005 (before housing costs) (JRF, 2009).
- The recession has had a devastating effect on children in poverty. Around 130,000 more children are in workless households and the

number of households where all adults are working has come down by around 250,000 (Save the Children, 2010).

- In 2007/08, more than half of children in Northern Ireland lived in households with incomes in the bottom two quintiles of the income distribution (Household Below Average Income Report Survey 2007-2008).
- In 2007/2008, 43,000 children were living in severe poverty<sup>vi</sup> in 2007/08 across Northern Ireland (Save the Children, 2010).

#### Women in employment in Northern Ireland

There are considerable gender differences in Northern Ireland in the area of employment. Given that women are, in the main, responsible for childcare, and the recognition that childcare is a key barrier to employment (Employers For Childcare, 2003), it is appropriate to monitor the trends and patterns of women that have moved into work in Northern Ireland.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of women in employment from the mid 1980s to the present time. In 1984 the number of women recorded to be in employment sat at 228,000 (DETI, 2007:6). By 2007 this figure increased to 371,000 (DETI, 2008:4). The most recent figures show a decrease with an estimated 361,000 women who are economically active (DETI, 2009:4). The impact of the recession has had a significant impact on women in work in Northern Ireland. There was a 4.5% decrease over 2008-2009 in women working, however it is notable that from 1984 the number of women recorded working has increased by 51% (DETI, 2009:4).



The economic differences in gender are portrayed through the gender pay gap, the number of women who work full-time comparable to men, the risk of low income, the economic inactivity rate and the number of women holding senior positions in Northern Ireland. As illustrated in the following statistics:

- 51% of males are working full-time compared to 33% of females (Family Resources Survey 2007-2008).
- There are 310,000 economically inactive people of working age in Northern Ireland. 43% (134,000) are male and 57% (176,000) are female (DETI, 2010: 4).
- Economic inactivity in women is directly influenced by whether women have dependent children, the number of children they have, and the age of the children (DETI, 2010: 4).
- It should be noted that a substantial proportion of females work part-time. While approximately one-in-ten males (9.2%) in the monitored male workforce work less than sixteen hours per week, the corresponding figure for females is around one-in-five (21.8%) (ECNI, 2007: 15).
- The median total individual income for women was £172 per week, compared to £265 for men (OFMDFM, 2009).

#### Lone parents in employment

- In Northern Ireland there are nearly 92,000 lone parents with 150,000 children (GingerbreadNI, 2009).
- Between 20% and 25% of all families in Northern Ireland are one-parent families (GingerbreadNI, 2009).
- Almost half of all people in lone parent families are on a low income. This is two-and-a half times the rate for couples with children (GingerbreadNI, 2009).

### Worklessness

- The proportion of working-age adults not in paid work is higher in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK (JRF, 2009).
- Children in workless households are more likely to be in severe poverty than non-severe poverty (Save the Children, 2010).
- Over half of all children in severe poverty were in families where no adults work (Save the Children, 2010).
- Half of all children in families claiming Jobseeker's Allowance were in severe poverty (Save the Children, 2010).
- During April – June 2009 there were 185,000 women of working age (16-59) who were economically inactive in Northern Ireland, with a resulting inactivity rate of 34.8% (25.9% in GB). 13% of these economically inactive women (23,000) wanted a job (27% in GB), but did not satisfy the criteria of availability for work and actively seeking work to be classified as unemployed.
- Family/home was cited as a key barrier to accessing employment (Save the Children, 2010).

### Childcare costs

In 2009 the average weekly amount of childcare charges paid by parents in Northern Ireland was £176 (Cfeb, 2010). This figure is based on the cost of a day nursery for a child under the age of two. An annual survey of childcare costs is carried out with England and Wales, we recognise this is an area of research that needs exploring in Northern Ireland. It is the intention of Employers For Childcare to carry out an annual childcare costs survey of parents in Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

The research carried out portrays a fragmented and disjointed policy approach to childcare services in Northern Ireland. It is a disintegrated, divided, discontinuous, and inconsistent approach that has ultimately translated in an overall small increase in the number of childcare places of only 2,285 over a ten-year period. Indeed we have experienced a decline between 2003 to 2009.

Northern Ireland has the highest percentage of households with children (34%), with the next highest regions being Outer London and West Midlands (32%). The UK average is 28% (Family Resource Survey 2007-2008). The shortage of childcare places is particularly challenging in rural areas (SACC, 2009). The Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance (CDSA) describes the availability of childcare places for children with disabilities as stark. 'Families with disabled children face considerable difficulties in finding accessible, appropriate childcare when their children are young' (CDSA, 2009: 18). A study carried out by NICMA in 2007 highlighted that there is a shortfall of 5,500 childcare places in Northern Ireland. In addition there are 11,000 unregistered childminders currently providing day care in Northern Ireland (NCB, 2007: 1).

Changes are necessary at Government level to the process of re-thinking the development and implementation of policies and programmes connected with childcare. The issues raised in *Children First* to address provision namely, age appropriate, flexible, quality, affordable and accessible childcare, remain outstanding and relevant.

Child poverty statistics for Northern Ireland are amongst the highest in the UK. Northern Ireland has the highest rate of economic inactivity. More parents are working and working outside of a traditional 'nine to

five', Monday to Friday timetable. Childcare services are a vital link to the process of securing the long-term employment of parents.

Anecdotal evidence points to the high use of informal childcare in Northern Ireland. However the traditional source of family members, mainly grandparents are becoming increasingly unavailable as many are continuing to work longer.

Early Years policy responsibility transferred from DHSSPS to DE in 2006. This shift advocated the close association of care and education, with a view to integrating childcare and early childhood education. However, it has led to a system whereby overall responsibility for childcare sits with no single Government department. Lines of responsibility are blurred, with no accountability.

This section aimed to contribute reflections on the policy developments relating to childcare. A natural outcome of the research is the interconnectedness of childcare services, family life, employment, education, social welfare, the economy and health services.

An integrated approach presupposes the need for a relevant Integrated Childcare Strategy, with the necessary leadership and funding to deliver on outcomes. The next section considers a comparison of the different regions approaches. In particular we examine the statutory duties that are now embedded in legislation in England and Wales to ensure childcare provision and information are given their due priority.

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<sup>i</sup> Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, Section 17, a child is deemed in need if the child is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by an authority. The child's health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, or the child is disabled.

<sup>ii</sup> Gender Mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/ dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.

<sup>iii</sup> Efforts to achieve equality of opportunity for women and men may include, where appropriate, the development of positive action measures. This is facilitated by Articles 48 and 49 of the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (as amended), which allows employers to encourage persons of a particular sex to apply for jobs if few or no people of that sex have done that type of work in the previous twelve months.

<sup>iv</sup> Public Service Agreements (PSAs) are designed to set out the main outcomes that departments work to deliver with the resources available to them. They represent an important link between policy priorities and budgets and are a key accountability tool.

<sup>v</sup> Government departments are required to make 3 percent efficiency savings on a yearly basis as part of the 2008-2011 budget.

<sup>vi</sup> A household with an income of below 50 percent of the median (after housing costs), and where both adults and children lack at least one basic necessity, and either adults or children or both groups lack at least two basic necessities.

# **Part 3**

## *Sizing up*

# *Comparison*

**Introduction**

The previous chapters have illustrated the progression of the childcare cause through the policy ranks since Labour came into power in 1997. This section provides a comparison of the four regions' approaches to addressing the challenges of childcare, in order to assess how Northern Ireland sizes up to its UK counterparts. It is evident that much time and funding has been dedicated to childcare across the UK since 1998. Childcare has reached a prime location in the policy mainstream and is now considered an important social and economic issue.

However, it is also clear that childcare is more highly considered in some parts of the UK than others. Two main strands emerge; childcare is either addressed directly and specifically through policy as a fundamental issue in its own right, or it is used as a tool for addressing other issues such as poverty and disadvantage.

Four key thematic areas have emerged within the context of childcare policy and provision across the four regions; quality, affordability, accessibility and choice. A comparison of each region's approach to addressing the four areas is now provided.

**Four Regions Overview**

Part two highlighted the different methods and measures taken by each of the four regions to address childcare. The following section summaries the key focal points of each region's approach.

England and Wales

New Labour in 1998 was the first to recognise childcare as a social and economic issue and publish a Childcare Strategy for England and Wales.



Three key areas were addressed, namely quality, affordability and accessibility (in 2004, the updated ten-year Strategy added choice to the three key areas) (DfEE, 1998a). The Strategy was based on achieving three key aims; promoting the well-being of children, responding to changing patterns of employment and allowing parents choice to support a healthy work-life balance (DfEE, 1998a). The aims have remained a constant strand in childcare policy since 1998. The strategies *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfEE, 1998a) and *Choice for parents, the best start for children* (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004) reflect changing social patterns, such as the changing roles of men and women in the labour market. The Government's role is to produce strategies to facilitate changing social patterns. The Childcare Strategy realised the Government's responsibility to provide parents with services to enable them to make choices.

The English approach set a strong precedent with a focus on interlinking education and childcare, thus ensuring that childcare had a positive impact on children's development (Rahilly and Johnston, 2002). Sure Start is the cornerstone of the Government's focus on childcare. The centre of children's services shifted away from exclusively focusing on children in need or at risk (Lewis and Lee, 2002: 12). Sure Start programmes (later developing into Sure Start Children's Centres) and pre-school education places centred on the well-being of all children, not just those living in areas of deprivation.

Substantial funding has been directed into childcare and early years services. Furthermore services are constantly reviewed and evaluated to ensure they address childcare needs. The *Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare Strategy* (DCSF, 2009e) is one example of this.

However, there are concerns that the aim and focus of the strategies have shifted from a 'sure start' for children to facilitating parents into employment. Critics such as Moss (2004), Glass (2005), Duncan *et al*

(2003) and Ball and Vincent (2005) state that what was originally child centred now has an economic aim. Social patterns certainly support this argument. Since 1998 more mothers than ever before are participating in the labour market. The number of lone parents in employment has also increased steadily. Furthermore, the number of workless households has also decreased. However, it could be argued that this figure reflects parental choice due to the increased level of childcare places.

Problems with childcare provision in England are also apparent. For example, the cost of childcare prohibits many parents using registered day care. Research by the Daycare Trust shows that childcare costs rise above the rate of inflation year after year (Daycare Trust, 2010). Furthermore, there are problems with the free preschool places in terms of funding for childcare providers (Laing and Buisson, 2008). This is only set to intensify when the entitlement increases to 15 hours in September this year.

Despite these problems, England's approach to childcare provision is pragmatic and organised. It identifies need and seeks to insert structures to address specific challenges. The Department for Children, Schools and Families carries responsibility for childcare policy. However, the role of LAs within this framework ensures that local need is constantly addressed and updated. The statutory obligations to address childcare through the Childcare Act (2006) have been instrumental in addressing the challenges of childcare.

### Wales

Wales sits under the umbrella of the English Childcare Strategies and also the statutory duties of the Childcare Act. However, the Welsh Assembly Government implemented its own Childcare Strategy *Childcare is for Children* in 2005 to meet Welsh specific local needs. For example

ensuring the Welsh language and culture is accounted for in a Childcare Strategy is an issue which is obviously unique to Wales (DfTE, 2005). The aims of the Welsh Childcare Strategy are the same as the National Childcare Strategy but the Strategy itself has been adapted to fit the needs of the Welsh nation.

Where the English Strategy is accused of focusing extensively on parents, the Welsh Strategy's motivation is to concentrate on the well-being of children. The title of the Childcare Strategy, *Childcare is for Children*, reflects this position and its focus is derived from the *Childcare Action Plan* (2002). The Strategy pays special attention to issues such as quality. For example Wales has quality assurance schemes for different forms of childcare (DfTE, 2005). The rights set out under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are also given special consideration in Wales, particularly in the Children and Young People Action Plans that LAs are required to publish. Furthermore, Wales has its own version of Sure Start called Flying Start for children.

This is not to say that childcare is not also used to address the needs of parents. The Genesis Wales project identifies childcare as a barrier to work (Genesis Wales, 2009) and has achieved considerable success.

As with the English Strategy there are criticisms. Childcare budgeting has been problematic (Children and Young People Committee, 2009). Also, research by the Welsh Assembly Government reveals that the majority of parents in Wales use informal childcare (Bryson *et al*, 2006), yet this issue is not addressed in the Childcare Strategy.

Despite the criticisms the Welsh Assembly Government deserves recognition for implementing a strategy that addresses local need, rather than simply falling under the National Childcare Strategy. This illustrates that childcare is an important policy focus. The Welsh Strategy is

certainly more child-centred than the English Strategy. Its attention to a children's rights approach is admirable. It is noteworthy that the focus on children's rights is derived from an investigation of childcare provision in 2002 through the *Childcare Action Plan*. The results derived from this investigation showed that this was necessary. However, this method of research informed policy has not translated across all policy making. For example, research carried out by the Welsh Government in 2006 highlighted that families rely heavily on informal childcare, yet this observation has not been addressed by policymakers in Wales.

### Scotland

Evidence-based policy is paramount in an investigation of policy making in Scotland. The Scottish Government has invested in extensive research to inform policy. One major example of this is the *Growing Up in Scotland* project (ScotCen, 2005) which informed the *Early Years Framework* (2008). Like Wales, Scotland pays particular attention to the UNCRC. According to the *Child Strategy Statement* (1997) every Government policy should be 'proofed' to ensure it meets the standards set out in the UNCRC.

Scotland's Childcare Strategy, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (Scottish Office, 1998) follows the core aims and plans of the English Childcare Strategy. Although this has not been updated since 1998, childcare has by no means dropped off the political spectrum in Scotland. It is arguable that the *Early Years Framework* (Scottish Government, 1998) serves to incorporate, and to some extent supersede, the national Childcare Strategy for Scotland. Indeed, LAs intend to incorporate the framework into their future Children's Services Plans.

However, having explored the policies and strategies in Scotland that address childcare provision, and in particular in the *Early Years*

*Framework*, it is clear that the focus is on both the well-being of children, as in Wales, and also on the economy, as in England. Scotland's focus is on early intervention, a grass roots approach to economic development. This accompanies the evidence-based policy approach Scotland utilises. Childcare is an economic issue. Evidence shows that the early years shape the future of Scotland, determining outcomes in adult life, and that the early years are therefore the best opportunity to intervene (Scottish Government and COSLA, 2008a). This is indeed similar to England's Sure Start approach, although England's Sure Start was aimed at the well-being of children. The overall outcome of improving the future economy is a focus which belongs to Scotland.

It is arguable that this focus takes away from the original Strategy's aim in addressing the four core areas of choice, availability, accessibility and quality. Furthermore, childcare is addressed through a series of policies rather than one main updated strategy. Yet, despite this Scotland is innovative in many of its projects such as the Sitter Service (2003) and Extended Schools Framework (2003). The Scottish Government's approach to childcare is pioneering and forward thinking while at the same time current in meeting the specific needs of Scottish Families.

#### Northern Ireland

This comparison has highlighted the dearth of attention paid to childcare in Northern Ireland. Each of the other three regions have made significant inroads to addressing childcare. England constantly updates its Childcare Strategy, Wales focuses its approach on local needs and Scotland is innovative and future focused. Yet, in recent years Northern Ireland has made little progress.

Northern Ireland published its own Strategy, *Children First*, in 1999. The Childcare Strategy has not been updated since it was published, despite a

number of recommendations. In England, prior to the first national Childcare Strategy, children's services were directed at children in need or at risk. It is arguable that Northern Ireland still follows this pattern. Despite *Children First*, childcare, when mentioned in Northern Ireland policy, is used as a tool to address other issues. These issues largely include poverty, disadvantage and deprivation. Although these are prevalent social problems in the region and need to be addressed, it is also necessary that all parents are supported through a holistic approach to childcare, as the other regions have done. England's model is a prominent example of this; childcare is addressed directly as an important social issue. However, this not to say that in England childcare is not also used as a tool for addressing disadvantage, *Ending Child Poverty: mapping the route to 2020* is one example of how childcare is utilised in addressing child poverty. Northern Ireland can learn from England's dual approach to childcare provision.

Similar to the English model, reviews and evaluations have been carried out, mainly on *Children First* (DHSSPS, 2005) and the Pre-School Expansion Scheme (DE, 2006a). However, there has been no action to implement the recommendations from the report. England's Childcare Strategy is constantly reviewed; the *Next Steps* Strategy (DCFS, 2009e) is an update on the national Childcare Strategy that puts into practice plans for the remainder of the ten years. Northern Ireland has not updated *Children First* despite reviewing its progress.

Notwithstanding this, Northern Ireland has made progress in respect of its Extended Schools Programme (DE, 2006b), pre-school education programme and the introduction of Sure Start. However Sure Start programmes in Northern Ireland have received considerably less funding than the other regions of the UK. Furthermore, attention has been paid to rural childcare in recent years (DARD, 2008; DARD 2009; Northern Ireland Executive, 2010) since this is a particular problem in the region.

**Direct Comparisons**

The first national Childcare Strategy, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfEE, 1998), identified three key problem areas to be addressed, namely quality, affordability and accessibility. The 2004 Ten-Year Strategy added the problem of choice (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004). Each of the Strategies in the other regions identified the same challenges - *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998) in Scotland, *Childcare is for Children* (2005) in Wales and *Children First* (1999) in Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is necessary to make a comparison on the basis of each of these four problem areas. It is to this task that the report now turns.

Quality

The quality of childcare provision was an area addressed as a main priority by *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998) in England. A regulatory body, Ofsted, was established to ensure that childcare met a high standard. This has translated to the childcare strategies for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Each region established regulatory bodies to ensure that the quality of childcare provision was upheld.

Prior to 1998, children's services were largely focused on children in need or at risk (Lewis and Lee, 2002). The Labour Government was the first Government to address childcare directly as an issue in its own right. The importance of quality was identified as one of the first areas to be addressed.

In addition to the regulation of care settings, the quality of childcare provision also involves the integration of education and childcare. This ensures that childcare has a positive impact on children's development.

England lead the way with a focus on the interlinking of education and childcare, thus ensuring that childcare had a positive impact on children's development. Aspects such as the Early Years Foundation Stage, Pre-school education and Sure Start schemes clearly placed the focus on the well-being of all children, not just those in need of protection.

#### *Pre-school education*

One of the main successes of Labour's first Childcare Strategy was the implementation of free pre-school places for all three and four year olds in England. As a result of *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998), every four year old could receive 12.5 hours free pre-school education a week. The Ten-Year Childcare Strategy (2004) extended this to all three and four year olds. In England 95% of families use the free entitlement (DCSF, 2010a). Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland also provide the free pre-school education places following the English model. In England, Wales and Scotland the pre-school places were targeted at all pre-school children. However, in Northern Ireland the places were initially only targeted at children from socially disadvantaged circumstances and the oldest children in the pre-school cohort (DE, 1998b). It was not until 2002-03 that provision was increased to cover 91% of children in their immediate pre-school year (NIAO, 2009). It is interesting to note that unlike the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland only targeted disadvantaged children for the first few years of the provision, a theme which runs throughout its approach to childcare.

#### *Sure Start*

Sure Start is the cornerstone of England's Childcare Strategy. In England Sure Start programmes began in the most disadvantaged areas. However, the Ten-Year Childcare Strategy sought to ensure that there was a Sure Start Children's Centre in every community in England by



2010 (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004), a goal which was achieved earlier this year (Number10, 2010). Sure Start is also present across Scotland and is known as Flying Start in Wales. Sure Start in England began as localised programmes to meet local needs, becoming Sure Start Children's Centres following *Choice for parents, the best start for children* (2004). Children's Centres provide a range of services for children and their families (NAO, 2010). In Northern Ireland there are currently 32 Sure Start programmes, similar to the English model that existed before Children's Centres came into fruition (DHSSPS, 2002). Sure Start is only available in 20% of the most deprived ward areas (NIA, 2008), while England has a Sure Start Children's Centre in every community. This amounts to 3,500 Children's Centres. Using the same ratio of Children's Centres to the approximate amount of children these centres accommodate, this means that for Northern Ireland to be equal with England there needs to be 134 Children's Centres in the region. Currently there are none, however the initial draft *Families Matter: Supporting Families in Northern Ireland* strategy had proposed plans for six Children's Centres by 2008. This is a target which has not been achieved. Sure Start expenditure across the UK is also widely varied. In England 2007/08 Sure Start expenditure per child was £600, in Wales it was between £270 - £350, and in Scotland, £380. However, in Northern Ireland expenditure per child was only £80 (Save the Children, 2009a: 3). A substantial variation in investment exists within the four regions.

#### Affordability

The cost of childcare is a factor which affects childcare provision across the UK. Daycare Trust figures show that the cost of childcare has risen above inflation every year since its annual childcare costs survey began in 2001.

Based on figures for a full-time day nursery place for a child under two years of age, London has the highest childcare costs in the UK at approximately £218 per week. Figures for England vary from £150 in the North West to £218 in London, with an average of around £178 a week for England as a whole. This figure is closely followed by Northern Ireland, where the average weekly cost is £176. Scotland and Wales follow with £168 and £156 respectively (all figures are taken from Cfeb, 2010).

Childminding costs tend to be slightly lower than day nursery costs. Again, the figure for London is higher than the rest of the UK at £208 a week for a full-time place for a child under two years of age. The lowest average cost in England is £142 a week in the West Midlands. Overall the average cost is £173 a week. This figure is followed by Scotland at £160 and Wales (£158) and Northern Ireland (£155) (all figures from Cfeb, 2010).

Overall childcare costs are consistently high across the four regions. The need for stronger intervention by the UK Government to grant more financial assistance is required to meet the high costs of childcare.

### Accessibility

The main incentive of the Childcare Strategies is to increase childcare provision. Childcare should be accessible and available to all families. Therefore, in any comparison of the approaches of the four regions to childcare policy it is essential to explore the changing nature of childcare provision.

### *Childcare places*

England has dedicated the most resources into the development and implementation of its Childcare Strategy, focusing on specific areas such

as out of school provision. Between 2003, the year before the ten-year Strategy was implemented, and 2008, the number of childcare places in England increased by 21% (based on Ofsted, 2003 – 2009 figures). This is the largest increase compared to the other three regions. The number of places decreased by 220,124 between 2008 and 2009 due to the impact of the recession (Ofsted, 2009). Despite this, the Strategy has had a positive impact on the number of childcare places. In 1997, there was one childcare place to every nine children under eight years of age in England (Daycare Trust, 2003). This has increased to one place to every three children in 2009 (Garnham, 2010).

Scotland has not been so successful. However, it has seen a 14% increase in childcare places since 2004 (when records began) and has only seen a drop of 280 places between 2008 and 2009 (Care Commission, 2009).

In Wales, the number of childcare places has increased by 6% since 2003 (based on StatsWales, 2010, figures). It is arguable that the geographical problems with childcare provision have hampered progress. For example, childcare provision in the valley areas of Wales currently has a ratio of one place to every 19 children, yet in other parts of Wales it is one place to every four children (The Poverty Site, 2010). Rural childcare is given little emphasis in the Welsh Childcare Strategy, which perhaps explains the stark difference between the ratios. It is positive, however, that unlike England and Scotland, there was an increase in childcare places between 2008 and 2009 in Wales rather than a decrease.

Although to varying degrees, England, Wales and Scotland have seen an increase in childcare places since 2003, the results for Northern Ireland are not so positive. Between 2003 and 2009 there has been a 7% decrease in childcare places (based on DHSSPS, 2003-2009, figures). Similar to Wales, the ratio of childcare places varies across the region.

Overall there is a ratio of one childcare place for every 6.4 children (under four years of age) (Garnham, 2010). It is notable that there are vast geographical differences in childcare availability across the region. The east of the region has nearly twice the provision available in the west. For example, there are 350 places per 1,000 children under five years of age in Ards and North Down compared to 130 places in the Foyle area (The Garnham, 2010). The relationship between the level of childcare places and the level of deprivation is clear, as the Foyle area represents one of the most disadvantaged wards and the Ards and North Down area the most privileged.

Northern Ireland has the highest percentage of households with children (34%) in the four regions. The UK average is 28% (DSD, 2007). Based on this statistic the need for childcare provision in the region is of paramount importance.

It is evident that the Childcare Strategy in Northern Ireland is not meeting its required goals. The problem of disadvantage consumes the area of childcare provision in this region. Apart from *Children First* (1999), which has largely disappeared from the policy radar, nearly every policy mentioning childcare sees it as a tool for addressing other social problems. Disadvantage is one such area.

#### *Local Authorities and Childcare Partnerships*

Childcare Partnerships were set up across England and Wales after *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998). Their main aim was to integrate early education and childcare in each LA area. Each Partnership has the responsibility of planning for early years and also childcare for children up to the age of 14 (DfEE, 1998). This was complemented in Scotland's Childcare Strategy, with 32 childcare partnerships set up, one in each LA (Scottish Office, 1998). In Northern Ireland *Children First* established four

Childcare Partnerships in each of the Health and Social Services Trusts (DHSS, 1999). The Partnerships are the operational bodies established to implement the Childcare Strategy. In England and Wales the powers of the LAs are enhanced by the Childcare Act (2006). This places a statutory duty on LAs to ensure that there is adequate childcare provision in their area. The increase in childcare places detailed illustrates that they are fulfilling their role. Scotland and Northern Ireland have no statutory duties. However, despite this, Scotland's strategies and policies focusing on childcare provision have helped increase the level of childcare provision. In the other three regions LAs and Childcare Partnerships are linked. In Northern Ireland LAs have no experience of childcare; they do not work with the Childcare Partnerships. The absence of a statutory duty will remain a significant challenge in overcoming this difference.

### Choice

The area of 'choice' incorporates many issues for parents. It involves providing parents with services to help them make informed choices about childcare, ensuring that all parents have a choice of childcare to suit their specific situation and also providing childcare so parents have the choice to enter the labour market or training.

### *Childcare information services*

The needs of parents in finding childcare and accessing information on childcare choices was identified as essential for parents. This is a theme which dominates the English childcare strategies *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998), *Choice for parents, the best start for children* (2004) and *Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare* (2009). A comprehensive childcare information service has been implemented throughout England and Wales since 1998. Under the *Childcare Act* (2006) LAs have the statutory responsibility to provide information to parents to enable them

to make informed choices about their childcare arrangements. From 2008 the Childcare Information Service included family information for parents of children and young people up to the age of 20. In 2010, Family Information Direct was launched to provide parents with information and advice throughout their children's lives (DCSF, 2010). In Wales and Scotland, every LA area also has its own childcare information service. Northern Ireland's Childcare Strategy *Children First* (1999) also recognised the lack of information available to parents. This was noted as a barrier to parents accessing childcare. The Strategy proposed to develop information networks for parents. However, this has not materialised making it increasingly difficult for parents in Northern Ireland to access childcare information. In Northern Ireland one independent childcare information service exists organised by Employers For Childcare. Concordia state:

The most comprehensive and advanced service is provided by the Employers For Childcare charity...it offers a web-based search facility and a telephone helpline which covers the whole of Northern Ireland and every type of childcare provider.

(Concordia, 2006, 20)

Concordia recommend that the Government should work with Employers For Childcare to develop this childcare information service.

#### *Out of school care*

Out of school care was initially implemented by *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998). It was recognised that this type of care was necessary for working parents of older, school aged, children, to give them more choice in their childcare options. In England, the Government invested £170 million to fund out of school places (DfEE, 1998). Between 1998 and

2004, 348,000 out of school places were created (HM Treasury *et al*, 2004). Out of school care was also a major area in the Ten-Year National Strategy. The Welsh Childcare Strategy also placed emphasis on out of school childcare and thus created an extra 22,000 out –of school childcare places in Wales (Bryson *et al*, 2006:10). The Scottish Government also made the commitment in its Childcare Strategy to increase out of school places by 100,000 (Scottish Office, 1998). Furthermore, the Scottish Executive introduced *School's Out: Framework for the Development of Out of School Care* in 2003. *School's Out's* vision was for there to be an out of school place for all children whose parents want their children to attend an extended schools club. It recommended that all LAs should audit provision and assess local provision (Scottish Executive, 2003). Scotland's model of out of school care is the most innovative in the UK, as it not only recognises the need for out of school care but has introduced measures to ensure that the need is met. The Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) plays an important monitoring role.

In Northern Ireland, the Children and Young People funding package introduced the extended schools funding programme in 2006. Extended schools aimed to increase children's educational chances and break cycles of deprivation (DE, 2006). Only schools with pupils living in deprived wards are eligible for funding. However, in 2008 funding cuts affected the level of provision (DE, 2008). The second Children and Young People Action Plan under *Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge* (OFMDFM, 2006) made a commitment to the continuation of the Extended Schools Programme. Due to a lack of resources the potential of Extended Schools has not realised its full capacity.

Two main problems with the Northern Ireland programme are evident when compared to the other regions. Firstly, the Northern Ireland programme is only available in deprived areas, rather than available to all school children, contrary to the Scotland model. Secondly, the level of

funding makes the provision unsustainable. To date there are only 498 out of school clubs (DHSSPS, 2009), which is a very small percentage when compared to the other three regions.

#### *Employment rates for women*

Childcare is recognised as a barrier to employment, and in particular women's employment. Thus a childcare strategy should focus on removing this barrier giving parents, particularly mothers, the choice to work or train.

In England the employment rate for women with dependent children is 64% (DCSF, 2009a). In Northern Ireland the figure sits at 67% (DETI, 2009:5). This is somewhat surprising considering that England's Childcare Strategy is criticised for placing too much emphasis on helping parents back into the labour market.

It is difficult to ascertain the current rate of employment for women with dependent children in Scotland and Wales as, to the best of our knowledge; the most recent statistics on this topic are from 2004 and 2005 respectively. However, the combined figure for England, Scotland and Wales stands at a 70% employment rate. Therefore in a comparison between Northern Ireland (67%) and the other three regions combined (70%), Northern Ireland falls behind (DETI, 2009:5).

Furthermore, only 39% of working age economically active females in Northern Ireland have dependent children (DETI, 2009:5). This represents a decrease from 48% in 2005. In fact between 2000 and 2005 the figure decreased by 5% (DETI, 2005:2).

In 2009, 351,000 women of working age in Northern Ireland were economically inactive. This compares with 323,000 women in 1984 and



represents an increase of 9%. During the same period the number of economically inactive women decreased by 5% in the rest of the UK, from 11.2 million to 10 million (DETI, 2009:15). Perhaps the lack of attention given to childcare in Northern Ireland has a bearing on this as the other three regions have a more extensive focus on childcare provision and recognise childcare as a labour market issue.

### **Overarching Strategies**

In a comparison of the four key areas, it is clear that there are clear differences between the four regions. Northern Ireland lags well behind the rest of the UK, whereas England, Wales and Scotland have the childcare infrastructure in place to be ready for the impact of overarching legislation such as the Child Poverty Act (2010) and the Welfare Reform Legislation (2009).

The Child Poverty Act received Royal Assent in March 2010. It reinforces a focus across Government on ending child poverty and provides a statutory basis for the commitment made by Labour Government in 1999 to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

Each devolved jurisdiction must draw up its own Child Poverty Strategy which must be structured around eight 'building blocks', of which one is childcare (DCSF, 2010). Unsurprisingly, considering Northern Ireland's focus on disadvantage, the Northern Ireland Executive has made a commitment to reduce child poverty and work towards its elimination by 2012 (OFMDFM, 2010). Furthermore, Northern Ireland's subcommittee on Children and Young People's sub-group for child poverty is a positive progression. This development in addition to the Child Poverty Act will mean that childcare must be considered by law; a first for Northern Ireland. England and Wales already have a statutory duty to ensure there is adequate childcare provision through the Childcare Act (2006). This is

enacted by LAs. They are therefore in a better position to meet the needs of the Act. Northern Ireland and to a lesser extent Scotland are not.

Furthermore, the Welfare Reform agenda (2009) dictates that lone parents with a seven year old or younger child must transfer from income support to Jobseeker's Allowance. This boundary will increase as time goes by, meaning that more and more lone parents will enter the labour market. This is nearly impossible without the childcare infrastructure to support them. Again England, Wales and Scotland are in a better position to sustain these changes. As childcare provision continues to decrease in Northern Ireland it is increasingly less likely that the region can support the reforms. This will place many parents in a vulnerable and difficult position.

From the research undertaken we are now in a position to draw conclusions and make recommendations which are contained in the next section.

# *Conclusions and Recommendations*

## **Part 3** **Conclusions and Recommendations**

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### **Conclusions**

It is clear that when it comes to childcare there are many great achievements and also many areas which are lacking across the four regions of the UK. This comparison has shown that within the borders of the UK, childcare provision and the many factors to be considered along with it, are widely varied. Each region has identified four key areas of need - quality, affordability, choice and availability. However, discrepancies are evident across the spectrum. Northern Ireland, in particular, is lacking in many areas and the lack of a recognised integrated Childcare Strategy is a major factor in addressing this.

Northern Ireland's vision for childcare is behind that of the other regions, as it focuses on services in the most disadvantaged areas. Although Scotland's approach to childcare is also quite disjointed, it continually commits to childcare through a series of strategies and plans to increase provision, for example the out of school framework and the Sitter Service. England (and largely by default Wales) has developed the most advanced policies and practices to address childcare. Although there are areas of weakness within England, its efforts make childcare provision the best within the regions of the UK. Provision has come a long way, and it could be argued that Northern Ireland is today where England was in 1997. A holistic and integrated approach to childcare is lacking in the region. Is it a coincidence that Northern Ireland's rate of economically inactivity amongst women has increased over time or is it the case that the level of childcare provision was decreasing before the recession began?

Labour Government's vision for, and implementation of, childcare policy was pioneering and innovative. However, the policy landscape has changed in recent days with the dawn of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government. As a result, the Government's commitment and approach to childcare policy may change direction. To date, the

## **Part 3 Conclusions and Recommendations**

Department for Children, Schools and Families has been disbanded and replaced with a Department of Education. The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families is now Michael Gove. The new coalition Government's emphasis on childcare policy has yet to be discovered. However the Labour Government has laid a firm foundation to build upon.

The English, Welsh and Scottish Childcare Strategies each take different approaches and employ various mechanisms to address the issue of childcare. Each has elements which Northern Ireland can learn from, utilise and build upon in order to create a robust and coherent integrated Childcare Strategy of its own to meet local need. Like Wales, Northern Ireland needs a Childcare Strategy which meets the needs of its own region, taking into account our problem areas. It can also learn from Scotland's innovative grassroots approach to childcare from both from a child development and an economic perspective. Furthermore, its evidence-based policy making model could ensure that childcare fully meets the changing needs of local families. In addition Northern Ireland requires a structured approach similar to England by creating a sole department dedicated to education, childcare and early years, supported by the statutory duties of the Childcare Act.

Northern Ireland is unique; families face many different circumstances and challenges that families in the other regions of the UK do not. However, the three driving features of the first National Childcare Strategy are still relevant across the UK, namely that childcare is for children, parents and families from all corners of society.

Government must facilitate families in the choices they make by providing essential services. In 1998 the Labour Government acknowledged this and the Childcare Strategy became a reality. In a modern society good quality, accessible and affordable childcare should be available to all

## **Part 3** **Conclusions and Recommendations**

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families. England, Wales and Scotland are moving towards this goal. It is paramount that Northern Ireland follows suit.

Government structures, responsibilities and policies will be under increasing scrutiny in the coming months and now is the time for fresh beginnings across the UK. Northern Ireland should take this opportunity to place a firm focus on childcare. Furthermore, the Welfare Reform agenda and child poverty legislation emphasise the need to address the challenges that childcare presents.

Our research has concluded with the need for a coherent, integrated Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland, coupled with the requirement to place childcare on a statutory footing. We now turn to our recommendations that are necessary to ensure that Northern Ireland sizes up to the rest of the UK.



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