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CHILDCARE PROVISION IN THE UK AND REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Research and Library Service

This Research Paper outlines current and previous childcare strategies, policies and funding for Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. It outlines the results of some recent research in the childcare field and the opinions of organisations in the childcare sector. It discusses barriers to childcare both from the perspective of providers and parents.

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SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Childcare is a crucial part of any child poverty strategy and yet it is proposed that childcare in Northern Ireland remains “*woefully inadequate*” and women cite the lack of affordable quality childcare as the main barrier to seeking employment¹.

Parents in the UK continue to pay around 75% of the cost of childcare, a higher proportion than in most OECD countries².

Section 2 focuses on Northern Ireland and notes that a new Early Years Strategy for 0-6 year olds, covering education, care and development, is in the planning stage with the Department of Education expecting to publish in July or August 2008.

Childcare in Northern Ireland is therefore currently under the direction of the previous Childcare Strategy *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999)³ and its key principles of social inclusion, quality, affordability, accessibility, flexibility, information and partnership. Sure Start was implemented as a result of *Children First* to promote physical, intellectual and social development of pre-school children with its projects locally managed by the four Childcare Partnerships. A 2005 review⁴ of the strategy noted the importance of developing and implementing a new revised childcare strategy, moving to mainstream funding for childcare and strengthening accountability for delivery.

Section 3 focuses on childcare in England. *Choice for Parents (2004)* is the most recent main UK Government childcare strategy. It outlines the improvements that have been made including investment in the previous *National Childcare Strategy* (1998), and in Sure Start, leading to the number of childcare places having “*increased dramatically by 525,000*” and an “*entitlement to 12.5 hours a week of free early education for all three to four year olds*”⁵. The Strategy covers both reserved issues (such as tax credits and maternity leave) and devolved issues (such as quality of childcare places) and responsibility for its delivery in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is therefore shared between the UK Government and the devolved administrations. It is supported by the Childcare Act 2006 which takes forward some of the key commitments from the Strategy, including duties on local authorities in England and Wales to assess the local childcare market and secure sufficient childcare for working parents.

Section 4 focuses on Scotland. A new early years strategy covering childcare will be published during 2008⁶, so as with Northern Ireland, childcare is therefore currently under the direction of the previous childcare strategy, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* (May 1998)⁷. It focused on raising the quality of care, making childcare more affordable and available, and making childcare more accessible by increasing places and improving information. To implement the

¹ Early Years Strategic Alliance, Early Years Manifesto, Section 4, pages 8 and 9

² Skinner, C. (2006) How Can Childcare help to end child poverty?, www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/9781859355053.pdf

³ Published by DHSS, Training and Employment Agency and DENI

⁴ DHSSPS (2005), *Review of Children First, Final Report*

⁵ Choice for Parents (2004), HM Treasury, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pension, Dti, Introduction and Summary, paragraph 1.7

⁶ *Smarter Scotland*, The Scottish Parliament – Official Report, Wed. 20th June 2007, Col 880

⁷ *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* (May 1998), The Scottish Office, www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm39/3958/summary.htm

Strategy, a Childcare Partnership was set up in the 32 local authority areas in Scotland.

The Scottish Executive commissioned research to provide an assessment of issues relating to parents' perceptions of access to and demand for childcare. Some of the pertinent findings were that 'trust' was the most important factor in any childcare decision and often a family member was seen as the ideal childcare provider for almost a third of respondents with out of school clubs, childminders and nursery/crèche the preferred formal options⁸.

Section 5 focuses on Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government's Childcare Action Plan published in 2002 put the perspective that children should be at the heart of childcare policy in Wales. The 2005 Childcare Strategy for Wales – *Childcare is for Children* is the Assembly Government's response to that report⁹. The Delivery of the Strategy is through existing Children and Young People's Framework Partnerships and it supports three inter-related objectives¹⁰:

- To ensure that childcare supports the developmental needs of children in Wales;
- To ensure that childcare is widely available and affordable to enable parents to train or work; and
- To provide childcare so that parents can have flexibility and choice in how they balance family, work and other commitments within their lives.

Section 6 notes the current Republic of Ireland's National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) as a key element of the National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010 being implemented by the Office of the Minister for Children (2006). NCIP includes €575 million over five years to increasing the supply by 50,000 additional childcare places, over and above the 36,868 places already created by mid 2007, with a greater focus on pre-school places for 3 and 4 year olds¹¹. The National Childcare Strategy includes an Early Childcare Supplement which came into effect in April 2006 and is paid in four quarterly installments of €250 per quarter¹².

Sections 7 and 8 deal with the barriers to childcare which fall into two main categories. Firstly, the barriers childcare providers face when establishing or running childcare provision and these differ between childminders, voluntary playgroups and the larger businesses of private daycare providers, however some common themes were the economics of provision due to parents' belief that childcare should be cheap; set-up costs; accessing training and qualifications; and the time taken to fill vacancies. Secondly, the barriers faced by parents in accessing childcare are discussed and include cost of childcare and accessibility in rural areas.

⁸ The Scottish Government, Social Research, Parents' Access to and Demand for Childcare Survey 2006, www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/13142214/1

⁹ Childcare is for Children (2005), <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/Thechildcarestrategyforwales?lang=en>

¹⁰ Childcare is for Children (2005), <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/Thechildcarestrategyforwales?lang=en>, Introduction, paragraph 8

¹¹ www.omc.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=700

¹² National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010, Office of the Minister for Children, Dept. of Health and Children, *A Guide for Parents*

The discussion, Section 9, notes the fact that current childcare policy and strategies pay little attention to the issue of informal care or addressing the needs of parents who chose to stay at home with pre-school children. There is some discussion of alternative viewpoints to the current accepted approach to early years interventions and policies and the fact that further research is needed in the impact of childcare and early years education on the outcomes for children. It is noted that the complexity of decisions surrounding childcare should not be underestimated and that childcare choices result from complex moral and emotional processes in assessing both children's needs and the mother's own¹³.

¹³ Willan, J (2007), Delivering Sure Start in rural communities, *Early Years*, **27**(1): 19-31, page 23

CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Childcare in Northern Ireland.....	2
	Current Childcare Policy and Relevant Funding in Northern Ireland	2
3.	Childcare in England.....	8
	Childcare Policy – Historical Context	8
	Current Childcare Policy and Relevant Funding in England	11
4.	Childcare in Scotland.....	16
	Current Childcare Policy and Relevant Funding in Scotland	16
5.	Childcare in Wales.....	20
	The Childcare Strategy for Wales – Childcare is for Children (2005)	20
6.	Childcare in the Republic of Ireland.....	23
	Childcare Policy – Historical Context	23
	National Childcare Investment Strategy and National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010	24
7.	Barriers to Providing Childcare.....	25
	Barriers for Childminders.....	25
	Barriers for Private and Voluntary Providers.....	27
8.	Barriers to Accessing Childcare	28
	Cost	28
	Rural Areas	29
9.	Discussion	30
10.	Appendix 1 Childcare Statistics for Northern Ireland.....	32
11.	Appendix 2 Childcare Statistics for England	34
12.	Appendix 3 Childcare Statistics for Scotland.....	38
13.	Appendix 4 Childcare Statistics for Wales.....	40

1. INTRODUCTION

Childcare is a crucial part of any child poverty strategy. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states in Article 18 “*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*”¹⁴.

Childcare and early years services play an important role in tackling poverty, enhancing attainment and promoting well-being among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Government’s anti-poverty strategy has focused on improving opportunities for parents to take and remain in work, providing assistance with moving ‘from welfare to work’, ensuring that paid work provides higher income than not working (‘making work pay’) and on providing security for those who cannot work. The success of the Government’s flagship policies, such as the New Deal, a scheme aimed at offering subsidised work or education to the long-term unemployed or young people, is dependent on the availability of childcare to allow parents to take paid work. The Government has adopted an approach to childcare specifically targeted at the 20 per cent most disadvantaged wards in England to increase the supply of childcare provision¹⁵.

It is proposed that childcare provision in Northern Ireland remains “*woefully inadequate*” and a survey undertaken for the Equality Commission NI, in 2003, found that nearly a quarter of employed mothers were constrained in the hours they worked by childcare problems, a further 20% were constrained in their choice of job and 67% of women surveyed cited the lack of affordable quality childcare as the main barrier to seeking employment¹⁶.

Parents in the UK pay around 75 per cent of the cost of childcare, a higher proportion of childcare costs than in most OECD countries. Even working families on the lowest incomes who get help with the cost of childcare through the childcare tax credit still have to find at least 30 per cent of the cost of childcare. Countries with good quality universal provision such as Sweden and Denmark have set a maximum level for parental contributions. In Sweden, for example, over 80 per cent of the costs of childcare are met by the state in the form of supply subsidy and a maximum fee for parents has been set at £95 a month for the first child and less for subsequent children. In Denmark, the Government pays 70 per cent of childcare fees and families 30 per cent, but many low income families receive significant additional relief. Overall, parents pay approximately 19 per cent of costs¹⁷.

Aside from cost other issues for parents in Northern Ireland include, particular childcare problems for those facing multiple disadvantages such as “*low income, working part-time or outside the 9 to 5 pattern*”¹⁸ and families with one or more disabled members are more likely to be living in poverty. It is proposed that there is a “*mismatch between the*

¹⁴ www.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm#art18

¹⁵ Skinner, C. (2006) How Can Childcare help to end child poverty?, www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/9781859355053.pdf

¹⁶ Early Years Strategic Alliance, Early Years Manifesto, Section 4, pages 8 and 9

¹⁷ Skinner, C. (2006) How Can Childcare help to end child poverty?, www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/9781859355053.pdf

¹⁸ Southern Area Childcare Partnership to Committee for the OFMDFM Inquiry into Child Poverty,

needs of children with disabilities and their parents and the services that are currently available to them”, specifically, “the lack of childcare services that exist in Northern Ireland is most acute for children with disabilities”¹⁹.

2. CHILDCARE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

CURRENT CHILDCARE POLICY AND RELEVANT FUNDING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

NB: An Early Years Strategy for Northern Ireland is currently in the planning stage with the Department of Education expecting to publish its Early Years Strategy for 0-6 year olds in July or August 2008. It is proposed that the Strategy will include the areas of education, care and development.

CHILDREN FIRST: THE NORTHERN IRELAND CHILDCARE STRATEGY (1999)

Childcare is therefore currently under the direction of the previous Childcare Strategy *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999)²⁰, which targeted the age range 0-14. The Strategy was in response to three main childcare challenges in Northern Ireland²¹:

- Quality of childcare was variable;
- The cost of childcare was too high for many parents; and
- In some areas there were not enough childcare places and access to them was hampered by poor information.

Four Area Early Years Committees (Northern, Eastern, Southern and Western) formed the basis of four new Childcare Partnerships, currently in operation, to implement the Strategy at a local level. Each was required to draw up a Childcare Plan setting out how needs in its area would be met²². The Principles of *Children First* were as follows²³:

- **Social Inclusion** - to promote social inclusion;
- **Quality** - to promote quality in both provision of childcare and the quality of suitably trained childcare workers;
- **Affordability** - to provide a range of affordable childcare, “*more choice for all families, especially those on a modest income*”;
- **Accessibility** - access to childcare in every community with a “*substantial increase in the number of childcare places available in different settings*”;
- **Flexibility** - the promotion of ‘family friendly’ policies among employers in Northern Ireland;
- **Information** - access for parents to accurate information on childcare and advice on financial support; and
- **Partnership** – a range of professions and agencies working in partnership with parents and employers.

¹⁹ Western Area Childcare Partnership, Memo to Committee for the OFMDFM Inquiry into Child Poverty, Nov. 2007, paragraph 7

²⁰ Published by DHSS, Training and Employment Agency and DENI

²¹ *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999), paragraph 1.6

²² *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999), paragraph 7.4

²³ *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999), paragraphs 2.2 – 2.9

Chapters three to seven of the Strategy outlined the specific actions under each of the Principles outlined above and some of the main actions were as follows:

- £9.9m provided for the implementation of Sure Start in Northern Ireland. The programme aims to work with parents and children under 4 in areas of social disadvantage to promote physical, intellectual and social development of pre-school children²⁴;
- £27.4m for the expansion of pre-school education for 3 and 4 year olds to cover 85% of pre-school children by 2002²⁵;
- £9.9m from the New Opportunities Fund to support the establishment of out-of-school childcare²⁶;
- £7.0m to support training opportunities in childcare through the New Deal by 2002²⁷; and
- The Training and Employment Agency was to develop a childcare training strategy for Northern Ireland²⁸.

SURE START IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Sure Start was implemented in Northern Ireland as a result of *Children First* as described above to promote physical, intellectual and social development of pre-school children. The projects are locally managed by the four Childcare Partnerships also established by *Children First*. According to the Sure Start website, there are now 25 Sure Start programmes across Northern Ireland and there is a “good urban/rural mix”. £9.3m was invested in 2006/07 and now means that 22,000 children aged under the age of 4 and their families have access to the services provided. Although the services are designed specifically to meet local needs there are core elements as described on the website as follows²⁹:

- Outreach and home visiting services, to make contact as early as possible in the child’s life and draw families into using other services;
- Family support, including befriending, social support and parenting information, both group and home-based;
- Good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children, both group and home-based;
- Primary and community healthcare and advice; and
- Support for all children in the community, recognising their differing needs - while Sure Start does not itself provide specialist services, projects need to ensure that their services are accessible to all families.

²⁴ *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999), paragraph 4.2

²⁵ *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999), paragraph 4.3

²⁶ *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999), paragraph 4.4

²⁷ *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999), paragraph 3.11

²⁸ *Children First: The Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy* (September 1999), paragraph 3.10

²⁹ www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/help/contacts/northernireland

DHSSPS REVIEW OF CHILDREN FIRST

In 2003, the Interdepartmental Group on Early Years (IDGEY) and the Children First Advisory Group made the decision to review *Children First*. The DHSSPS published the *Review of Children First*³⁰ in 2005 to ascertain the progress made in the childcare sector since its publication in 1999 and to take account of developments within childcare policy in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland and how they might contribute to improved childcare services in Northern Ireland. Sections 3.3 and 3.4 of the DHSSPS Review outline the achievements made in the main areas of accessibility and affordability of childcare:

Accessibility

The report noted the difficulty in quantifying the precise improvement in accessing childcare due to “*the lack of any baseline information*”, however between 31 March 1999 and 2004 the total number of childcare places increased by 5.7% to 42,367 (split between childminders, playgroups and day nurseries); there are now 25 Sure Start projects in Northern Ireland with more than 20,000 children under the age of 4 and their families having access to Sure Start services; the number of free pre-school education places has increased “*beyond targeted levels*” and by the 2003/04 academic year places were available for “*95% of children in their immediate pre-school year*”; and considerable developments in out-of-school provision meant that 14,494 new out-of-school childcare places were created by 2004. In addition the Review describes an “*increased focus...on providing childcare for children with special needs and increased resources have been directed to this area*”³¹.

Affordability

The DHSSPS Review noted “*a number of initiatives have been driven by Children First which has improved the affordability of childcare in Northern Ireland*”. These include³²:

- The introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit Scheme to provide tax relief for working parents with children;
- The progress of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme has seen the number of funded pre-school education places grow considerably and thus improved the affordability of childcare;
- The New Opportunities Fund has increased the number of funded Out of School Hours places;
- “*Investments from the Childhood Fund have supported the creation of 2,503 new childcare places and sustained 4,117 places. This...has supported the development of affordable childcare places*”; and
- More employers are providing Childcare Vouchers, which are available to parents for use as full or part payment for a wide range of registered childcare³³.

The Review noted that *Children First* was “*launched at a time when external funding sources were available. Now Sustainability issues have arisen with the ending of short-term European monies*”³⁴. It proposed potential models for the delivery of childcare in

³⁰ DHSSPS, *Review of Children First, Final Report*, August 2005

³¹ DHSSPS, *Review of Children First, Final Report*, August 2005, Section 3.3.1

³² DHSSPS, *Review of Children First, Final Report*, August 2005, Section 3.4.1

³³ Employers who provide Childcare Vouchers for employees can save up to 12.8% on the value of the vouchers through exemptions from National Insurance Contributions.

³⁴ DHSSPS, *Review of Children First, Final Report*, August 2005, Section 4.1, page 60

Northern Ireland. The models “seek 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”³⁵. The phased delivery approach assumes a change to a strategy supported by mainstream funding rather than short-term funding. The Review proposed six recommendations to achieve the phased movement to an optimum delivery model. These are listed below as summarised from Section 5 of the publication³⁶:

Recommendation 1 – Reshape the childcare vision for Northern Ireland

This includes developing and implementing a new childcare strategy for Northern Ireland (As stated above an Early Years Strategy for Northern Ireland is currently in the planning stage with expected publication in July or August 2008). Subsequent inter-departmental and sub-regional action plans would be developed from the new childcare strategy. The core themes at inter-departmental level should be incorporated into the new childcare strategy including care, health, education, training, workforce development, neighbourhood renewal, anti-poverty and voluntary sector cooperation.

Recommendation 2 – Allocate mainstream funding to the childcare strategy

Mainstream funding should be allocated to the childcare strategy from block funding before monies are distributed amongst departments and the level of funding should be based on ‘good practice’ of at least 1% of Northern Ireland’s GDP.

Recommendation 3 – Strengthen accountability for childcare action

The childcare strategy should be more visible across government departments by ensuring childcare is embedded in Priorities for Action. Departments should be accountable for its implementation by assigning clear roles and responsibilities. The inter-departmental body should produce an action plan and be accountable to the lead department’s minister. There should be formal accountability from ministerial to local level.

Recommendation 4 – Create robust leadership structures for childcare

One department and one minister should have lead responsibility for the childcare strategy with a junior minister for children within the lead department’s structures. The current IDGEY model should include the Department for Social Development.

Recommendation 5 – Implement childcare from an integrated platform

Regional focus should be provided on critical functional areas such as training, and information through time limited sub-groups. Care and education should be integrated at sub-regional level by four subregional Children’s Fora.

Recommendation 6 – Strengthen local capacity to action childcare priorities

Local level capacity to implement the childcare strategy should be strengthened with local connections through sub-regional and regional coordinating staff. Coordination of action at the local level should be more formal with the creation of a Local Children’s Forum.

³⁵ DHSSPS, *Review of Children First, Final Report*, August 2005, Section 4.2, page 62

³⁶ DHSSPS, *Review of Children First, Final Report*, August 2005, Section 5, page 71

TEN YEAR STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND 2006-2016 (OFMDFM)³⁷

Although the main Strategy document does not deal specifically with the issue of childcare, the related Children and Young Peoples Action Plan 2007-08 contains some pertinent action points:

Outcome Area 3: *Enjoying, Learning and Achieving*, paragraph 3.19 – provision of one year of high quality funded pre-school education in the year before compulsory education for every child whose parents wish it. This is ongoing and since the 2006/07 school year there have been sufficient places for every child in Northern Ireland whose parents applied;

Outcome Area 6: *Living in a Society Which Respects their Rights*, paragraph 6.39 - 6.40. Implementation of a play policy for Northern Ireland, an action plan for 0-11 year olds is to be developed by June 2008; paragraph 6.40 – Expansion of Sure Start provision in Northern Ireland, including expansion of the geographical boundaries of 19 existing Sure Start projects (by April 07), improve daycare provision within existing projects (by April 07), create 7 new projects (by April 08), and design and implement children's centres model in Northern Ireland (by April 08).

THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FUNDING PACKAGE (NI BUDGET AND PRIORITIES 2006-08)

The Children and Young People (C&YP) funding package (2006-08) targeted more than £61m over 2006-2008 to “addressing directly the most pressing needs of children and young people”³⁸. In the area of childcare the package was to provide³⁹:

- £13.25m/£13.3m for the Extended Schools concept (8am to 6pm) which is at the core of the C&YP funding package. “*Extended schools will provide activities based on their particular circumstances and needs, but taken from a ‘menu’ which will include breakfast clubs, after-school study support and after-school youth, sport and leisure activities...with funding being allocated directly to schools*”;
- £1.75m/£3m expansion of Sure Start;
- £0.75m/£2m planned developmental programme for 2 year olds, which has “*natural links to both Sure Start and Pre-School*”;
- £0.65m/£1.2m for Day care to be provided within Sure Start projects; this funding was to meet the need for “*day care in areas of deprivation to allow parents to access work or training*”;
- £0.6m/£0.8m to provide the facilities of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme in conjunction with Sure Start to allow seamless provision for children from birth until they enter school and was to provide places for 570 children in their pre-school year; and

³⁷ www.allchildrenni.gov.uk/tenyearstrategychildren1-2.pdf

³⁸ Budget 2006-08 Children and Young People Funding Package, Forward by the Secretary of State, 7 March 2006

³⁹ Budget 2006-08 Children and Young People Funding Package, paragraphs 7.1 and 8.3

- £100k was allocated in 2006/07 to increase the enrolment of Traveller Children in pre-school settings.

All of the above provision was planned to be made through or linked to the extended schools wherever possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT AND BUDGET 2008-2011

Within the Public Service Agreements (PSA) of the Programme for Government, there appear to be no specific references to the childcare sector, however, PSA 3 and 6 have the potential to impact on childcare⁴⁰:

- PSA 3 – describes “*addressing the barriers to employment*”, however in the more detailed objectives for PSA 3 there are no specifics regarding addressing childcare as a potential barrier to employment; and
- PSA 6 – “*To ensure that children are cared for, live in safety, are protected from abuse, receive the support they need to achieve their full potential...*”. The more detailed objectives for this PSA list the taking “*forward the development of an Early Years Strategy*” as mentioned above in this paper.

With regard to the PSA Framework, the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) noted, in their response to the NI Executive Draft Programme for Government and Draft Budget 2008-2011, their dismay “*at the lack of any mention of childcare in the Draft Programme for Government and the accompanying Public Service Agreement Framework*” and were further disappointed to note that there was no commitment to produce the Early Years Strategy by a given date within the next three years. NICMA did welcome the commitment given by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to address rural childcare issues as described in the final budget as “*rural development antipoverty measures aimed at capacity building in rural areas and targeted specifically at children, childcare and communities*”⁴¹.

With reference to the consultation on the Draft Budget 2008-2011⁴²,

“the perceived lack of provision of high quality, affordable, age appropriate and assessable child care places in Northern Ireland was the main issue raised regarding services for Children. This was highlighted as also having a negative impact on the economy as women, particularly single mothers, were less able to return to work in the absence of accessible childcare. It was proposed that the Executive should consider introducing a Transformation Fund similar to that which operates in England and Wales....A further issue was the perception that the removal of a specific ring-fenced Children and Young People’s Funding Package would have a detrimental impact on the services provided for Children and Young People...Respondents felt that the draft Budget proposals did not adequately address the needs of Children and Young People, particularly those who are most disadvantaged”.

⁴⁰ www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk/finalpfg.pdf, Annex 1

⁴¹ www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk/finalbudget.document.pdf, page 62

⁴² www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk/finalbudget.document.pdf, paragraphs 8.21-8.23 and 8.26

In recognition of the concerns expressed, additional funding made to the Department of Education in the final Budget was to help in addressing those issues.

3. CHILDCARE IN ENGLAND

CHILDCARE POLICY – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

NATIONAL CHILDCARE STRATEGY (1998)

The most recent inter-departmental government childcare strategy for England was published in 2004, *Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare (Dec 2004)*⁴³. However, prior to this Strategy there was a previous National Childcare Strategy entitled *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998).

The Strategy recognised that children are often cared for by both formal childcare settings and informal care with parents and relatives in the home and that a Childcare Strategy was important as “*For too long the UK has lagged behind in developing quality, affordable and accessible childcare*”⁴⁴.

The overall aim of the 1998 Strategy was to “*ensure good quality, affordable childcare for children aged 0-14 in every neighbourhood, including both formal childcare and support for informal arrangements*” and it focused on addressing three key problems⁴⁵:

- The quality of childcare could be variable with no defined standards and gaps in the system of regulation, for example, many childcare workers lacked formal qualifications. Measures to address this included:
 - New Early Excellence Centres to better integrate early education and childcare;
 - A more consistent regulatory regime;
 - New standards; and
 - Training and qualifications framework for childcare workers;
- The cost of childcare was high and out of reach of many parents, for example, the Daycare Trust estimated at the time that a full-time childminding place cost between £50 and £120 per week and a similar private day nursery place cost between £70 and £180; Measures to address this included a childcare tax credit as part of the Working Families Tax Credit; and
- In some areas there were insufficient childcare places and access to them was hampered by poor information. In 1998 there were 830,000 registered childcare places for the 1.5 million children aged under 8 in England. Measures included increasing the number of childcare places in England, including £300 million to set up new out of school childcare places and free pre-school education places for all four year olds.

⁴³ Choice for Parents (Dec 2004), published by HM Treasury, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pensions and DTI

⁴⁴ *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998), Executive Summary, paragraph ES4 and ES6, www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/about/thesurestartprogramme2/challenge

⁴⁵ *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998), Executive Summary, paragraph ES6, www.surestart.gov.uk/aboutsurestart/about/thesurestartprogramme2/challenge

The Strategy was implemented through 150 Local Authorities and their Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships⁴⁶

NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE REPORT (2004)

In 2004 the National Audit Office (NAO) published its report into what progress the Department of Education and Skills had made in improving the accessibility, affordability and quality of early years provision⁴⁷, since the 1998 Childcare Strategy.

The Department had achieved the 1998 target of providing a free part-time pre-school place to all four-year-olds whose parents wished it and it aimed to provide similar places for three-year-olds by 2004. By spring 2003, it had created enough places nationally to achieve this, although there were gaps in some localities⁴⁸.

From the launch of the measures announced in the National Childcare Strategy to spring 2003, 626,000 new childcare places for all ages were created in England. However, as a substantial number of places have closed, the NAO estimated that there will have been a net increase of 520,000 places by 2004 and most new places have been in out of school and holiday provision, mainly funded by the New Opportunities Fund. 96,000 places are for pre-school children⁴⁹.

The NAO reported that gaps in provision remained as follows⁵⁰:

- Provision at flexible hours to meet the needs of some, especially lone parents; Geographical gaps exist with much regional and local variation; for instance, the number of pre-school childcare places varies between 11 and 58 per 100 pre-school children;
- Few providers, especially childminders, are currently able to cater for disabled children and many are not trained to do so; and
- Less early years provision is available in the 20 per cent most deprived wards in England than in other areas.

Affordability has improved for some parents but costs have risen for others and the NAO report that the affordability of provision affects whether parents use it.

“childcare costs more for under-twos, reflecting the availability of free early education provision for older children and higher per capita costs for this age

⁴⁶ www.pm.gov.uk/output/page1430.asp

⁴⁷ *Early Years - Progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 268 Session 2003-2004: 27 February 2004

⁴⁸ *Early Years - Progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 268 Session 2003-2004: 27 February 2004, Executive Summary, paragraph 6

⁴⁹ *Early Years - Progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 268 Session 2003-2004: 27 February 2004, Executive Summary, paragraph 7

⁵⁰ *Early Years - Progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 268 Session 2003-2004: 27 February 2004, Executive Summary, paragraph 8

group, and there is survey evidence that costs vary widely around the country. For instance, a full-time nursery place for under-twos varied from £168 a week per place in London to £107 in the West Midlands in January 2004".

However the NAO reported that very few parents of children who did not use early years provision said this was because it was too expensive. Instead, "*the most common reasons were that the child was too young or that they preferred to look after them at home*"⁵¹.

The NAO reported that the Department has put in place a detailed framework of measures to improve the quality of childcare provision,

"National standards, which address issues of physical safety, child protection and provision for special needs as well as care and learning, have been set for childcare provision, and group sizes are established in law. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspects childcare providers against these standards every year...The Department has worked with local partners on a national recruitment campaign for staff, and developed new training routes, including an early years Foundation Degree. They have developed the Birth to Three Matters framework and the Foundation Stage curriculum, setting early learning goals for children below compulsory school age. There has been less progress in introducing quality assurance mechanisms for providers themselves. Fewer than 40 per cent of providers are accredited to one of the 67 quality assurance schemes currently in operation in the sector. To rationalise the situation the Department has developed an umbrella scheme, Investors in Children, which has now endorsed 24 schemes".

The NAO noted that further improvements to accessibility and quality will depend on a faster expansion of the childcare workforce and stated that the Department faced a challenge in increasing the size and skills of the workforce in line with its targets for creating additional places.

HOUSE OF COMMONS, COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS REPORT 2003-2004

On the basis of the above report from the NAO, the Committee of Public Accounts took evidence from the Department of Education and Skills and the interdepartmental Sure Start Unit on the progress made in increasing the supply of early years provision, improving choice for parents and delivering improvements in the standard of care. The Committee published its own report *Early Years: progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*⁵².

The Committee concluded that there "*has been good progress in increasing the supply of early education, but the Department needs to tackle the risks to the viability of*

⁵¹ *Early Years - Progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 268 Session 2003-2004: 27 February 2004, Executive Summary, paragraphs 12 and 13

⁵² *Early Years: progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*, House of Commons, Committee of public Accounts, Thirty Fifth Report of Session 2003-04

provision and the regional gaps in supply". The Committee proposed a list of key priorities for the Government and these included⁵³:

- Public funding should be linked to evidence that providers are well-run;
- The Department should set a target minimum number of places per 100 children at local authority level;
- The Department should develop its early years programmes for deprived children outside disadvantaged areas. The Committee noted that there are pockets of deprivation in otherwise affluent areas and a danger that these will be missed in a strategy focusing on the 20% poorest wards;
- School premises are an under-used resource but many schools have been reluctant to provide childcare. The Committee proposed that the Department needed to assist existing schools to make their premises available;
- The Department should be able to show that childcare has become more affordable for all and remains so. More research is needed to assess the impact of initiatives such as the childcare element of the Working Families Tax credit on the affordability of childcare across the country;
- The Government should re-examine the choices available to parents of very young children as the Department agreed that the balance of financial incentives is currently for mothers of very young children to return to work. The Committee proposed it should take into account the research evidence on the benefits of parental care; and
- The Department should assess the extent of unregistered childminders and the barriers to registration.

CURRENT CHILDCARE POLICY AND RELEVANT FUNDING IN ENGLAND

CHOICE FOR PARENTS, THE BEST START FOR CHILDREN: A TEN YEAR STRATEGY FOR CHILDCARE (DEC. 2004)⁵⁴

Choice for Parents (2004) is the most recent Government childcare strategy. It outlines the improvements that have been made in the area of childcare since 1998, including substantial investment in the previous *National Childcare Strategy* (described above), and in Sure Start, leading to the number of childcare places having "*increased dramatically by 525,000*" and an "*entitlement to 12.5 hours a week of free early education for all three to four year olds*"^{55, 56}.

The Government wish the Strategy to be implemented throughout the UK and it covers both reserved issues (such as tax credits and maternity leave) and devolved issues

⁵³ *Early Years: progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*, House of Commons, Committee of public Accounts, Thirty Fifth Report of Session 2003-04, pages 4-5

⁵⁴ *Choice for Parents (2004)*, HM Treasury, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pension, Dti

⁵⁵ *Choice for Parents (2004)*, HM Treasury, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pension, Dti, Introduction and Summary, paragraph 1.7

⁵⁶ All children in England are eligible for a free part-time funded place from 1 Sept., 1 Jan. or 1 April following their third birthday for up to 2 years before they reach statutory school age. Local authorities make funding available to providers to enable them to provide free places.

(such as quality of childcare places). Responsibility for the delivery of the strategy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is therefore shared between the UK Government and the devolved administrations. Despite the progress the Strategy notes that challenges remain including⁵⁷:

- Finding childcare to fit family circumstances and childcare that adapts as children grow;
- Affordability for some parents;
- Varying quality of childcare; and
- Accessibility problems due to poorly joined up services.

The three central principles of the Strategy are⁵⁸:

1. *“The importance of ensuring every child has the best possible start in life”;*
2. *“The need to respond to changing patterns of employment and ensure that parents, particularly mothers, can work and progress their careers”;* and
3. *“The legitimate expectations of families that they should be in control of the choices they make in balancing work and family life”.*

The main objectives of the Strategy cover the areas of choice, availability, quality and affordability as follows, extracted directly from the document⁵⁹:

Choice and flexibility: parents to have greater choice about balancing work and family life:

- A goal of 12 months paid maternity leave;
- Legislation to give mothers the right to transfer a proportion of this paid leave to the child’s father; and
- Every family to have easy access to integrated services through Children’s Centres in their local community, offering information, health, family support, childcare and other service for parents and children. 2500 such Centres to be in place by 2008 and 3500 by 2010.

Availability: for all families with children aged up to 14 who need it, an affordable, flexible, high quality childcare place that meets their circumstances:

- Legislation for a new duty on local authorities in place by 2008 so that over time they will secure sufficient supply to meet the needs of families;
- A goal of 20 hours a week of free, high quality care for 38 weeks for all 3 and 4 year olds; and;
- An out of school childcare place for all children aged 3-14 between the hours of 8am and 6pm each weekday by 2010.

Quality: high quality provision with a highly skilled childcare and early years workforce:

⁵⁷ Choice for Parents (2004), HM Treasury, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pension, Dti, Introduction and Summary, paragraph 1.8

⁵⁸ Choice for Parents (2004), HM Treasury, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pension, Dti, Introduction and Summary, paragraph 1.4

⁵⁹ Choice for Parents (2004), HM Treasury, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pension, Dti, Introduction and Summary, page 1

- All full daycare settings to be professionally led;
- A Transformation Fund of £125 million each year from 2006 to invest in high quality, sustainable, affordable provision; and
- Radical reform of the workforce via a new qualification and career structure;
- Reform of the regulation and inspection regime.

Affordability: families to be able to afford flexible, high quality, childcare that is appropriate for their needs:

- Increase in the limit of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit⁶⁰ and an increase in the maximum proportion of costs that can be claimed⁶¹; and
- A pilot scheme to address childcare affordability issues in London.

CHILDCARE ACT 2006

The Childcare Act 2006 is described by the Government as “a pioneering piece of legislation. It is the first ever act to be exclusively concerned with early years and childcare”⁶². The Act takes forward some of the key commitments from the Ten Year Childcare Strategy described above. It has four parts:

- Part 1 – duties on local authorities in England
- Part 2 – duties on local authorities in Wales;
- Part 3 – Regulation and inspection arrangements for childcare providers in England; and
- Part 4 – general provisions.

The main provisions, directly extracted from the Every Child Matters website (see footnote 8) are as follows:

Sections 1-5 require local authorities and their NHS and Jobcentre Plus partners to work together to improve the outcomes of all children up to 5 and reduce inequalities between them, by ensuring early childhood services are integrated to maximise access and benefits to families - underpinning a Sure Start Children’s Centre for every community

Sections 6, 8-11 & 13 require local authorities to assess the local childcare market and to secure sufficient childcare for working parents. Childcare will only be deemed sufficient if meets the needs of the community in general and in particular those families on lower incomes and those with disabled children. Local authorities will not be expected to provide childcare direct but will be expected to work with local private, voluntary and independent sector providers to meet local need.

Section 7 re-enacts the duty for local authorities to secure a free minimum amount of early learning and care for all 3 and 4 year olds whose parents want it.

⁶⁰ to £300/week (£175 for one child) from April 2005

⁶¹ from 70 percent to 80 percent from April 2006

⁶² www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/earlyyears/childcareact

Section 12 extends the existing duty to provide information to parents, to ensure parents and prospective parents can access the full range of information they may need for their children right through to their 20th birthday.

Sections 39-48 introduce the Early Years Foundation Stage, which will build on and bring together the existing Birth to Three Matters, Foundation Stage and national standards for day care and childminding. This new framework will support providers in delivering quality integrated early education and care for children from birth to age 5.

Sections 31-38 & 49-98 reform and simplify the framework for the regulation of childcare and early education to reduce bureaucracy and focus on raising quality and standards. All providers caring for children up to age 5 will be required to register on the Early Years register and deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (unless exceptionally exempted). Childcare settings providing for school age children will be judged against a streamlined set of Ofsted Childcare Register standards. These criteria will be compulsory for all settings caring for children under 8. Other providers may join the register on a voluntary basis.

Sections 99-101 allow for the collection of information about young children to inform funding and support the local authority duties under the act.

PROGRESS OF THE CHILDCARE STRATEGY

In 2007 the Daycare Trust (a national childcare charity), published *Childcare Nation? Progress on the childcare strategy and priorities for the future*. The report posed a series of questions and described whether or not the Childcare Strategy for England had succeeded in each of the areas as follows:

- **How has the quality of childcare changed?** – the Daycare Trust believe the quality of childcare is improving but there is “*still a way to go*” as in 2006/7 four percent of childcare settings were “*still graded inadequate by Ofsted, showing no improvement of the previous year*”. The Trust noted increased levels of qualified staff but that existing Ofsted standards have not yet been met, particularly in out-of-school clubs and that pay levels and the status of childcare staff will “*need to be improved to reflect this professionalism*”⁶³;
- **How has the strategy shaped market developments?** – The report noted a significant increase in daycare and out-of-school services and places since 1998, mainly in extended sessional care rather than full daycare. Provision during school holidays and care at atypical hours remains limited. The Daycare Trust propose that Government may need to increase its involvement in order to deal with “*market imperfections, such as the provision of services which are not profitable (e.g. provision in deprived areas, flexible provision)*”⁶⁴;
- **How has the childcare strategy affected maternal employment?** - The report notes that maternal employment has not increased significantly since 1999 and this “*may explain why overall demand for childcare appears not to have kept up*”

⁶³ Childcare Nation? (2007), The Daycare Trust, Section: *How has the quality of childcare changed?*

⁶⁴ Childcare Nation? (2007), The Daycare Trust, Section: *How has the strategy shaped market developments?*

with increases in supply. However there has been a significant increase in long part-time working hours (i.e. 16-29 hours per week)". The Daycare Trust believes that some mothers retain a preference for parental care which places limits on the extent to which a childcare strategy can increase maternal employment, however increasing childcare provision may increase maternal employment for low-income groups and lone mothers⁶⁵;

- **How has the use of childcare changed?** – The report notes a considerable increase in the take-up of early years education between 1999 and 2004 *"although participation remained lower than average among disadvantaged groups"* and modest increases in the forms of childcare used mainly by working parents, *"reflecting the lack of significant change in full-time maternal employment"*. The Trust propose that barriers, such as cost and accessibility still seem to be preventing some parents (and particularly disadvantaged groups) from using formal childcare⁶⁶.
- **What changes has the strategy brought to the costs of childcare?** - The report notes that evidence suggests that *"the cost of childcare might have contributed to slow down progress"* and *"cost constitutes a barrier particularly for lone parents, low income families and parents with pre-school children"* as these groups spend a larger portion of their income on childcare.

The Daycare Trust propose that it is difficult to *"disentangle the complex interplay of factors that shape parents' childcare decisions"* and believe that a *"more sophisticated research model should be developed to disentangle the effects of parental attitudes towards childcare services from barriers that might restrict childcare choices"*⁶⁷.

THE CHILDREN'S PLAN, BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES (DEC. 2007)⁶⁸

The Department of Children, Schools and Families was created by the Government in the summer of 2007 and it subsequently published the first Children's Plan (ten year plan) for the UK *"to put the needs of families, children and young people at the centre of everything we do"*⁶⁹. The overall aim of the Plan is *"to make England the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up"*⁷⁰. The Plan deals with certain aspects of childcare and notes that the number of registered childcare places has more than doubled since 1997 so that *"there is now a registered childcare for 1 in every 4 children under 8"*⁷¹.

Chapter 3 of the Plan deals with *excellence and equity* and notes that *"having raised the entitlement to free early education and childcare for 3- and 4- years olds from 12.5 hours*

⁶⁵ Childcare Nation? (2007), The Daycare Trust, Section: *Has the childcare strategy affected maternal employment?*

⁶⁶ Childcare Nation? (2007), The Daycare Trust, Section: *How has use of childcare changed?*

⁶⁷ Childcare Nation? (2007), The Daycare Trust, Section: *Recommendations from Daycare Trust*

⁶⁸ The Children's Plan, Building Brighter Futures (2007), Department for Children, Schools and Families

⁶⁹ The Children's Plan, Building Brighter Futures (2007), Department for Children, Schools and Families, Foreword by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

⁷⁰ The Children's Plan, Building Brighter Futures (2007), Department for Children, Schools and Families, Executive Summary, paragraph 1

⁷¹ The Children's Plan, Building Brighter Futures (2007), Department for Children, Schools and Families, Executive Summary, paragraph 1

*to 15 hours a week, we will now invest £100 million over three years to extend the offer of up to 15 hours of free early education and childcare to 20,000 2-year olds in the most disadvantaged communities*⁷².

Chapter 4 of the Plan deals with *leadership and collaboration* and with regard to early years and childcare will invest £117 million over three years in the early years workforce, including⁷³:

- Funding supply cover so that early years workers can take part in continuing professional development; and
- Enhance the Graduate Leader Fund so that every full day care setting will be led by a graduate by 2015, with two graduates per setting in disadvantaged areas.

4. CHILDCARE IN SCOTLAND

CURRENT CHILDCARE POLICY AND RELEVANT FUNDING IN SCOTLAND

NB: In June 2007 the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning launched a

*“process to develop a long-term early years strategy covering childcare, development and education that will be published in the summer or autumn of 2008. The strategy will reflect the Government’s view that by building self-confidence, social skills and an awareness of one’s impact on others, our investment in the early years will create the foundations for good health and positive economic and civic engagement later in life”*⁷⁴.

The Cabinet Minister noted early commitments to progress in this area in the meantime, including from autumn 2007, *“the (free pre-school education) entitlement for all three and four-year olds will be increased to 475 hours a year”*^{75, 76}.

MEETING THE CHILDCARE CHALLENGE: A CHILDCARE STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND

As with Northern Ireland, childcare is therefore currently under the direction of the previous childcare strategy, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* (May 1998)⁷⁷. The overall aim of this 1998 Strategy mirrored that of the 1998 English Strategy and was to *“ensure good quality, affordable childcare for children aged 0-14 in every neighbourhood, including both formal childcare and support for informal arrangements”*. The following information, directly extracted from the Executive Summary describes how the aim was to be achieved⁷⁸:

⁷² The Children’s Plan, Building Brighter Futures (2007), Department for Children, Schools and Families, Executive Summary, paragraph 15

⁷³ The Children’s Plan, Building Brighter Futures (2007), Department for Children, Schools and Families, Executive Summary, paragraph 20

⁷⁴ *Smarter Scotland*, The Scottish Parliament – Official Report, Wed. 20th June 2007, Col 880

⁷⁵ *Smarter Scotland*, The Scottish Parliament – Official Report, Wed. 20th June 2007, Col 880

⁷⁶ 475 hours per year equates to 2.5 hours per school day for 38 weeks a year

⁷⁷ *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* (May 1998), The Scottish Office, www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm39/3958/summary.htm

⁷⁸ *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* (May 1998), The Scottish Office, www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm39/3958/summary.htm, Executive Summary paragraph ES8

- **Raising the quality of care:** plans include better integration of early education and childcare; a more consistent regulatory regime between education and childcare; new standards for early education and childcare; a new training and qualifications framework for childcare workers; more opportunities to train as childcare workers, including up to 5,000 places in Scotland through the New Deal.
- **Making childcare more affordable and available:** investing £250 million a year in the United Kingdom in a new 'childcare tax credit' for working families - part of the new Working Families Tax Credit. It will give help with childcare costs of up to £70 per week for a family with one child and up to £105 per week for a family with two or more children.
- **Making childcare more accessible by increasing places and improving information:** encouraging a diversity of childcare provision to meet parents' preferences. We will increase the number of childcare places through a £30 million investment in Scotland - £25 million of it from the Lottery - over the next five years to develop more places across the country. In addition from winter 1998 every four-year old will have the chance of a free part-time pre-school education place. Plans include a new helpline in 1999 which will link parents with local childcare information services which meet national standards.

To implement the Strategy, a Childcare Partnership was set up in the 32 local authority areas in Scotland, with a Childcare Partnership Development Officer appointed in each. The Partnerships included representation from the Local Authority (including education and social work interests), the Local Enterprise Company, local employers, private education sector and childcare providers, out of school forums, voluntary sector providers of early years education and care, further education colleges, NHS, registered childminders, employment service/New Deal Partnerships, and parents (including working parents⁷⁹).

Consultation on the Strategy at the time proposed certain concerns including⁸⁰:

- The Strategy needed to look further at the needs of children from rural areas, those from ethnic minorities, those with special needs or those identified as in need through homelessness or other measures;
- The Strategy emphasised the link between childcare and work more than the needs of the child; and
- There should be recognition for parents who prefer to stay at home to look after their children.

⁷⁹ www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Early-Education-Child-Care/15135/1088

⁸⁰ Responding to the Childcare Challenge, A summary of responses to the green paper, www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w7/rtcc-oo.htm

RECENT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESEARCH IN THE AREA OF CHILDCARE

National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce Consultation

A Scottish Executive Education & Skills Directorate consultation, "*National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce*" took place between 10 August 2006 and 22 December 2006. As part of this consultation, a written consultation document was issued aimed specifically at individual childcare workers and childminders in Scotland. Some of the pertinent findings were⁸¹:

- The majority of childminders (62%) who responded to the childminders' consultation questions considered it very important or important to have qualifications that are on par with the rest of the early years and childcare workforce. Many of the 38% of childminders who did not consider parity of qualifications important believed that experience counts for more than qualifications;
- 72% of childminders who provided a view stated that they would undertake training and learning if it was recognised within a single qualifications and professional development framework across the whole early years and childcare sector, however, the most common factor identified as preventing them from undertaking training and learning was not having the time needed to pursue this;
- There were mixed views amongst individual childcare workers on a proposal to raise the qualification level for managers and lead practitioners. Whilst many supported the proposal in order to increase the professionalism and status of the workforce, others considered that experience should count for more than paper qualifications;
- Individual childcare workers reported that providing opportunities for training and promotion, and a good reputation were attractive features of their previous or current employer; and
- Most (83%) individual workers considered that better pay and terms of service would help employers attract new recruits and/or keep workers in the sector.

Parents' Access to and Demand for Childcare Survey 2006

The Scottish Executive Education Department, Children and Young People and Social Care Group commissioned research to provide an assessment of issues relating to parents' perceptions of access to, and demand for, childcare. Although focused on Scotland, the findings, in many cases, are of general interest to the consideration of

⁸¹ National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce Consultation: Analysis of Childminders' and Childcare Workers' Responses – Research Findings (2007), www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/07/25092713/1

childcare policy. Some of the pertinent key findings are as follows (directly extracted from the Executive Summary)⁸²:

Usage and Non-Usage of Childcare

- 42% of parents interviewed use childcare in a typical week, rising to 49% when occasional use is also considered;
- Just under half of respondents (43%) who have regular provision patterns use no more than 10 hours of childcare in a typical week, across all providers; and
- Childcare use varies by the age range of the child, with the highest levels of use for younger children, with this dropping off as children get older, giving a relatively low average childcare use for the whole study sample.

Reasons for Use of Childcare and Motivating Factors

- Trust is by far the most important factor in the childcare decision. More than half (54%) of respondents placed it in the top three of the factors they considered;
- Cost is also an important factor, especially for low income households and those with more than two children. Location, while rarely the first consideration, is an important secondary factor;
- In-depth qualitative interviews indicate that the majority of parents consulted felt that the cost of formal childcare was too high, particularly those with larger families; and
- Households on lower incomes (less than £221 per week) tend to spend less on childcare.

Childcare Preferences

- A family member is the ideal provider for 28% of respondents;
- Out of School Clubs, childminders and nursery/crèche are the most commonly preferred type of formal provision;
- Only 7% of all respondents who do not use their ideal arrangements said it is because they cannot afford it; and
- In a typical week, childcare is most commonly used Monday to Friday. Weekend use is a small proportion of overall childcare use.

⁸² The Scottish Government, Social Research, Parents' Access to and Demand for Childcare Survey 2006, www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/13142214/1

Parents' Opinions and Knowledge of Information Sources and Changes in Childcare Arrangements

- Very few parents experience problems accessing new arrangements when changes are needed; and
- When information on childcare provision is needed, the most common source is word of mouth, but many parents draw on more than one source.

Gaps in Provision and Constraints

- Approximately two in five respondents did not feel they had a real choice in their decision on whether to work. Childcare was a factor for 56% of these respondents;
- Most respondents say that they are happy with their decisions both on whether to work (88%) and whether to train or study (89%); and
- A reduction in working hours in order to provide childcare is more common in two-parent households than in one parent households.

Costs of Childcare

- Around half (51%) of those using childcare do not pay anything for it;
- Economically inactive parents are more likely to receive free childcare than those in employment; and
- Over a third (36%) of single parent families claim that the childcare benefits they receive are vital to their ability to access childcare.

5. CHILDCARE IN WALES

THE CHILDCARE STRATEGY FOR WALES – CHILDCARE IS FOR CHILDREN (2005)

The Welsh Assembly Government's Childcare Action Plan published in 2002 set out the perspective that children should be at the heart of childcare policy in Wales. In 2004 the Assembly Government formed a new Childcare Working Group to build on the implementation of the Childcare Action Plan and the Group provided 77 recommendations. The Childcare Strategy for Wales – *Childcare is for Children* is the Assembly Government's response to that report⁸³.

The Delivery of the Strategy is through existing Children and Young People's Framework Partnerships. The Strategy supports three inter-related objectives⁸⁴:

- To ensure that childcare supports the developmental needs of children in Wales;

⁸³ Childcare is for Children (2005), <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/Thechildcarestrategyforwales?lang=en>

⁸⁴ Childcare is for Children (2005), <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/Thechildcarestrategyforwales?lang=en>, Introduction, paragraph 8

- To ensure that childcare is widely available and affordable to enable parents to train or work and thus raise levels of economic activity in Wales; and
- 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.

The Strategy notes that although the overall number of registered childcare places has increased by nearly 18,000 between March 1999 and March 2005 and the Assembly Government delivered on its commitment to a free half time term time education place for all three year olds, there are still many challenges, for example⁸⁵:

- Provision remains uneven across Wales;
- Areas of high poverty face extra deficiency;
- The end of lottery funding for out of school places;
- Potential new providers find regulatory and financial barriers difficult; and
- Providers report challenges in recruiting, training and retaining sufficient qualified staff.

The Welsh Assembly Government believes that its Strategy places children at the centre of childcare planning and supports the aims of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in that good quality childcare supports⁸⁶:

- A “*flying start in life by providing professional care based on international best practice*” - The Strategy notes its initiative for the youngest children in disadvantaged areas ‘Flying Start’ and having already delivered free part time education for three and four year olds, the initiative aims to provide free quality part time childcare for two year olds in disadvantaged areas;
- Learning;
- Healthy development, including nutrition, hygiene and active play and exercise;
- Diversity of culture and language, including protection of the Welsh language;
- Parents accessing training and work, thus lifting families out of poverty; and
- Inclusion of disabled children⁸⁷.

The following pertinent action points are taken from Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the Strategy and address the areas of regulation, quality, affordability and the childcare workforce:

- The Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales will “*make children’s experiences the central focus of regulation, and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens*” (paragraph 30);
- The Assembly Government will support the development of a quality assurance methodology across childcare and early years education (paragraph 37);

⁸⁵ Childcare is for Children (2005), <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/Thechildcarestrategyforwales?lang=en>, Introduction, paragraph 10

⁸⁶ Childcare is for Children (2005), <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/Thechildcarestrategyforwales?lang=en>, Chapter 2, paragraph 15

⁸⁷ Childcare is for Children (2005), <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/Thechildcarestrategyforwales?lang=en>, Chapter 2, paragraph 19

- A communications campaign will be mounted to ensure there is accessible promotional material for parents regarding the Working Tax Credit (paragraph 59);
- Local authorities will be under a new duty to secure sufficient childcare, supported by regulations and guidance appropriate to Wales (paragraph 73); and
- The Welsh Assembly Government will work with the new Sector Skills Council for Care and Development to create a Workforce Development Plan for Wales (paragraph 87).

GENESIS WALES

The Strategy describes Genesis Wales as the “*unique strategic programme for childcare*”, building on a pilot programme of outreach, measures to increase self esteem and available childcare to introduce women to work and training opportunities. Having won £10.1 million of ESF under Objective 1 and £2.5 million under Objective 3 over three years, the national targets it is planned to deliver on are⁸⁸:

- To assist 13,000 people;
- To increase childcare places by 8,500;
- 50% of beneficiaries with children under 5 years in work at least 6 months after ESF support; and
- 40% of beneficiaries achieving a qualification.

MEN IN CHILDCARE NETWORK

The network is a partnership between Children in Wales, the Department of Childhood Studies at Swansea University and Trinity College Carmarthen to encourage more men into the workforce working with children and young people. The first meeting was in May 2007 and the remit agreed was as follows⁸⁹:

- Influence policy in Wales;
- Share experience and good practice;
- Exchange information;
- Encourage more men into the workforce;
- Challenge the mindset of professionals;
- Change public perceptions of male roles in child care and child rearing;
- Encourage male friendly services;
- Promote positive role models for children and young people;
- Research views and gather statistics about men in childcare

⁸⁸ Childcare is for Children (2005), <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/Thechildcarestrategyforwales?lang=en>, Chapter 6 paragraph 93

⁸⁹ www.childreninwales.org.uk, Men in Childcare Network, Wales

6. CHILDCARE IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

CHILDCARE POLICY – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES CHILDCARE PROGRAMMES - EOCP I AND EOCP II

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s there was an increasing awareness of the potential of the female labour force as an impetus for further economic growth and a corresponding awareness of the need for childcare services. In 1997 an Expert Working Group on Childcare was established, in the context of the Partnership 2000 national agreement, to develop a national childcare strategy. Their 1999 recommendations have informed much of the public policy response to childcare since⁹⁰.

The provision in 1998 of £11 million of EU coupled with Exchequer match funding (€14 million) “*marked the first significant steps towards the provision of Government incentives to develop childcare services to address the needs of parents in employment, education and training*”⁹¹. The first Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (1998-1999) (EOCP I) focused on a number of small initiatives in areas of disadvantage. An element of EOCP I was a census of childcare providers to provide baseline childcare information and the results of this census formed the baseline for EOCP II, the 2000-2006 Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme⁹².

The main objectives of EOCP II (2000-2006) were to⁹³:

- Improve the quality of childcare;
- Maintain and increase the number of childcare facilities and places; and
- Introduce a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of childcare services.

The Expert Working Group on Childcare recommended the establishment of a county based structure for childcare and subsequently City/County Childcare Committees have been established in 33 counties and cities to develop a coordinated strategy for childcare provision in their area. Financial support for the Committees was made available from EOCP II⁹⁴. The €500 million EOCP II was funded by the Government and part-financed by the EU Structural Funds under the National Development Plan 2000-2006. It operated under three sub-measures to meet its aims and provide grant assistance in the form of⁹⁵:

- Capital funding for both community/not-for-profit groups and private providers;
- Staffing supports for community/not-for-profit groups in disadvantaged areas; and

⁹⁰ *Developing Childcare in Ireland*, A Review of the Progress to End 2003 of the Implementation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006, Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, paragraph 1.1.5

⁹¹ *Developing Childcare in Ireland* A Review of the Progress to End 2003 of the Implementation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006, Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, paragraph 1.3.1

⁹² *Developing Childcare in Ireland*, paragraphs 1.3.2, 1.4.1

⁹³ *Developing Childcare in Ireland*, paragraph 3.1.2

⁹⁴ *Developing Childcare in Ireland*, paragraph 3.6.1

⁹⁵ Office of the Minister for Children website, www.omc.gov.ie, Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006

- Supports for Quality Improvement projects, including support to the City/County Childcare Committees (see below) and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.

Until recently EOCP II operated under the remit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform but is now the responsibility of the Office of the Minister for Children and it will “run in parallel with the new National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 until all its commitments have been honoured”. The Programme has exceeded its original targets to create 31,800 childcare places⁹⁶.

NATIONAL CHILDCARE INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND NATIONAL CHILDCARE STRATEGY 2006-2010

NATIONAL CHILDCARE INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2006-2010 (NCIP)

The NCIP is a key element of the National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010 being implemented by the Office of the Minister for Children. It became effective from 1 January 2006 and succeeds the EOCP II, however, unlike EOCP II it is entirely Exchequer funded. The objectives and main elements of NCIP are as follows⁹⁷:

- €575 million over five years to increasing the supply by 50,000 additional childcare places, over and above the 36,868 places already created under EOCP by mid 2007, with a greater focus on pre-school places for 3 and 4 year olds (10,000 places) and 5,000 after school places;
- Improving the quality of early childhood care and education services, including developing training and standards for childcare workers with a target of 17,000 places in childcare training;
- Supporting families and breaking the cycle of disadvantage; and
- Supporting a coordinated approach to the delivery of childcare which is centred on the needs of the child and facilitated through a proactive approach by the City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs).

The maximum Capital Grants available through NCIP are⁹⁸:

- 1.2 million euro per facility for Community Based Not for Profit Providers; and
- 100,000 euro per facility for Private Providers (subject to a max. of 75% of the total cost) and a max. of 500,000 euro for multiple services in different catchment areas.

The current funding stream will also assist with Staffing and other operating costs in community facilities that cannot meet the costs from fees alone and will also provide for the further development of the CCCs. In addition the National Childminding Initiative, administered locally by the CCCs, provides a capital grant of €630 under the Childminder Development Grant Scheme to purchase safety equipment, toys, make minor adjustments to the childminder’s home or to establish a childminding service⁹⁹.

⁹⁶ Office of the Minister for Children website, www.omc.gov.ie, Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006

⁹⁷ www.omc.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=700

⁹⁸ www.omc.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=700

⁹⁹ www.omc.gov.ie, Childminders, National Childminding Initiative and Guidelines

NATIONAL CHILDCARE STRATEGY 2006-2010

The key objective is to “*further develop the childcare infrastructure to meet the needs of children and their parents for quality early childhood care*”¹⁰⁰.

The pertinent issues in the Strategy for Providers are as described above under the NCIP i.e. additional places, capital grants and training places. There are also new entitlements for parents under the Strategy as follows¹⁰¹:

- Early Childcare Supplement – this came into effect in April 2006 and is paid in four quarterly installments of €250 per quarter. It is intended to help parents of children under 6 years with the cost of caring for young children. Parents of children under 6 years who qualify for child benefit will automatically qualify for the supplement, which is direct and non-taxable;
- Improved maternity and adoptive leave increasing to 26 weeks paid maternity leave plus 16 weeks unpaid maternity leave plus 14 weeks of unpaid parental leave which can be taken by either parent;
- Increased maternity benefit to €265.60 per week from January 2006; and
- A new programme of educational opportunities – a new social inclusion programme ‘Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools’ has been established by the Department of Education and Science. It is intended to help meet the needs of children/young people in disadvantaged communities and includes measures from pre-school to second level education, as well as education for students with special needs and second-chance education and training for adults. The programme will link in with the National Childcare Strategy.

7. BARRIERS TO PROVIDING CHILDCARE

BARRIERS FOR CHILDMINDERS

According to the findings of a study commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) published in October 2000¹⁰² some of the main barriers for childminders in establishing and running a quality provision are:

- Time taken to register with the local authority;
- The time taken to fill all places;
- Parent’s belief that childcare should be cheap; and
- The failure of local authorities to police unregistered childminders.

The Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) state that registered childminding in Northern Ireland accounts for 63% of full-time daycare places and 37% of all childcare places. They propose that in many rural areas it is the only form of

¹⁰⁰ National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010, Office of the Minister for Children, Dept. of Health and Children, *A Guide for Providers*

¹⁰¹ National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010, Office of the Minister for Children, Dept. of Health and Children, *A Guide for Parents*

¹⁰² Callender, C. (2000) *The Barriers to Childcare Provision – Research Brief*, South bank University and the Policies Studies Institute

childcare provision¹⁰³. NICMA note that adding to a “*significant shortfall in childcare places in Northern Ireland...in the three years to March 2006, there was a 19% fall in the supply of places with registered childminders*”¹⁰⁴.

In order to overcome the barriers individual childminders face in establishing and maintaining a quality service NICMA have proposed a Childminder Start-Up Package to provide a “*cost-effective means for the Executive to begin tackling the shortfall in childcare*”. The package would include a £400 Start-Up Grant for prospective childminders, combined with one-to-one mentoring for all those seeking to enter the profession, or just beginning to establish their businesses. NICMA estimate this would require an annual investment of £300K. The childminding support initiatives available elsewhere are¹⁰⁵:

- Republic of Ireland – Childminder Development Grants of up to €630 are available as set-up grants and for existing childminders to improve the quality of their service;
- England – Sure Start funds Childminder Start-Up Grants as part of its childminding recruitment campaign; and
- Wales – A Start-Up Grant is available to new childminders

Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)¹⁰⁶ also support a Childminder Start-Up Package and the establishment of mandatory pre-registration training for prospective childminders and thereby “*addressing the registration issues that are hindering the development of childminding*”.

In England, Ofsted intend to impose a rise in registration fees for both childminders, nurseries and other daycare providers from September 2008. The fee for childminders is planned to increase from £15 to £103 per annum¹⁰⁷. Those caring for children aged 5 to 7 will face the increase in September and those caring for younger children will not pay the increase until 2010. Children’s charities and industry leaders believe that childminders may face “*being driven out of business*” by the increase. The rationale for the fee increases is that the Government wishes Ofsted to “*start making money to cover some of its costs*”¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰³ NI Executive Draft Programme for Government and Draft Budget 2008-2011, Response from NICMA (Dec 2007), page 5

¹⁰⁴ NI Executive Draft Programme for Government and Draft Budget 2008-2011, Response from NICMA (Dec 2007), page 2

¹⁰⁵ NI Executive Draft Programme for Government and Draft Budget 2008-2011, Response from NICMA (Dec 2007), page 5

¹⁰⁶ CiNI – Regional umbrella body for the children’s sector in Northern Ireland, representing 114 member organisations

¹⁰⁷ The fee for day nurseries will increase from £155 to £450 by 2010

¹⁰⁸ Childminders face huge rise in Ofsted fee (Feb.20 2008)

http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/families/article3399677.ece

BARRIERS FOR PRIVATE AND VOLUNTARY PROVIDERS

According to the findings of a study commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) published in October 2000¹⁰⁹, the main obstacles such child care providers face in setting up childcare provision are:

- Finding suitable premises and getting planning permission;
- Set-up costs of buying premises or converting and adapting premises; and
- Lack of support for small business;

The main obstacles faced by providers in running the daycare provision are:

- The cost of wages, especially for playgroups;
- Registration and inspection costs and differences in regulatory standards between different types of providers;
- How much parents could afford to pay and society belief that childcare should be cheap;
- Lack of marketing expertise; and
- Lack of public transport.

The main obstacles faced by providers in providing high quality childcare are:

- Staff terms and conditions of employment including low wage levels of childcare¹¹⁰ staff and lack of suitably qualified and experienced staff¹¹¹;
- The economics of provision, all types of providers singled out the affordability of childcare as a major impediment to quality provision and parents' belief that childcare should be cheap.

It should be noted that there was “*considerable consensus amongst providers of childcare about which policies would be most effective in increasing the level of provision. All providers in the survey....believed that the most effective way of increasing the number of providers was to give parents financial support to help meet childcare costs*”¹¹². Other issues identified to increase provision were¹¹³:

- Reduce provider costs via VAT free purchases;
- Reduce business rates;
- Carry out local audits of childcare provision and need;
- Better information for parents on childcare in their locality;
- Removing differences in the standard of childcare regulation and inspection;
- Greater availability of training leading to a recognised qualification

¹⁰⁹ Callender, C. (2000) *The Barriers to Childcare Provision – Research Brief*, South bank University and the Policies Studies Institute

¹¹⁰ Wage levels also mentioned as an obstacle to running the provision, yet low wages are often a disincentive for childcare workers entering and remaining in the profession.

¹¹¹ The Early Years Strategic Alliance for Northern Ireland propose a Transformation Fund for the childcare workforce of Northern Ireland, equivalent to that currently operating in England. The fund would aim to raise the quality of childcare for the under fives, by supporting the development of the workforce without compromising affordability/availability of childcare.

¹¹² Callender, C. (2000) *The Barriers to Childcare Provision – Research Brief*, South bank University and the Policies Studies Institute

¹¹³ The report recognised that many of these issues were being tackled in some way by recent Government policy such as Childcare Tax Credits and allocation of funds for the training and development of childcare staff.

8. BARRIERS TO ACCESSING CHILDCARE

COST

A Welsh Study of Parents' Use, Views and Experiences of Childcare and Early Years¹¹⁴ noted

“Currently, formal childcare and early years provision is affordable (though by no means easily affordable) to some, but less affordable – and sometimes a barrier to its use – by others. Lower income families found it harder, on average, to pay for their childcare and early years provision (in the local area), than those in the highest income group”.

The cost of childcare and early years provision is often seen as a barrier to employment, especially for mothers. How the cost should be shared between parents and the government is an issue of continuing debate and concern. Cost is, however, an area where there have been recent policy developments in the UK including the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, and free part time nursery education places for three and four year olds. There does appear to be room for improvement in terms of increasing parents' awareness of the financial help available¹¹⁵.

According to the Daycare Trust Childcare Costs Survey 2008¹¹⁶, the typical cost of a full-time nursery place for a child under two is:

- England, £159 a week (over £8000 a year), rising to £200 a week in London and the highest identified by the Daycare Trust was £436 a week;
- Scotland, £141 a week; and
- Wales, £142 a week.

In the same survey, the typical cost for a full-time place with a childminder for a child under two is:

- England, £144 a week;
- Scotland, £139 a week; and
- Wales £153 a week.

With regard to Northern Ireland, research from the Derry Well Women Project, *Childcare on the Borderline*, revealed that the amount spent weekly on childcare in the North West ranged from £1.50 to £215, with the mean cost per household being £42.27 per week. Those who were in receipt of financial assistance for childcare cited a variety of sources including education and training providers, Social Services and ex-partners and *“appears to highlight an inconsistency in accessing support for childcare costs”*. The

¹¹⁴ Bryson, C. et. al. (2006) *Childcare and Early Years Provision in Wales: A study of Parents Use, Views and Experiences* (March 2006), Welsh Assembly Government, Department for Training and Education Information Document No: 006-06, Executive Summary, page 5

¹¹⁵ Bryson, C. et. al. (2006) *Childcare and Early Years Provision in Wales: A study of Parents Use, Views and Experiences* (March 2006), Welsh Assembly Government, Department for Training and Education Information Document No: 006-06, Executive Summary, page 4

¹¹⁶ www.daycaretrust.org.uk/mod.php?mod=userpage&menu=1003&page_id=354

research noted that childcare is relatively more expensive for working lone parents than for two parent working families and for one parent families the lack of directly subsidised childcare provision “leaves parents with little choice in remaining on social welfare, thereby compounding the poverty trap”¹¹⁷.

The Northern Childcare Partnership Report on *Childcare Issues Affecting Families in Rural Areas* (2007) noted that their survey revealed that the cost of formal childcare was seen as too high and as a result many rural families continue to rely on informal arrangements with relatives or friends and even with subsidy from Childcare tax credit component of the Working Families Tax Credit, some parents find it difficult to pay the rest of the cost as it often outweighs the financial gain of being in paid employment¹¹⁸.

RURAL AREAS

The Northern Childcare Partnership (Northern Ireland) convened a task force in August 2006 to look at the experiences of families living in rural areas in relation to childcare. The following areas of concern emerged¹¹⁹:

- Within both individual settlements and within wards, parents lacked a choice of services, there were instances of no access to any facilities or if access no available places. This meant parents using facilities or childminders in the nearest village or in some cases towns further away;
- Childcare was generally not flexible enough as rural families must travel further to and from work and increased commuting time requires extended hours of childcare to allow for early drop off and/or late collection; and
- The rate of uptake of free pre-school places is 79% in rural areas of the Northern Board (as defined by the survey), while the availability is 95%. This may be due to accessibility problems and the fact that many places are part-time causing problems for working parents in collection of children and potentially transport to another childcare provider for the remainder of the day.

The report made recommendations for improving rural access to childcare and early years services including¹²⁰:

- A Campaign to increase the number of registered childminders in rural areas and improve the number of registered places by promoting the benefits of registration;
- Better access to transport addressed by better links between schools and childcare facilities with sharing of minibuses, taxis etc.; and
- Increased funding to sustain childcare in rural areas because of the additional costs for parents and the low numbers of children, by making funding available

¹¹⁷ Western Area Childcare Partnership, Memo to Committee for OFMDFM, Committee Inquiry into Child Poverty, paragraphs 6 and 9.

¹¹⁸ The Northern Childcare Partnership Report on Childcare Issues Affecting Families in Rural Areas (2007), page 22

¹¹⁹ The Northern Childcare Partnership Report on Childcare Issues Affecting Families in Rural Areas (2007), Conclusion, page 21

¹²⁰ The Northern Childcare Partnership Report on Childcare Issues Affecting Families in Rural Areas (2007), Recommendations, page 23

for social economy childcare provision and by recognising rurality when targeting childcare funding streams.

In June 2007 the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland set up a stakeholder (short-term advisory) group to look at the key issues relating to rural childcare provision. The aim of the group is to “*identify the main factors in rural areas that affect access to childcare and consider ways to improve this*”. The group will produce a report¹²¹ detailing current difficulties in childcare provision in rural areas and make recommendations to improve provision¹²².

9. DISCUSSION

It seems evident from the main childcare and early years strategies described in this paper that there is little focus of addressing the issue of informal care (extended family and friends), despite the fact that it makes up a substantial proportion of childcare used. It is not merely an issue of cost but also of trust of the home environment and the care providers and the flexibility of arrangements which can be made¹²³.

Current strategies also pay little attention to those parents who chose to stay at home to look after, particularly pre-school, children. Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) recommend support, in the form of home-based and group-based services for stay at home parents who chose to stay at home to look after pre-school children¹²⁴.

Indeed there is research that cautions against the current accepted approach to early years interventions, particularly those targeted at disadvantaged children. One such critique of Sure Start argues that the emphasis on parent education and home visits diverts attention from the inequalities of class and income and highlights ‘poor’ parenting and ‘un-stimulating’ homes as the root cause of compromised life prospects and that social ills can be solved “*through suitably targeted interventions from early childhood professionals*”¹²⁵.

The evaluation of three rural Mini Sure Start projects revealed that parents were often divided about whether they wanted more childcare services for their 0-3 year olds and when asked about preferred childcare options more than half the respondents said that friends and family would be their first choice and they were divided over whether they wanted to take up paid work at this stage of their children’s young lives. According to key workers, lone mothers were particularly reluctant to work when their children were very young as “*it was middle-class professional women who wanted to work because the*

¹²¹ The group has not yet reported

¹²² www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-dard/news-dard-june-2007

¹²³ Bryson, C. et. al. (2006) *Childcare and Early Years Provision in Wales: A study of Parents Use, Views and Experiences* (March 2006), Welsh Assembly Government, Department for Training and Education Information Document No: 006-06, Executive Summary, page 7

¹²⁴ CiNI Written Evidence to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister Inquiry into Child Poverty, Nov 2007, Section 6

¹²⁵ Willan, J (2007), Delivering Sure Start in rural communities, *Early Years*, 27(1): 19-31, page 22

*work available to them was more interesting and remunerative and made the juggling of time, transport, childcare and household management worthwhile financially*¹²⁶.

The Daycare Trust note that some issues require further research in the impact of childcare and early years education on outcomes for children. The Daycare Trust note that a *“considerable body of evidence has shown the substantial benefits of early years education and care for children...as disadvantaged children already lag behind their middle class contemporaries in terms of cognitive development at the age of three, the provision of high quality early years education is clearly one very important way to counter this”*¹²⁷. However, the Trust proposes that further research is needed on the effects of spending a few long days, rather than many short days in childcare and also on the outcomes for children under two to establish further data on the hours of childcare that are most appropriate. For young children the Trust believe that secure attachment to their mother (or primary caregiver) is *“particularly important and may reduce any negative impacts of childcare at an early age. Generous parental leave and pay policies are therefore very important to avoid the negative outcomes associated with non-parental care in the first months of a child’s life”*¹²⁸.

Some academic commentators¹²⁹ go further and propose that current employment and social policies are lacking a proper consideration of gender and equality principles and are based upon a gender template which assumes women, especially mothers, should be natural carers. They propose that policies that seek to promote women’s entry to paid employment only do so by enhanced access to childcare and recreate the gender template by promoting low paid jobs for women as paid carers who are predominantly providing care services for other women.

In assessing the success or other wise of childcare and early years strategies the complexity of decisions regarding childcare should not be under estimated. Research has shown that mothers do not see childcare in terms their child’s cognitive development or their own employment but that they make childcare decisions according to their social grouping and often decide that close relatives provide the most secure environment for pre-school children. The research suggests that childcare choices result from complex moral and emotional processes in assessing both children’s needs and the mother’s own¹³⁰. As stated earlier in the paper, the Daycare Trust propose that it is difficult to *“disentangle the complex interplay of factors that shape parents’ childcare decisions”* and believe that a *“more sophisticated research model should be developed to disentangle the effects of parental attitudes towards childcare services from barriers that might restrict childcare choices”*¹³¹.

126 Willan, J (2007), Delivering Sure Start in rural communities, *Early Years*, 27(1): 19-31, page 26

127 Childcare Nation? (2007), The Daycare Trust, Section: *How has the quality of childcare changed?*

128 Childcare Nation? (2007), The Daycare Trust, Section: *How has the quality of childcare changed?*

129 McKie, L et.al. (2001), *Gender, caring and employment in Britain*, *Journal of Social Policy*, 30(2): 233-258

130 Willan, J (2007), Delivering Sure Start in rural communities, *Early Years*, 27(1): 19-31, page 23

131 Childcare Nation? (2007), The Daycare Trust, Section: *Recommendations from Daycare Trust*

10. APPENDIX 1 CHILDCARE STATISTICS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Source: Key Indicators of Personal Social Services for Northern Ireland 2006, DHSSPS

TABLE 1 DAY CARE PROVISION FOR CHILDREN AGED UNDER 5 AT 31ST MARCH, BY TYPE OF PROVISION (2003-2005 – PER 1000-POPULATION AGED UNDER 5 AT 31ST MARCH)

	Registered Childminders			Places in Day Nurseries			Places in Playgroups		
	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005
Board/Trust									
Eastern	156.3	126.2	101.6	88.1	93.0	100.3	136.7	132.1	123.5
N&WBelfast	212.5	109.3	54.8	66.7	68.2	73.0	141.2	139.1	128.6
S&E Belfast	190.4	186.2	159.1	156.2	173.3	178.7	131.4	124.4	115.2
Ulster Comm. & Hosp.	111.4	105.8	83.8	68.5	68.6	86.6	155.8	149.6	144.0
Down Lisburn	112.7	100.0	99.7	57.6	57.5	60.6	124.2	120.9	112.0
Northern	115.6	120.8	126.1	68.9	72.8	86.9	126.2	118.9	116.4
Causeway	120.2	139.1	124.2	38.9	39.6	64.1	125.3	125.3	125.3
Homefirst	114.2	115.1	126.7	78.2	83.0	93.9	126.4	116.9	113.6
Southern	40.4	43.7	45.8	54.3	61.6	64.6	103.6	105.6	107.0
Armagh & Dungannon	47.2	55.8	63.1	33.7	35.1	42.6	126.9	126.1	123.9
Craigavon & Banbridge	65.7	66.9	66.3	78.8	98.5	92.0	84.1	88.5	90.3
Newry & Mourne	0.0	0.0	0.0	45.9	43.8	53.9	102.6	104.7	109.6
Western	54.5	56.2	56.2	39.7	46.4	45.9	134.8	131.9	129.4
Foyle	50.7	52.7	50.6	33.2	36.9	39.4	117.7	114.5	113.7
Sperrin Lakeland	60.4	61.5	64.6	49.4	60.8	55.8	160.8	158.3	153.3
NI	104.3	95.5	88.3	67.7	73.1	79.8	127.1	123.5	119.5

(Source: Table and information below extracted from Table 6.2 in Key Indicators of Personal Social Services for Northern Ireland 2006, DHSSPS)

At March 31st 2005, Playgroups were the main form of independent day care provision for children under 5, providing 13,770 places (119.5 places per 1000-population aged under 5); registered childminders provided 10,174 places (88.3 places per 1000 population aged under 5). Day nurseries provided the least number of places 9,197 for children under 5 (79.8 places per 1000-population aged under 5).

The number of independent care places provided by *registered childminders* for children aged under 5 varied significantly across Trusts, from 159.1 places per 1000-population aged under 5 in South and East Belfast to 0.0 places in Newry and Mourne.

Since 2003, the number of independent care places provided by registered childminders per 1000-population aged under 5 in N&W Belfast has fallen by 74%.

Day nurseries provided the least number of places (9,197) for children aged under 5, with 79.8 places per 1000-population aged under 5. Across Trusts this ranged from 178.7 places per 1000-population aged under 5 in S&E Belfast to 39.4 in Foyle.

TABLE 2 DAY CARE PROVISION FOR CHILDREN AGED UNDER 12 AT 31ST MARCH, BY TYPE OF PROVISION (2003-2005 – PER 1000-POPULATION)

	Places with registered childminders per 1000-population aged under 12 at 31 st March			Places in out of school clubs per 1000-population aged 5-11 at 31 st March		
	2003	2004	2005	2003	2004	2005
Board/Trust						
Eastern	111.2	90.2	73.4	31.2	34.0	36.9
N&WBelfast	133.4	82.3	39.3	58.3	61.8	57.9
S&E Belfast	111.5	95.2	81.1	31.0	42.2	45.5
Ulster Comm. & Hosp.	118.1	109.6	97.7	16.5	13.8	14.7
Down Lisburn	87.5	78.6	77.5	18.0	17.5	27.0
Northern	77.8	85.5	85.6	16.3	21.0	31.3
Causeway	94.9	114.3	102.0	14.2	34.8	49.9
Homefirst	72.7	76.9	80.7	16.9	17.0	25.8
Southern	29.2	32.4	35.5	28.3	36.3	39.7
Armagh & Dungannon	34.2	41.6	47.6	32.2	43.8	51.3
Craigavon & Banbridge	42.6	44.6	46.4	32.8	43.8	51.3
Newry & Mourne	6.4	6.2	7.7	18.1	26.1	26.1
Western	35.2	36.6	36.4	32.8	37.1	36.0
Foyle	31.4	32.1	30.4	29.2	28.0	29.1
Sperrin Lakeland	40.9	43.4	45.5	38.1	50.6	46.3
NI	72.9	67.9	62.2	27.2	31.8	35.9

(Source: Table and information below extracted from Table 6.3 in Key Indicators of Personal Social Services for Northern Ireland 2006, DHSSPS)

Whilst some provision for children under 12 is made in day nurseries, the majority of day care places are provided by childminders and out of school clubs.

Registered childminders provided 18,065 places for children aged under 12 in NI at 31st March 2005, however across Trusts this ranged from 102.0 per 1000 of population under 12 in Causeway to 7.7 per 1000 in Newry and Mourne. Over the three years to 2005, childminding places per 1000-population aged under 12 fell from 72.9 to 62.2, across Trusts the largest decrease was from 133.4 (2003) to 39.3 (2005) in N&W Belfast.

Out of school clubs provided 6,288 places for children aged 5 -11 in NI at 31st March 2005. N&W Belfast had the highest number of such places (57.9 per 1000-population aged 5-11) and Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust had the lowest (14.7).

Funded Pre-School Education in Northern Ireland

Based on a Statistical Press Release from the Department of Education/NISRA (26 February 2008) there are currently 21,118 children in funded pre-school education:

- 13,953 in nursery schools or nursery classes in primary schools;
- 630 in reception classes/groups; and
- 6,535 in funded places in voluntary and private pre-school education centres.

In 2002/03 there were 21,076 children in funded pre-school education.

11. APPENDIX 2 CHILDCARE STATISTICS FOR ENGLAND

Figures and 'Key' Information Extracted from Ofsted, Quarterly Childcare Statistics as at 31 December 2007, Age Group 0-7. Published 25 January 2007

TABLE 3 REGISTERED CHILDCARE PLACES AT 31 DECEMBER 2007 – ENGLAND

	Total Places	Childminder Places	Full Day Care Places	Sessional Day Care Places	Out of School Day Care Places	Creche Day Care Places
ENGLAND	1,549,000	302,300	614,600	214,300	369,900	47,800
East of England	168,700	35,100	58,200	35,500	34,100	5,700
East Midlands	133,100	27,300	54,500	21,900	25,300	4,100
Inner London	86,500	12,300	37,600	5,800	26,600	4,200
Outer London	131,00	29,400	44,300	19,400	34,500	3,600
North East	68,400	15,900	27,300	5,500	15,100	4,600
North West England	225,200	36,600	93,000	21,800	67,200	12,615
South East England	282,900	58,100	106,700	47,100	64,300	6,700
West Midlands	164,800	28,100	71,700	17,300	43,600	4,100
Yorkshire and the Humber	135,100	30,300	58,500	14,500	27,900	3,900

Key:

Childminder – Registered to look after 1 or more children under the age of 8 to whom they are not related on domestic premises for reward and for a total of more that 2 hours in any day.

Full Day Care – Facilities that provide day care for children under 8 for a continuous period of 4 hours or more in any day in premises which are not domestic premises. Includes day nurseries, children's centres and some family centres.

Sessional Day Care – Facilities that provide day care for children under 8 for a session which is less than a continuous period of 4 hours in any day in premises which are not domestic premises. Where two sessions are offered in any one day, individual children must not attend more than five sessions in one week.

Out of School Care – Facilities that provide day care for children under 8 which operate during one or more of the following periods: before school, after school or during the school holidays. The total care provided is for more than two hours in any 1 day and for more than 5 days a year. Includes Open Access Schemes.

Crèches – Facilities that provide occasional care for children under 8 and are provided on particular premises on more than 5 days a year. They must be registered where they run for more than 2 hours a day; even when individual children attend for shorter periods.

TABLE 4 NUMBERS OF 3 AND 4 YEAR OLDS BENEFITING FROM SOME FREE EARLY EDUCATION AND THE PART TIME EQUIVALENT NUMBER OF FREE EARLY EDUCATION PLACES FILLED BY 3 AND 4 YEAR OLDS BY TYPE OF PROVIDER¹³²

Figures extracted from Tables 1 and 4 of *Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England: January 2007*, Department for Education and Skills, National Statistics, First Release, SFR 19/2007, 31 May 2007, Theme Education and Training¹³³.

Numbers of 3 and 4 year olds benefiting from some free early education			
Providers	2003	2005	2007
ALL PROVIDERS			
No. of children benefiting	1,100,900	1,103,400	1,126,100
Percentage of population ¹³⁴	94	98	98
Private and Voluntary			
No. of children benefiting	365,100	396,700	420,700
Percentage of population	31	35	37
Independent Schools			
No. of children benefiting	40,500	39,200	37,900
Percentage of population	3	3	3
Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes in Primary Schools			
No. of children benefiting	331,300	312,300	318,900
Percentage of population	28	28	28
Infant Classes in Primary Schools			
No. of children benefiting	359,500	351,500	344,900
Percentage of population	31	31	30
Special Schools			
No. of children benefiting	4,400	3,700	3,700

¹³² Parents do not necessarily take up all of their free entitlement, therefore the number of children benefiting from some free early education can exceed the number of part-time funded places

¹³³ www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/

¹³⁴ Number of three and four years olds expressed as a percentage of the three and four year old population

Part time equivalent number of free early education places for three and four year olds			
ALL PROVIDERS			
Part time equivalent funded places filled	1,026,600	1,028,000	1,054,800
Part time equivalent funded places filled per 100 children in the population	88	92	92
Maintained Nursery and Primary Schools			
Part time equivalent funded places filled	690,900	663,800	63,800
Part time equivalent funded places filled per 100 children in the population	59	59	58
Other Maintained Providers and Private, Voluntary and Independent Providers			
Part time equivalent funded places filled	335,700	364,200	391,000
Part time equivalent funded places filled per 100 children in the population	29	33	34

12. APPENDIX 3 CHILDCARE STATISTICS FOR SCOTLAND

TABLE 5 TOTAL NUMBER OF CENTRES AND CHILDMINDERS BY MAIN SERVICE TYPE, MANAGEMENT SECTOR, AREA DEPRIVATION AND RURALITY, JANUARY 2007

Figures extracted from, The Scottish Government Statistics, pre-school and childcare statistics 2007, Table 1: Total Number of Centres and Childminders by main service type, management sector, area deprivation and rurality, January 2007¹³⁵.

Main Service	Childminder	Nursery	Playgroup	Out of School Club	Creche	Children/family centre	Sitter service	Holiday play scheme	No single main service	Unknown	Centre closed or not operating	Total
Number and (percentage of all services)												
Scotland Total	6,020 (57.5)	2,412 (23.0)	574 (5.5)	774 (7.4)	168 (1.6)	132 (1.3)	20 (0.2)	88 (0.8)	86 (0.8)	61 (0.6)	142 (1.4)	10,477 (100.0)
Management Sector												
Public	0	1,501 (80.6)	16 (0.9)	129 (6.9)	46 (2.5)	75 (4.0)	0	20 (1.1)	19 (1.0)	18 (1.0)	39 (2.1)	1,863 (100.0)
Private	6,020 (84.9)	658 (9.3)	55 (0.8)	190 (2.7)	51 (0.7)	11 (0.2)	11 (0.2)	15 (0.2)	26 (0.4)	18 (0.3)	33 (0.5)	7,088 (100.0)
Voluntary	0	237 (16.3)	502 (34.5)	431 (29.6)	67 (4.6)	39 (2.7)	9 (0.6)	51 (3.5)	37 (2.5)	23 (1.6)	59 (4.1)	1,455 (100.0)
Unknown	0	16 (22.5)	1 (1.4)	24 (33.8)	4 (5.6)	7 (9.9)	0	2 (2.8)	4 (5.6)	2 (2.8)	11 (15.5)	71 (100.0)
Area Deprivation												
Most Deprived	1,050 (41.7)	773 (30.7)	81 (3.2)	261 (10.4)	86 (3.4)	90 (3.6)	8 (0.3)	35 (1.4)	37 (1.5)	30 (1.2)	64 (2.5)	2,515 (100.0)
Intermediate	2,170	937	226	258	45	24	5	29	30	17	52	3,793

¹³⁵ www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/09/2609451/10

	(57.2)	(24.7)	(6.0)	(6.8)	(1.2)	(0.6)	(0.1)	(0.8)	(0.8)	(0.4)	(1.4)	(100.0)
Least Deprived	2,800 (67.2)	702 (16.8)	267 (6.4)	255 (6.1)	37 (0.9)	18 (0.4)	7 (0.2)	24 (0.6)	19 (0.5)	14 (0.3)	26 (1.3)	4,169 (100.0)
Rurality												
Urban Areas	3,540 (55.9)	1,497 (23.6)	246 (3.9)	543 (8.6)	127 (2.0)	110 (1.7)	15 (0.2)	60 (0.9)	63 (1.0)	44 (0.7)	93 (1.5)	6,338 (100.0)
Small Towns	1,080 (65.7)	284 (17.3)	104 (6.3)	88 (5.3)	19 (1.2)	16 (1.0)	0	18 (1.1)	10 (0.6)	10 (0.6)	16 (1.0)	1,645 (100.0)
Rural Areas	1,400 (56.3)	625 (25.1)	224 (9.0)	143 (5.7)	22 (0.9)	6 (0.2)	4 (0.2)	10 (0.4)	13 (0.5)	7 (0.3)	33 (1.3)	2,487 (100.0)
Unknown	0	6 (85.7)	0	0	0	0	1 (14.3)	0	0	0	0	7

13. APPENDIX 4 CHILDCARE STATISTICS FOR WALES

TABLE 6 CHILDREN'S DAY CARE SETTINGS AND PLACES AT 31/03/07FIGURES EXTRACTED FROM *CHILDREN'S DAY CARE SETTINGS AND PLACES AT 31/03/07 CARE SERVICES IN WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2006-2007*,PAGE 32

	Childminders		Crèches		Full day Care		Open Access		Out of School		Sessional Day Care		Total	
	Settings	Places	Settings	Places	Settings	Places	Settings	Places	Settings	Places	Settings	Places	Settings	Places
Total	2405	11,958	67	1197	495	19,323	65	2987	554	18,100	806	17,116	4392	70,681
North West	252	1316	6	108	57	2176	29	1093	56	1461	158	3141	558	9295
North East	287	1461	8	198	87	3926	3	165	135	4459	155	3549	675	13,758
Mid	167	709	1	12	36	984	0	0	40	1050	86	1518	330	4273
South East	513	2031	17	311	89	3605	2	88	76	2949	103	2340	800	11,324
Cardiff	324	1753	16	335	55	2325	7	495	52	2378	52	1295	506	8581
Vale & Valleys	362	1941	11	128	49	1854	17	803	56	1569	74	1694	569	7989
South West	328	1795	4	44	79	2999	7	343	57	1914	70	1431	545	8526
West	172	952	4	61	43	1454	0	0	82	2320	108	2148	409	6935