



28th BIC Summit, Cardiff, 25th November 2016

EARLY YEARS: INVESTING FOR THE FUTURE

The Council is invited to:

Discuss and note the following paper prepared by Early Years work sector officials including the following key points:

- i. Member Administrations continue to acknowledge the critical importance of the Early Years in creating strong foundations for children and families to thrive, and recognise the importance of investment in the Early Years in terms of generating better value for money in the public sector by moving from curative to preventative models of service delivery and supporting social mobility;**
- ii. Welcome the progress made by Member Administrations in taking forward the Early Years agenda since the 2012 Summit;**
- iii. Member Administrations face key challenges and opportunities ahead. Member Administrations agree the forward Work Plan for the Early Years work sector and its focus on the following priorities:**
 - The Workforce;**
 - Supporting Families;**
 - Parenting; and**
 - Quality Assurance and Assessment of Developmental Progress**
- iv. Member Administrations recognise the significant benefits gained from their collective participation in the Early Years work sector and welcome the opportunity for officials to share policy developments, knowledge, challenges, best practice and research relating to the early years; and**
- v. Member Administrations agree that this paper be published on the Council's website and made available for interested stakeholders.**

**BIC Early Years Work Sector
25 November 2016**

INTRODUCTION

Why are the Early Years so important?

There is widespread agreement that the early years are critical to children's outcomes and later life chances. Evidence from a range of disciplines (including neurodevelopment, developmental psychology and genetics) has pointed to the particular importance of the first few years of life for future mental, social and emotional developmentⁱ. Events and experiences in the first months and years of a child's life can set a foundation for lifelong well-being or leave a legacy of poor physical and emotional health and developmental challenges. There is a growing body of research and evidence which increases our understanding of the wider influences on a child's development, and the impact of early advantages and disadvantages. Children from families who are not experiencing barriers to learning such as disadvantage show marked advantages in both knowledge and skills that are evident long before starting school. This view is supported by the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE)ⁱⁱ study and the findings of the Marmot review of Health Inequalitiesⁱⁱⁱ, which point to the impact of the early years on children's educational attainment and health outcomes. In addition, the longitudinal study 'Growing Up in Scotland' is providing valuable insights into how outcomes for children in the early years can be improved^{iv}. What happens to children in the early years can have physiological effects which are lasting.

Evidence shows that there are a number of factors which have a strong impact on children's early development. These are:

- family socio-economic status;
- parenting;
- home learning environment;
- quality of pre-school education; and
- other factors (such as child health, nutrition, parental mental health etc).

These factors influence the development of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Cognitive development in the early years is of great importance to later outcomes, and results from cognitive assessments from as early as ages 3 and 5 has been found to be related to later school achievement, academic attainment and occupational outcomes^v, as well as adult health^{vi}. Poor cognitive performance early in life has also been found to be related to higher chances of unemployment, low qualifications and low income; this relationship is seen even when other factors are accounted for^{vii}.

Why invest in the early years?

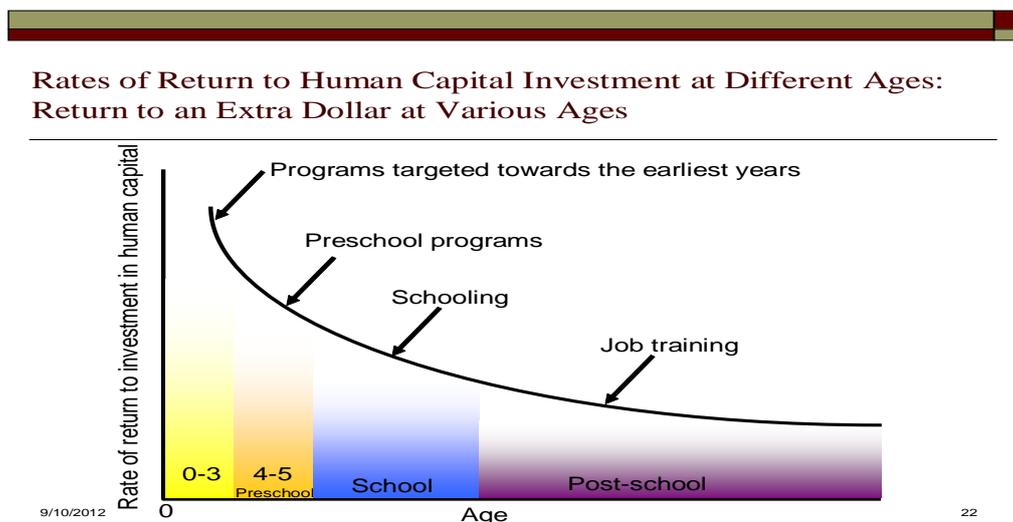
The most effective interventions often take place before they are needed. Preventative approaches, which tackle problems before they develop, can minimise costs in the long run and provide enhanced outcomes for individuals, taxpayers and society as a whole. For example, in Scotland, the Christie Commission has estimated that 40 per cent of public spending is as a result of the failure to intervene early enough to prevent dysfunction.^{viii}

There are undoubtedly lifetime benefits to the individual from preventative interventions during childhood, including improved health and wellbeing, social and emotional development and improved earnings. Benefits will also be realised by families, peers, co-workers and by society as a whole. These benefits are more marked for children and families in disadvantaged circumstances. As set out above, there is a growing body of evidence that supports the positive role of prevention and early intervention in early years in improving the development of children and young people and their prospects in adulthood.

The evidence indicates that such interventions improve educational attainment and achievement, and reduce the costs of later remedial actions (e.g. through the criminal justice system). It also suggests that interventions targeted early in life are potentially much more cost-effective than interventions targeted at adolescents or adults^{ix}. The evidence suggests three linked propositions:

- Intervention in early years produces benefits for children, young people and their families, the communities in which they are located and society as a whole – both in the short-term and also over the longer term through, for example, increased educational attainment and achievement, and reductions in crime.
- The benefits of early years interventions are more marked for children and families that are deprived and/or living in more deprived areas.
- Early years interventions achieve these benefits at costs that are relatively modest compared with more expensive later remedial interventions such as those provided as part of 'out of home care', child protection services and the criminal justice system.

In the United States Heckman demonstrated that investment in early childhood increased the return at the next stage as shown in the diagram below. He suggests that early interventions promote economic efficiency and reduce lifetime inequality. Whereas interventions for disadvantaged adolescents are more difficult to justify on the grounds of economic efficiency as they generally have lower rates of return.



The study, 'The Financial Impact of Early Years Interventions in Scotland'^x, includes financial modeling of short term savings from investing in early years / early interventions from pre-birth to aged five. This suggests that there are potential net savings of up to £37.4k per annum per child in the most severe cases and of approximately £5.1k per annum for a child with moderate difficulties in the first five years of life. In the longer term, a failure to effectively intervene to address the complex needs of an individual in early childhood can result in a nine fold increase in direct public costs, when compared with an individual who accesses only universal services. Whilst evidence increasingly points to investment in early childhood as one of the most cost-effective ways to achieve sustainable development, early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life and as such, it should be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right as well as for the significant foundation it provides for future and lifelong learning^{xi}.

PROGRESS SINCE 2012 SUMMIT

Member Administrations' approaches to the early years are built on similar principles to those outlined above. Since the last Early Years Summit in 2012, the agenda has become even more of a priority area for Member Administrations. The work sector meetings continue to be a useful forum for sharing policy, research, evidence, expertise and practice.

Although at different stages of development, Member Administrations are all seeking to improve outcomes for children and families. All Member Administrations are investing in a range of services and programmes that impact positively on the early years of children's lives and on the lives of their families. Activities such as family, relationship and parenting support, early education and care, workforce development, and support for high quality play experiences for children are features of this investment. A short overview of the progress made by each Member Administration since the 2012 Summit is set out below.

Guernsey Government

Education in Guernsey is working in partnership with Health and Social Care and third party charities to develop and continue to improve the quality of provision and services for the children under five in the Bailiwick. As part of this development, the States Early Years Team has been established, with colleagues from Health and Social Care and Education working together as one team. The Key Early Years working streams are as follows

- Early Years Quality Standards Framework (EYQSF) - this document outlines the standards all preschools and day nurseries are registered and inspected against. The EYQSF is built on our principles of:
 - the role of effective leadership in securing and improving quality;
 - a continuous cycle of self-evaluation, improvement and reflection, enabling and empowering practitioners to see themselves as learners, seeking improvements in their practice, reducing inequality and having the highest aspirations for all children;
 - a system of support and challenge which is agreed and transparent;
 - strong partnerships with Education, HSSD, other Early Years Providers, Schools, Professionals and the local Parish community.
- 1001 days is being coordinated by Every Child Our Future charity (ECOF) working in partnership with services to deliver a variety of programmes targeting our most vulnerable families, by using progressive universalism to target the most vulnerable families whilst offering a universal entitlement to ensure equality and inclusion.
- 15 hours Free Preschool Education is being introduced for the first time in the Bailiwick in January 2017 for all 3 and 4 year olds for one year before they start school. This includes a threshold for entitlement and is being trialled for two terms. The new Committee for Education, Sport and Culture has proposed that the offer will be revised for September 2017, which will go to the States of Deliberation later this year for debate.
- Bailiwick Children's and Young People's Plan - as of 2015, children and young people aged under 18 make up approximately 20% of our population. For the large majority of children and young people, Guernsey and Alderney are fantastic places to grow up. Most children and young people achieve well academically; they live in loving families and have good networks of friends; they benefit from many aspects of Island life, including our exceptional physical environment. But this is not the story for all of Guernsey and Alderney's children and young people. We have created six key commitments setting out how we will add 'value' to children's lives:
 - *We will ensure that the voices of children and young people are at the heart of everything we do.*
 - *We will focus resources on early help and preventing problems getting worse for children, therefore reducing the numbers who then have high levels of need.*

- *We will tackle inequality of help and support, including the impact of low income and high level of need that disadvantage some of our children and young people and their families.*
- *We will get better at sharing information and working more closely in partnership with each other and with children and families.*
- *We will improve our data collection and IT systems so that we have an evidence base about the nature and level of need, and can use our resources wisely.*
- *We will improve communication to make the Plan more relevant - a living document – and resource it properly.*
- The New Bailiwick Curriculum Whilst our statutory duty is from 5-16 years old we are ensuring the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum show skills progression and transitions effectively from Reception through into year one. The Early Learning Goals will directly link to the skills progression of this curriculum into the next phase. We are working to implement this in September 2017.

States of Jersey

Key developments since 2012 include:

- Jersey has invested in a pilot Child and Family centre funded through a tripartite arrangement between Health, Education and a local charity, Family Nursing and Homecare. This pilot will be evaluated to support the establishment of an operational model to support the co-ordination of more locally accessed integrated services for families in those areas of demographic priority need.
- In 2014, the Child and Family Team introduced the Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-visiting (MECSH) scheme in Jersey, this is delivered as part of a comprehensive, integrated approach to services for young children and their families. All our Health Visitors are now working with families on the MESCH programme and our aim is to recruit between 100 and 150 families onto the programme by the end of 2016.
- An Early Years taskforce was created in 2015 following the support in Jersey of the 1001 Critical Days political manifesto to bring cohesion and collaboration between all government departments and supporting organisations across all services for children 0-5yrs .Our Early Years and Childhood Partnership will continue when the taskforce finishes it work at the end of the year.
- Early Childhood Development Programme - Investment made by a philanthropist with the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) as the implementation partners: to ensure we have continued investment in the Making it REAL programme to achieve sustainability through training “REAL” champions on island. NCB have facilitated Outcomes Based Accountability workshops to shape how Jersey plans strategically to deliver our Early Years Strategy. Knowledge Makes Change bulletins will be introduced to empower every stakeholder through sharing key information from within our unique jurisdiction and from national and international perspectives.
- Early Education Funding - Jersey has a universal offer of 20 hours of nursery education funding available to parents to access a funded place in either a private day nursery, pre-school or school based nursery class. Jersey plans to introduce Jersey Premium from January 2017, (a version of the English pupil premium). All children living in Income Support claiming households will be eligible for this additional funding.
- Regulation and Standards - the registration and regulation of childcare for children 0-12 under the Day Care of Children (Jersey) Law 2002 is to be reviewed as part of an options appraisal project to ensure we are able to deliver a system of regulation that is robust, standardised and independent. Jersey is in the process of implementing a new School Review Framework that will be applicable to all schools, including those with an Early Years Foundation stage. This will be a peer review model, using external lead

reviewers in partnership with on island head teachers and professional partners. The Education Department is now extending Nursery class provision to all Primary Schools.

- Early Years Inclusion – additional investment made to support the inclusion of pre-school children across both the States and PVI sector through the appointment of Area SENCos, Portage workers and through additional targeted funding.

Irish Government

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has lead responsibility for early years care and education. It is committed to ensuring access to high quality and affordable early childhood care and education in Ireland. Recent demonstration of this commitment can be seen through two successive budgets, Budget 2016 and Budget 2017 both provided a 35% increase in funding (a 70% increase in total) to early years. For the first time, total early years spending in Ireland (including spending on infant classes in primary schools as per OECD definition) will now exceed €1 billion per year.

- The Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE or the free pre-school scheme): The introduction of the universal Early Childhood Care and Education scheme in 2010 marked a major milestone for early years in Ireland. ECCE has had 96% uptake levels to date. From September 2016, this is available to all children from age three until they start in primary school. Whilst children traditionally benefited from 38 weeks of the scheme, this has now increased to 61 weeks on average.
- The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the ECCE programme. Its goal is to empower service providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that every eligible child can fully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early years care and education. AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs of the child and the service provider. €35m per annum has been invested in the programme
- Early Years Strategy - The Department is finalising Ireland's first ever Early Years Strategy which will represent a whole of Government approach to all areas that impact a child's development during the first six years of his or her life. The Early Years Strategy builds on the 'Better Outcomes Brighter Futures' Report, an overarching national policy framework for children and young people in Ireland, published in 2014.
- Affordable Childcare Scheme - A major policy priority in 2017 is the development of a new Single Affordable Childcare Scheme. This will replace existing childcare subsidisation schemes for targeted / low-income groups (excluding ECCE) with a single, streamlined scheme from September 2017. It represents a major step in making childcare more affordable, and will enable both universal and targeted subsidies for parents towards their childcare costs. 79,000 children will benefit from the scheme when it is introduced in September 2017.
- Targeting those most in need - parents will qualify for a targeted subsidy based on their net income. Subsidies will be available for children aged from 6 months up to 15 years and will meet families' full-time childcare needs, including outside of school hours and during school holiday time. The highest levels of subsidy will be provided to those on the lowest incomes, approx. €8,000 a year based on the maximum of 40-hours childcare a week. This will help families to overcome disadvantage and contribute to a reduction in child poverty.
- The universal measure will apply for parents of children aged 6 months to 3 years. From September 2017, a universal subsidy of up to €80 per month will be provided towards childcare costs. This equates to over €900 per annum for parents working full time and will be paid pro-rata. This will be payable to childcare services registered with Tusla (The Child and Family Agency) and will also include a small number of child-minders.

- Other Quality Initiatives - funding continues to be provided for quality initiatives in the early years sector. These include funding for statutory and education-focused inspections, continued support for the up-skilling of staff in the sector, the further roll-out of the early education quality frameworks (Síolta and Aistear) and an Early Years specialist or mentoring service to provide support to providers to help them to improve quality in their services.

Isle of Man Government

Key early years developments in the Isle of Man over the last three years include:

- Universal Pre School Funding - in July 2016 Tynwald approved a further rise in the standard pre-school credit. All children can now attend funded sessions for approximately 10 hours per week throughout their pre-school year. There has also been an increase in the higher rate of credit, applicable to families in receipt of Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Employed Person's Allowance or Income Support, which on average now provides funded access for 12.5 hours of pre-school per week.
- Combined Inspection of Child Daycare Centres - The Department of Education and Children and the Department of Health and Social Care are continuing to work towards developing and implementing a quality assurance framework, which will lead to the Combined Inspection of Child Daycare Centres. As part of the Quality Assurance process pre-school settings will also have access to advisory support in order to further develop and improve the quality of their provision. Draft Standards for Forest Schools have been developed and are due to be published in 2017.
- Play - Department of Education and Children and a Third Sector Provider have worked in partnership to provide challenge and support for practitioners through the provision of Play bin, Forest School and Beach School training. Schools and Early Years Settings have also been supported in developing challenging outdoor play opportunities and provision within their immediate and wider local contexts. The next focus is to develop a Play Policy drawing on much of the good practice developed in Wales and Scotland
- Cross-island links through BIC - as a result of links made through the BIC Early Years work stream, members of the Isle of Man Early Years Advisory Team have run training for the States of Guernsey Education Department. We are in the process of developing a joint initiative for Foundation Stage Moderation across the two islands.
- Early Help and Support (Children with Additional Needs) is a service delivery approach to assessing, making plans for, and reviewing outcomes of services provided to Children with Additional Needs. The intention of the service is to promote: One Child, One Team, One Plan: Seamless Support for Children. Integrated multi-agency and multi-professional teams of staff work alongside parents, children and young people to provide early help and prevention services. A lead professional and Child with Additional Need Co-ordinator (CWAN) take responsibility for co-ordinating this multi –agency strategic approach, providing needs-based help and support within agreed timescales. This is now firmly established within statutory school based settings and there are plans to extend this into the nursery sector.

Northern Ireland Executive

The Department of Education's Framework for Early Years Education and Learning 'Learning to Learn', was published in October 2013. It offers a framework for enhanced coordination and collaboration across departments and agencies. The overall policy aim for early years education and learning is that 'All children have equal opportunities to achieve their potential through high quality early years education and learning experiences'. The associated actions are aimed at ensuring that every child can access high quality early

learning experiences that equip them to develop improved cognitive, social and emotional skills and which lay important foundations for future learning and development.

Enabling early years education policy, legislation and funding supports a range of universal and targeted services which help children achieve, develop and thrive. The key early years programmes over recent years include:

- The Pre-School Education Programme is a universally available service aiming to provide a non-compulsory pre-school place in the immediate pre-school year (3-4 year olds) for every child whose parents want it. Pre-school education is available in statutory (nursery schools and units), voluntary and private settings; all funded settings must adhere to the same 'Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education' and are inspected to the same educational standards by the Education and Training Inspectorate. Approximately 92% of target age children apply for a pre-school place each year, and at least 99.8% of children (almost 24,000 in 2015/16) whose parents stayed with the admissions process to the end in each of the last five years were offered a place in a pre-school setting of their parents' preference.
- Sure Start: 39 Sure Start projects provide targeted services to over 33,000 children aged 0-4 and their families within at least the top 20% most disadvantaged wards with expansion of services to the 25% most disadvantaged areas almost complete. The overarching aim of Sure Start is to work with parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional development of pre-school children, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to ensure they can flourish at home and when they get to school.
- The Pathway Fund provides targeted support to facilitate quality provision targeted at children up to the age of four, in areas of social disadvantage, with additional needs and at risk of harm.
- The Toybox project provides targeted support to Traveller children and their parents before, during and after pre-school. It works to address parental attitudes towards education to help them understand the importance and value of supporting their children's education.
- Getting Ready to Learn (GRtL) forms part of the Early Intervention Transformation Programme a NI Executive / Atlantic Philanthropies Delivering Social Change Signature Programme. GRtL is a universally available programme focused on improving outcomes for children in pre-school by engaging and empowering parents to help them create and sustain positive home learning environments.
- The Executive's Childcare Strategy is being delivered on a phased basis. The first phase was launched in September 2013 and included 15 Key First Actions intended to address the most pressing regional childcare needs identified through survey research and an initial public consultation exercise. Work to develop the full Childcare Strategy began in 2014 and has been taken forward on a co-design basis involving regular engagement with the main childcare stakeholders. The Department of Education now leads on the NI Executive's Childcare Strategy. The Minister of Education aims to bring forward the final version of the Childcare Strategy to his Executive colleagues in the coming months.
- The Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme is the principal initiative undertaken as part of the first phase of the Childcare Strategy. To date, it has supported around 3,000 low cost childcare places benefiting, in particular, low income families and rural communities.
- The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, which received royal assent on 9 December 2015, requires departments and statutory bodies to co-operate with one another and with other children's services providers to improve the well-being of children and young persons.

Scottish Government

The Scottish Government wants Scotland to be the best place to grow up. The Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach, through its holistic concept of wellbeing, clearly articulates what children and young people need to be happy, healthy and safe. Key early years programmes over recent years include:

- The Early Years Change Fund provided a partnership funding mechanism to support the prioritisation of prevention and early intervention by service providers.
- We have expanded free early learning and childcare for three and four-year-olds and eligible 2s – moving from 475 hours per year to 600 hours, and plan to expand even further to 1140 hours per year by 2020. We have also made free school meals available to all P1 to P3 pupils and eligible nursery children.
- As part of the transformative expansion to 1140 hours, we have recently launched a consultation on our policy blueprint. This includes articulation of our vision for a high quality and flexible early learning and childcare sector – integrated with out of school care - that is affordable and accessible for all.
- A new commitment to deliver a Baby Box offering essential items for a child's first weeks to the families of all newborn babies in Scotland, to promote the fair and equal start we want for every child regardless of circumstance
- We have focused on quality improvement through programmes such as: the Early Years Collaborative (a national multi-agency improvement programme); the Child Protection Improvement Programme (considering all elements of child protection); the Maternity and Children Quality Improvement Programme (part of the NHS Patient Safety Programme); and the Permanence and Care Excellence Programme, which aims to reduce drift and delay for looked after children in achieving permanence. We have also undertaken a fundamental independent review of maternity and neonatal services which is due to publish later this year.
- The Family Nurse Partnerships support to all mothers under the age of 19 has been embedded and expanded, it is now being extended to eligible mothers under 24. There has also been a national roll-out of the universal 27-30 month health review in April 2013 and we established a new Health Visitor pathway which, supported by the investment in 500 additional health visitors by 2018, will ensure that families can get tailored support when they need it most, in the very early days.
- We have empowered third sector organisations to deliver early intervention and prevention support children and families through a wide range of centrally funded interventions.
- The Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan has been updated and we launched a national awareness campaign and a Snapchat campaign with Young Scot.
- We have established a public service reform programme for children's services called Realigning Children's Services.
- We have launched and supported a new national youth justice strategy: Preventing Offending – Getting It Right for Children and Young People and supported successful advocacy pilots in Fife, Dundee, Highland and North Lanarkshire.
- We have published a National Play Strategy for Scotland and supporting Action Plan to reinforce our commitment to improving play experiences for all of our children and young people, including those with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

UK Government

Key early years developments in the UK Government over the last three years include:

- 15 free hours of early education for 20% of the most disadvantaged two year olds in England was introduced in September 2013. Eligibility was expanded in September 2014 to reach the 40% most disadvantaged families.
- In 2013 government introduced early years initial teacher training to provide specialist graduate level training in the 0-5 age range. Early Years Teachers have the specialist skills and knowledge they need to work with children from birth to age five and have an understanding of the educational continuum through Key Stages 1 and 2.
- In 2014 government introduced the level 3 early years educator qualification criteria which sets out the standards that students studying at level 3 must meet to operate effectively in a level 3 job role.
- 30 hours of free childcare for working parents - In 2016 the focus has been on driving forward policy development of 30 hours of free childcare for the children of eligible working parents in England. The Department for Education, DWP and HMRC have actively shared learning with BIC colleagues where appropriate and have benefited from discussion and exchange of ideas. In September 2016 eight early implementer local authorities began to deliver 30 hours to support learning prior to full roll out in September 2017. We will actively share learning with our BIC colleagues.
- We are also investing £50 million into the creation of new early years places in support of 30 hours delivery. £40 million of this will be awarded in December 2016 to successful Local Authorities that worked in partnership with early years providers to submit project bids demonstrating clear need for capital funding to deliver new 30 hours places. The other £10 million will be invested into the first ever early years loan finance fund designed to attract additional investment to the sector to support providers to expand sustainably. The Department will be making a first loss commitment in order to de-risk investment and attract a wide range of external investors into the early years market.
- We have consulted on introducing a national early years funding formula and reviewing the way that local authorities fund early years providers in their area. The consultation also considered how additional funding could be provided to support children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Workforce strategy – the UK Government committed to developing an early years workforce strategy in 2016. Currently we are on track to publish in early 2017. The focus of the strategy will be to set out what government can to remove barriers to attracting, retaining and developing staff to support a high quality workforce. We have shared learning on the journey of the strategy so far with BIC colleagues through discussion and exchange of information and will be leading a BIC Early Years work strand on workforce before the end of the year.

Welsh Government

The Welsh Government's approach for early years and childcare to date is set out in Building a Brighter Future (BBF) which was published in 2013. BBF focuses on the key factors of health and well-being; strong and positive families; good parental engagement; parental income; positive home learning environment; high quality early education and childcare settings; and support for speech and language development. The key early years programmes over recent years include:

- The Foundation Phase is the statutory curriculum for all 3 to 7 year olds in Wales in both maintained and non-maintained settings. It provides developmentally appropriate learning / curriculum for 3-7 year olds modelled on Scandinavian

approaches and encourages children to be creative, imaginative and makes learning more enjoyable and more effective.

- Flying Start is for families with children 4 years of age and under. It operates in some of the most disadvantaged communities across Wales. The core elements of the programme are designed to maximise positive outcomes for children and their families: free quality part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds; an enhanced health visiting service; access to parenting support; and support for the development of speech, language and communication. More than 37,200 children benefitted from Flying Start in 2014-15;
- The Families First programme since 2012 has promoted the development of multi-agency support for families, particularly those living in poverty. The programme emphasises early intervention and prevention and bringing organisations together to work with the whole family to help stop problems from escalating towards crisis. The Social Services and Wellbeing Act has a strong emphasis on early intervention and the Families First programme is used by Local Authorities to help meet their commitments under the Act.
- The Welsh Government promotes positive parenting and provides funding for family support programmes, which promote the use of positive parenting styles. Our universal campaign, '*Parenting. Give it Time*', offers tips and advice to parents on positive approaches to raising children through a website, Facebook, booklets and information sheets.
- The Healthy Child Wales Programme aims to reduce variability in the provision of a best practice universal health offer to all children in the first years of life. From October 2016 it will be a universal health programme for all families with 0 – 7 year old children and areas of intervention include screening, immunisation and monitoring and supporting child development.
- In terms of Play, the Welsh Government recognises the essential role of play in the growth in children's cognitive; physical, social and emotional development. Wales was the first nation to legislate for play; placing local authorities under a duty to conduct Play Sufficiency Assessments and to secure sufficient play opportunities.
- Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE) is a £13.5m programme, backed with £8.5m EU funds, that helps unemployed or economically inactive parents into work. PaCE aims to help improve employment prospects by providing access to training or job opportunities that might not otherwise have been possible due to childcare commitments. PaCE covers the cost of childcare while parents undertake training to gain the skills they need to get a job.

THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

Member Administrations face a number of common challenges and opportunities in raising the overall status of early years and progressing the agenda over the coming years. In particular, budgetary pressures and constraints across Member Administrations underline the need to draw on evidence in order to inform funding decisions. In addition, ensuring programmes and interventions are delivered in the most cost effective way whilst providing quality services to children, parents and families will be increasingly important. In recognition of the scale of the task, the work sector proposes focussing on a number of priorities and these are outlined below.

The Workforce

There is ample evidence that high quality early education and childcare services can improve children's development, learning and behaviour. In terms of quality, the workforce is the sector's biggest asset. A well qualified, professional workforce is by far the most important factor in delivering the quality of services that will give children the best possible start in life. As Andreas Schleicher of the OECD has said, "staff qualifications are one of the strongest predictors of the quality of early childhood education and care."

The important role of dedicated early years, childcare and play workers is often undervalued. There is a need to raise the status of these professions and work towards a sector which is highly regarded, well led, able to recruit high quality applicants and to retain a skilled workforce which is actively pursuing continuous professional learning. In doing so, we recognise the challenge of low pay within the sector, and the need to support and help providers run their businesses efficiently.

We want early years, childcare and play to be a career of choice, and for potential entrants to feel informed about the range of opportunities available to them within the sector and the wider children's workforce. We want to attract entrants with the appropriate knowledge, skills and behaviours to provide high-quality care, education and play opportunities for children.

We also need to ensure training and qualifications are both accessible and offer the best possible preparation for our workforce; helping them to fully understand how children learn and develop, enabling them to structure activities, time and environments to support all children to develop to their full potential. Finally, we want to support the existing workforce to gain the skills they need to progress in their careers.

Supporting Families

Strong, supportive families are crucial in building cohesive communities, promoting resilience in children and ensuring good social, physical and emotional health and well-being. They are a protective factor for children growing up in disadvantage and have a positive impact on children's development, learning and outcomes at school.

We know that economic, social and demographic changes can have a significant impact on families. Some key features include persistent child poverty and higher teenage pregnancy rates. Early help and intervention is therefore crucial if we want to support families to get out of a cycle of poor outcomes that repeats itself over and over through the generations. That means every service that families and young children come in to contact with being clear how they can best support child development in the broadest sense. Parents and children need to be placed at the heart of services while professionals are able to do what works and is best for their local community. Alongside this, there is a growing recognition of the importance of multi-agency working and taking a whole-family approach to improve outcomes for children.

Parenting

Parents play a central role in relation to outcomes for children. We know that positive parenting can help promote resilience, positive self-esteem and have a positive impact on a child's learning and overall outcomes. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states the right of children to be supported by their parents as they grow and develop, and places a responsibility on parents to ensure these rights are met:

“...the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.”

Government can play an important role in supporting and working with parents to reduce risks, strengthen parenting capacity and engagement, develop and build resilience and sustain positive change. There is a continued need to:

- Ensure all parents have easy access to clear, concise information on everything from pregnancy through early childhood to the teenage years and beyond;
- Offer informed, coordinated support to enable parents to develop their parenting skills, to manage behaviour more effectively and promote children's social skills, self-esteem and self-discipline;
- Increase parents' confidence and skills in providing a positive home learning environment and supporting their child with their learning;
- Provide targeted support to families facing additional pressures that impact on day-to-day parenting.

Parenting support should be responsive to parents need and should incorporate open access and universally available services, through to more structured and targeted support.

Quality Assurance

As already noted, high quality early years provision has a lasting positive impact on outcomes for children and narrows the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children. Furthermore, research shows that the perception of quality is a key factor for parents when choosing their childcare provider and that parents want well qualified and trained staff with their children (Nutbrown Review 2012^{xiii}). There is also clear evidence that disadvantaged children particularly benefit from high quality pre-school, especially those with less stimulating home learning environments or parents with poor or no qualifications.

Parents play a key role in accessing quality provision, as the primary users and purchasers of early years services on behalf of their children. Parents need to be able to choose high quality provision. As a result, they need to be able to make an informed choice and access information about what constitutes high quality and determine the quality of different settings. However, balancing the quality of delivery with the sufficiency of childcare places to support parents to work is a key challenge, and likely to continue with the extension of free childcare across Member Administrations.

Approaches to Quality Assurance across Member Administrations are built on the principles outlined above and although at various stages of development, colleagues agree that there is a need to focus on improving and sustaining quality across the range of early years settings. Work sector meetings have proved useful in supporting colleagues in developing this aspect of their work through sharing policy, procedures, QA systems and expertise.

CONCLUSION

The British-Irish Council plays a vital role in facilitating and fostering collaboration among Member Administrations and providing a forum where issues affecting our common interests can be brought to the fore. Member Administrations recognise the need for continued collaboration to attain maximum impact and will be delivering a programme of work in the following key areas over the next two years:

- The early years Workforce – including issues such as leadership, attracting high-quality new entrants, and raising skills and standards in the existing workforce;
- Supporting Families in the early years – to include multi-agency support for families, early intervention and prevention programmes;
- Parenting in the early years – to include support/advice to parents on positive approaches to raising children, the provision of information/advice for prospective parents and parents/carers of children and young people etc; and
- Quality Assurance and Assessment of Developmental Progress.

In addition to collaboration in these four specific areas, Member Administrations are also committed to sharing approaches and information in relation to other areas of early years policy development and implementation, such as their early childhood education and care policies and commitments. One specific example of cooperation and discussion would be the childcare policies and programmes being progressed over the coming years across a number of Member Administrations.

BIC Early Years Work Sector 25 November 2016

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^{iv} 'Tackling Inequalities in the Early Years: Key Messages from 10 Years of the Growing Up in Scotland Study', Scottish Government, 2015 (www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00486755.pdf)

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^{viii} 'Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services', The Christie Commission

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^{ix} 'The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children', Heckman and Masterov, 2007; 'Human Capital Policy', Carneiro and Heckman, 2003

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^{xii} 'Foundations for quality: the independent review of early education and childcare qualifications', The Nutbrown Review, 2012 (www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview)