

Our Manifesto

Working for parents, employers and
childcare providers across the UK



At Employers For Childcare we are committed to working for parents and families, employers and childcare providers. This manifesto sets out the key social and economic policy areas that we feel must develop in order to proactively meet the needs of families and our society as a whole. Without political will and policy development, change will not happen.

We are calling on our politicians to put families first by investing in vital services, creating supportive workplaces, tackling economic inactivity and growing the Social Enterprise sector.

**Marie Marin,
Chief Executive,
Employers For Childcare**

Who we are and what we do...

Who we are...

Employers For Childcare is a Social Enterprise and a Charity. 100% of the profit from our social enterprise activities is reinvested into our charity for social good. We work for and with parents, employers and childcare providers across the UK. Our mission is to make it easier for parents with dependent children to get into work and to stay in work. We address childcare not only as a social issue, but as a labour market and economic issue.

What we do...

Our charitable services include:

Research, Policy and Lobbying

We undertake qualitative and quantitative research gathering evidence to lobby on childcare, family and work related issues.

Family Benefits Advice Service

Our specialist Advisors carry out personalised benefits calculations for parents to ensure they are receiving all the financial help they are entitled to, particularly with the cost of childcare. We also deal with queries on all childcare and work related issues for parents, employers and childcare providers.

Family Friendly Employer Awards

We encourage employers to be family friendly, and support their employees with caring responsibilities. Our annual UK Family Friendly Employer Awards recognise employers who go above and beyond legal requirements to implement family friendly policies.

Our Social Enterprise, Employers For Childcare Trading Limited, provides a range of services with profits used to fund our charity:

Childcare Vouchers

Since 2004 we have been working with employers across the UK to offer the only Social Enterprise Childcare Voucher scheme to help parents save money on the cost of registered childcare.

High Rise

We are developing a new family adventure centre, High Rise, which will feature Clip 'N Climb, soft play and an innovative sensory room and quiet room benefiting a range of users, as well as a Changing Places toilet.

Recruitment Services

We support childcare providers in Northern Ireland to find staff by offering tailored recruitment packages.

Key asks

This manifesto sets out the issues that must be addressed for the benefit of parents and families, for the local labour market and economy and for society as a whole.

Each of our **five key asks** are based on areas of need which are evidenced by our own work and research.



1. Invest in the childcare infrastructure which our society needs

Our society needs a childcare infrastructure that is affordable, accessible, flexible, high quality, and which supports children's education and development. Childcare should be available to, and suitable for, children of all ages, those with a disability, and those living in a rural location. Childcare provision should enable parents to access and stay in paid work or education and training. This requires the value of childcare work to be recognised with decent pay and terms and conditions, and investment to ensure quality care is sustainable for providers to deliver.

Employers For Childcare addresses childcare as a social, labour market and an economic issue. Through our annual Childcare Surveys we know that parents and carers who are locked out of access to affordable childcare face a barrier to getting into, and progressing in, work. Just as we expect our roads and our schools to be there, we can redesign our childcare support system by removing the barrier that affordability poses, ensuring access to quality care is always an option for families, and helps to give our children and young people the best start in life and to realise their potential.

We can get this right. Doing so will ensure that our childcare infrastructure in Northern Ireland is a key to unlocking barriers to parents participating and

progressing in the workforce, particularly women, and to families who are in work maximising their incomes. It can also unlock a child's potential, providing an opportunity for early intervention, nurturing their development and helping to achieve the outcomes that we as a society know are right.

Here is what our elected representatives can do:

Invest at all levels to secure a sustainable, quality, affordable childcare infrastructure underpinned by:

- a costed Childcare Strategy
- a legal framework
- learning from other jurisdictions.

2. Ensure all families are accessing the financial help they are entitled to

It is not right that some families in our society, including those in work, are living in poverty, and others are struggling to get by due to financial pressures, including the ability to afford childcare. We can help to solve this by ensuring that families are able to access the financial support they are entitled to, and know where to go for information, advice and guidance.

Access to financial support, whether that means tax relief schemes for working parents, directly funded childcare, or the benefits system, can make a real difference. Ensuring parents know where to go for advice and guidance helps to relieve pressure and anxiety experienced by families.

There are practical ways in which families can receive this help. We know from our work with parents that it can be confusing navigating the complex system of support, but we are here to help.

Employers For Childcare operates the Family Benefits Advice Service, providing parents with information and personal advice on their entitlements. Our service is well-established, yet we know many more parents could be availing of support but are unaware of their entitlements.

Here is what our elected representatives can do:

- Commit to ensuring that all parents are aware of the financial support available to help them with the cost of childcare.
- Signpost all parents, childcare providers and employers to support or to advice giving services, and proactively promote this information.

3. Support employers and employees to benefit from family friendly working policies

Each year Employers For Childcare holds the Family Friendly Employer Awards which recognise and celebrate employers who go above and beyond legal requirements to implement family friendly working policies.

Our research highlights the benefits to organisations of supporting their staff to achieve a positive work-life balance. The benefits of supporting employees to reach this balance include increased productivity, staff motivation and loyalty – so it's a win-win for employers and employees.

When an organisation encourages a family friendly ethos its employees feel understood and valued not just as staff but as parents, grandparents, siblings and grandchildren.

This is underpinned by research, including Employers For Childcare's Striking the Balance report, which informed the development of our resource 'How to be Family Friendly: A Guide for Employers'.

Employers For Childcare has been working with employers across all sectors for the past twenty years to help support them in offering family friendly policies and practices

in the workplace. We offer free guidance in the form of our Family Benefits Advice Service which offers information on employment legislation relating to maternity, paternity, shared leave and guidance on family friendly policies.

Here is what our elected representatives can do:

- Highlight the benefits to employers of implementing family friendly working policies through training, mentoring and promotion of the Family Friendly Employer Awards.
- Ensure a family friendly working culture is embedded at all levels of Government.

4. Support the growth of Social Enterprise

Northern Ireland has a vibrant and innovative Social Enterprise sector. Social Enterprises are businesses set up for social good. Their aim in turning a profit is to fund their charitable activities and as such these organisations benefit the local economy and labour market while also addressing key social issues.

In England there has been a Social Value Act in place since 2012. The Act obliges all public bodies to consider how the services they procure will improve the economic social and environmental wellbeing of the area.

In Northern Ireland, annually around £3 billion is spent on procuring public services, and rather than weighting decisions on social and economic impact, tenders are typically awarded on price. This is an ineffective use of public money.

Employers For Childcare's annual Social Impact Reports highlight how we invest all profits generated through our trading activities, into the community through the provision of our charity's services.

Despite their proven impact, Social Enterprises regularly lose tenders for public services due to the heavy weighting given to price. Investing public funds in social business offers better value for money as it has a double impact.

Here is what our elected representatives can do:

- Introduce Social Value legislation that requires tenders to incorporate social value.
- Ensure that all tenders contain social clauses and weighting based on value for money, not simply the lowest price.

5. Reduce levels of economic inactivity by ensuring all parents have the option of getting into, staying in and progressing in work

The high rate of economic inactivity is a long standing problem in Northern Ireland. The Economic Inactivity Strategy launched in April 2015 aimed to work with those who are economically inactive due to family commitments. For many years Employers For Childcare has been working with parents to help them to get into, stay in and progress in work. We recognise the challenges parents face in finding suitable work, balancing their work and family commitments and the barriers which can prohibit work altogether, such as the lack of affordable childcare.

Our research shows that despite significant progress towards gender equality, it's still predominately mothers who are reducing their hours or leaving the workforce to raise their children.

Mothers who are qualified for a range of professions, from Quantity Surveyors to Nurses, have told us they have had to reduce their hours to reduce their childcare bill. As a society we must address this issue, we cannot be educating and training our daughters to be the best in their field whilst ignoring the barrier an inability to access affordable childcare presents to a woman's career progression.

A strategic approach to ensuring all parents with dependent childcare have the option of getting into,

staying in, and progressing in work is to:

- Invest in the childcare infrastructure which our society needs
- Ensure all families are accessing the financial help they are entitled to
- Support employers and employees to benefit from family friendly working policies
- Support the growth of Social Enterprise, creating sustainable employment.

Here is what our elected representatives can do:

Work with employers, social enterprises, charities and others to target support where it is most needed to ensure all parents can get into and stay in work.

Summary of proposed actions

1. Invest in the childcare infrastructure which our society needs

Invest at all levels to secure a sustainable, quality, affordable childcare infrastructure underpinned by:

- A costed Childcare Strategy
- A legal framework
- Learning from other jurisdictions.

2. Ensure all families are accessing the financial help they are entitled to

- Commit to ensuring that all parents are aware of the financial support available to help them with the cost of childcare.
- Signpost all parents, childcare providers and employers to support or to advice giving services, and proactively promote this information.

3. Support employers and employees to benefit from family friendly working policies

- Highlight the benefits to employers of implementing family friendly working policies through training, mentoring and promotion of the Family Friendly Employer Awards.
- Ensure a family friendly working culture is embedded at all levels of Government.

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- Introduce Social Value legislation that requires tenders to incorporate social value.
- Ensure that all tenders contain social clauses and weighting based on value for money, not simply the lowest price.

5. Reduce levels of economic inactivity by ensuring all parents have the option of getting into, staying in and progressing in work

- Work with employers, social enterprises, charities and others to target support where it is most needed to ensure all parents can get into and stay in work.



100% of the profit made from our Social Enterprises is donated to fund our charitable services.

Employers **For Childcare**

Working For Parents

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