

Childcare For All conference paper March 2019: Summary

The Childcare For All campaign hosted a policy conference ‘Childcare Policy Development in Northern Ireland: Exploring Drivers and Addressing Barriers’ in March 2019. The conference brought together stakeholders from different sectors, with varying perspectives and experiences. There was engagement from more than ninety participants from a range of roles in the childcare sector, from government departments including education, health and finance and from diverse organisations working on areas of child poverty, disability and gender equality. Three academics from Queen’s University and Ulster University also presented their research.

The conference was a positive opportunity to frame solutions, establishing a robust evidence base of research, and to map out opportunities for improvement within the current policy framework.

Key themes

The conference drew together research and discourse across four panels covering areas underpinning childcare policy and practice in Northern Ireland. These are echoed in the [Childcare For All Charter](#).

- **Early years development:** This panel focused on the benefits of early intervention, childcare for children with additional needs and linking childcare and early education to help improve strategic direction and provision.
- **Sectoral development:** This panel explored how best to develop a sustainable childcare workforce. The discussion identified some key challenges facing the sector including low pay, recruitment, sectoral diversity and financial sustainability. It also focused on solutions and how best to overcome these challenges.
- **Improving children’s outcomes:** This panel examined issues and solutions for improving children’s outcomes through accessible, quality childcare. There was a strong focus on affordability and the impact of welfare reform on families, particularly Universal Credit.
- **Gender inequality:** This panel looked at how the inability to access and afford childcare impacts on women and, conversely, how accessible and affordable childcare is a key component in increasing maternal employment. There was discussion on how best to support and value those who provide unpaid childcare.

The [Conference Policy Paper](#) also includes reflections from participants who attended the conference to represent their thoughts on issues that need addressed. It sets out recommendations for policy makers to ensure a high quality, sustainable childcare infrastructure that is affordable for parents to access, and for providers to deliver.

As a coalition, Childcare For All continues to work collectively on this campaign, engaging with policy-makers to ensure childcare policy is high on the political agenda and that childcare provision and delivery can work for all – families, childcare providers, employers and society as a whole.