

Early Years: Sharing policy development across the administrations of the BIC



Ministerial Foreword by the Chair of the Early Years Policy Work Sector

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 cognitive, social and emotional development.

In recognition of the importance of this area of work, it was agreed at the eleventh summit of the British-Irish Council in September 2008 that 'Early Years Policy' would be established as a work sector engaging officials from all the administrations. The work sector encompasses, amongst other things, early years education, childcare, health and support for parents.

'Early Years Policy' was a featured agenda item at the Cardiff Summits in November 2012 and again in November 2016. Embarking on its second work plan following the Summit in November 2016, the 'Early Years Policy' work sector has continued to share policy, research, evidence, expertise and good practice. It has done this through its work sector meetings along with a range of site visits and presentations from individuals and organisations.

At the 2016 summit, the group was tasked to focus on the following priorities:

- 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.

Since the 2016 Summit, officials have met on eight occasions, and there have been supplementary meetings between Administrations on specific issues. Member Administrations continue to recognise the significant benefits gained from their collective participation in the 'Early Years Policy' work sector. This report outlines some of the work undertaken over recent years as Member Administrations continue to invest 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.



Julie Morgan AM
Welsh Government
Deputy Minister for
Health and Social Care

Joint Working between BIC Member Administrations

Member Administrations are committed to sharing approaches and information in relation to areas of early years policy development and implementation, such as their early childhood education and care policies and commitments. There are numerous examples over recent years of where Administrations have worked together on specific issues.

Childcare Quality Assurance and Training

In particular, the Member Administrations representing the Crown Dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man have developed a strong partnership, sharing best practice, learning and development which has an impact not only on policy but immediate practice too.

They have developed external quality assurance processes around the end of reception moderation across the three Crown Dependencies that has had significant impact on the development and improvement of more effective systems and practices at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. In addition, reciprocal training sessions have been organised and delivered, drawing on the expertise and skills of Members and focussing on areas identified for development. For example, during 2019 an officer from Guernsey delivered training on 'Supporting Early Writing' to teachers in the Isle of Man. This was followed by an officer from the Isle of Man delivering some 'Beach Schools' training in Guernsey ahead of the June 2019 work sector meeting. As well as being a cost effective way of delivering training, this collaborative approach also supports the development of skills and knowledge which ultimately ensures quality teaching for children.

This collaboration is a source of support and challenge for Members and recognises that the relationships and partnerships facilitated by the British-Irish Council lead to significant benefits.



Childcare Offers

Another example of cooperation and discussion over the last few years has been in relation to childcare policies and programmes. In February 2019, officials from the Welsh, Irish and Scottish governments travelled to Belfast to share their experiences of developing and delivering their respective childcare offers with Northern Ireland colleagues.



"This meeting provided a useful opportunity for relevant Administrations to share approaches and information in relation to other areas of early education and childcare policy, specifically emerging early childhood education and care policies and commitments."

Cathy Galway (Northern Ireland Executive)

Baby Boxes and Bundles

The Irish Government's considerations on how to proceed with a 'Baby Box' was informed by the work of the British-Irish Council; in particular the success of the 'Baby Box' in Scotland.



First 5, the Irish Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028) was published in November 2018. The Strategy sets out a vision for early childhood and a roadmap for the coming decade. One of the actions in the Strategy is to pilot the introduction of 'baby boxes' and funding has been secured for this project.

'Baby Boxes' will contain a range of practical and useful items and information resources to support the transition to and early stages of parenthood. The project will pilot and test the design, items for inclusion, procurement, registration and distribution of 'Baby Boxes' in a selected geographic area. The pilot phase of the project will also include the development of accompanying information resources and training of staff involved in roll out.

A 'Book Bags' initiative will also be piloted and tested under First 5. The pilot will make 'Book Bags' available free of charge to families with young children at key points in a child's life (infancy, transition to pre-school, transition to primary school). This initiative will be linked to the 'Baby Boxes' pilot project, through coordinated management, and streamlined consultation and implementation.

Preparatory work on these multi-year projects will commence later this year. It is envisaged that the pilots will run in 2020. There will be a significant emphasis in the pilots on evaluating the impact it has, with a view to determining whether it is suitable for wider roll out.

In addition, the First Minister of Wales in his 2018 Labour Leadership manifesto pledged to pilot a 'Baby Bundle' scheme of essential items and guidance to help them and their parents in the first weeks and months of life, as a 'welcome to the world' gift from Welsh Government.

"In taking this commitment forward, learning from experiences in Scotland and Ireland will be important, including the approach taken to piloting, the selection and procurement of the items for inclusion, distribution and evaluation."

Owain Lloyd (Welsh Government)



Guernsey, June 2019 Transition & engaging parents / carers

The focus of the June 2019 work sector meeting in Guernsey was on transition and engaging parents / carers. Guernsey shared work from their 'Transition working party' who are developing an interactive map, accessed via Google and a QR Scanner, which promotes transition opportunities for pre-school children. They have developed a list of "23 things for your four year old to do before they go into their Reception class". Families will be challenged to complete one or more of the activities on the map before their children start school and share them with their new teachers.



Members were able to use the map and visit a number of places to experience the interaction. All venues are linked to local bus routes and do not cost any money to access.

"This is a really exciting initiative which will encourage families to take their children outdoors to learn more about where they live and provide fun and active learning opportunities. I can see the potential to develop this app further to include photos and activities for young children such as 'can you see, can you find...?' This could be particularly relevant for children with special needs to help them engage and prepare them for their visit."

Lorraine Brown (Northern Ireland Executive)

States Early Years Team

Promoting outdoor learning and Transition into Reception classes for pre-school children



To promote transition opportunities for our preschool children The Early Years Transition Working Party have developed a list of '23 things for your four year old to do before they go into Reception classes.'

We hope you can find time to complete one or more of the activities on the map.

If you click on the link below or use a QR scanner it will give you access to the map, including a list of 23 activities for children to take part in.

<https://drive.google.com/open?>

drive.google.com/open?



Transition opportunities for pre-school children.

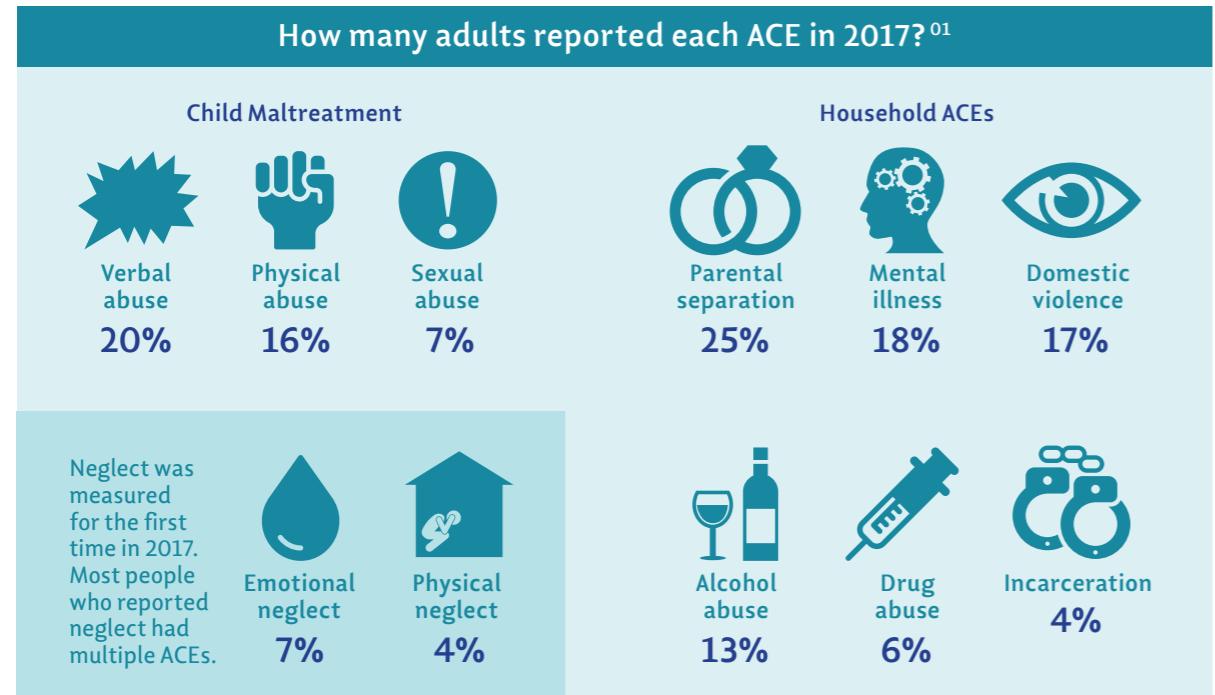
Shared experiences such as these help Member Administrations develop their initiatives and take back ideas for their own projects. Sometimes they may lead to significant policy directives and investment and at other times they are smaller scale initiatives which can be shared and implemented operationally. The impact on children and families early years experiences are positively affected and strengthened by such opportunities the BIC 'Early Years Policy' work sector brings.

As part of the meeting the following day, a short presentation on Guernsey's Early Years Road Map was shared, with details of their vision and current development. Members were invited to contribute their own experiences and expertise in helping shape and develop this significant piece of work.

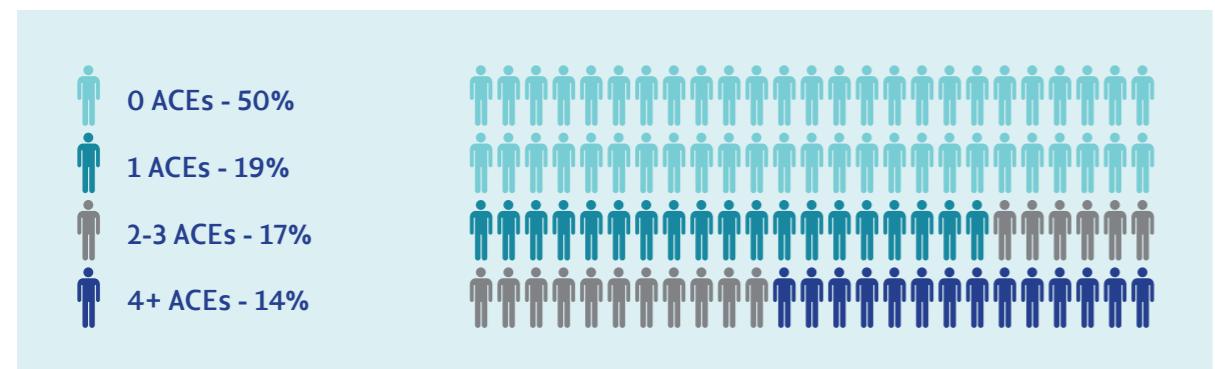
Wales, October 2018 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

The focus of the October 2018 work sector meeting in Cardiff was on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the growing recognition of the long term impact of exposure to ACEs on children's life outcomes; including the effect on health and wellbeing, in education and

economic prosperity. ACEs include child maltreatment, including neglect, and wider experiences of household dysfunction such as, for example, parental separation and domestic violence.



For every 100 adults in Wales, 50 had at least one ACE and 14 had four or more



⁰¹ Hughes et al, 2018. Sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood experiences: Report 1 - Mental illness. Public Health Wales & Bangor University.

A presentation from Public Health Wales (PHW) showcased the work undertaken in Wales including a study into ACEs and the publication of a series of reports on its findings. Key findings of the study include the prevalence of ACEs in Wales, the cumulative impact of exposure to multiple ACEs and the importance of resilience as a protective factor against ACEs. Many of the findings of the PHW study mirror those of other similar studies undertaken elsewhere in the World.

Members heard that as a result of the research and a greater understanding of ACEs, Welsh Government had decided to make tackling ACEs a cross-government priority. Preventing and mitigating the effect of ACEs is a key commitment for this Assembly term and is set out in the national strategy, 'Prosperity for All', and programme for government, 'Taking Wales Forward'.

Central to delivering on this commitment has been the establishment of an ACE Support Hub for Wales, as a centre of knowledge and expertise to help organisations, communities and individuals become ACE informed and support collaborative action to tackle ACEs. The work sector heard how the Hub is working across a wide range of sectors to raise professionals' awareness and understanding of ACEs. It has worked closely with particular sectors such as education, youth work and homelessness.

Documents and materials from the presentation were shared by Administrations including with Resilient Bailiwick in Guernsey, which is a group of health and wellbeing professionals who want to embed Trauma-informed services across Guernsey based on ACEs.

As part of the work sector meeting, members also visited the Ely and Caerau Children's Centre, Cardiff's first Integrated Children's Centre which has been open and operational for families since June 2005. The Centre was built with the aims to improve health, education and the emotional development of young children and families through an integrated approach.

The work sector heard how the centre provides integrated, high quality services to children and adults through a multi-agency approach. As an inclusive



Centre, it recognises individual needs, actively fostering warm relationships in order to develop a positive self-image, confidence and a feeling of wellbeing for all.

"Children's Centres are an integral part of supporting and empowering parents in a community. The staff here were passionate, effective and knowledgeable creating a joined up approach. It was a privilege to meet the children and staff and see the outstanding practice in such a dynamic well thought out environment."

Ruth Sharp (Guernsey Government)

Members also saw the use of Welsh language in as many situations as possible throughout the Centre. It was clear from the visit that the Centre is a fundamental part of the community, providing a long-term, nurturing, viable learning environment and offering specific home-based interventions off-site.

As a result of the visit, members of the Early Years and Inclusion and Safeguarding Teams on the Isle of Man plan on visiting the Ely and Caerau Children's Centre during 2019 to observe and learn from their integrated approach to improving the health, education and emotional development of children and families in Cardiff.

Northern Ireland, April 2018

Parenting - Getting Ready to Learn programme

The April 2018 work sector meeting in Derry/Londonderry focussed on the theme of parental engagement and the importance of supporting parents as their child's first and ongoing educator. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland alongside their delivery body, the Education Authority, showcased their 'Getting Ready to Learn' programme, which was launched in 2016 as part of the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP).

The 'Getting Ready to Learn' programme aims to support staff in pre-school education settings to engage more effectively with parents, with the objective of empowering parents to help them create and sustain positive home learning environments.

The successful delivery of the programme is based on a collaborative approach between Education and Health professionals and parents, at policy and practice level. Members heard how the programme complements the Health-led 'Getting Ready for Baby' and 'Getting Ready for Toddler' programmes. Education and Health professionals have worked closely to ensure consistent

key messages on child development and positive parenting are delivered across all three programmes.

Northern Ireland officials shared with Members key learning points from the establishment and delivery of the programme. The 'Getting Ready to Learn' programme has delivered very positive outcomes for pre-school children and their families, with 77% of pre-school education settings in 2018-19 participating in the programme. Data from the 2017-18 academic year indicates that over 13,300 families of pre-school children participated in the programme.

Importantly, as demonstrated in the extract from the report card below, the evidence gathered using an outcomes-based approach has indicated improved parental knowledge of developmental milestones, the pre-school curriculum and how to support their child at home. Other outcomes were significantly increased frequency of parents playing and reading with their children, better bedtime routines, reduced screen-time and increased physical activity. Pre-school settings have reported positive changes in the children's learning and behaviour.

Is anyone better off?

100%⁰² of settings in 2017/18 recorded improved levels of parental engagement following participation in the GRTL programme. Some of the key outcomes reported are:

Before	After
45% Parents with a good understanding of the pre school curriculum	73%
52% Parents who felt they had a good knowledge of how to help their child develop their learning at home	80%
65% Parents who play, talk and read with their children at least 5 times a week	80%
60% Children participating in physical activity at least 5 times a week	75%
81% Parents reading to their children at bedtime at least 3 times a week	93%
52% Parents reading to their children during the day at least 3 times a week	66%
30% Children with access to screen time of more than 2 hours / day	19%

⁰² The percentages above are based on monitoring returns fully completed by 418 settings in 2017/18 (Extract from 'Getting Ready to Learn Report card')

'Getting Ready to Learn' has been recognised in Northern Ireland as an exemplar of effective collaboration and innovation at policy and practice levels. Given its success, the Department of Education in Northern Ireland has secured funding to sustain the programme into future years. For further information please refer to: www.gettingreadytolearn.co.uk

In addition to learning about the 'Getting Ready to Learn' programme, members visited Holy Family Primary and Nursery School located in the North West. Members engaged with key staff, visited nursery and foundation classes as well as the nurture unit, and had the opportunity to discuss the various initiatives to help address barriers to learning, including support for parents through counselling sessions, drop in facilities and engagement with the community.



Following this visit, the Government of Jersey were able to share with their Early Years Policy Development Board the impact of these interventions that support parents and the importance of the Home Learning Environment. Future work will include using local insights, national research and evidence based practice, to prioritise continued support and investment in current programmes, like Making it REAL and explore further initiatives that will support children's early learning.

"The value of seeing how other jurisdictions involve, support and value parents and the home learning environment is demonstrable in guiding how others develop policy and practice at a local level."

Nicola Mulliner (Jersey Government)



Ireland, December 2017 Quality Assurance

The theme of the December 2017 work sector meeting in Dublin was 'Quality Assurance' in the early years sector. The Irish team members presented information on 'Better Start' which is an initiative of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), collaborating with the Early Years Education Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and Pobal (Pobal works on behalf of Government to support communities and local agencies toward achieving social inclusion and development) to establish a single, cohesive approach to quality across the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in Ireland. They explained that the primary service focus of the 'Better Start' programme is to provide mentoring support to ECEC settings to build quality in early years provision in Ireland.

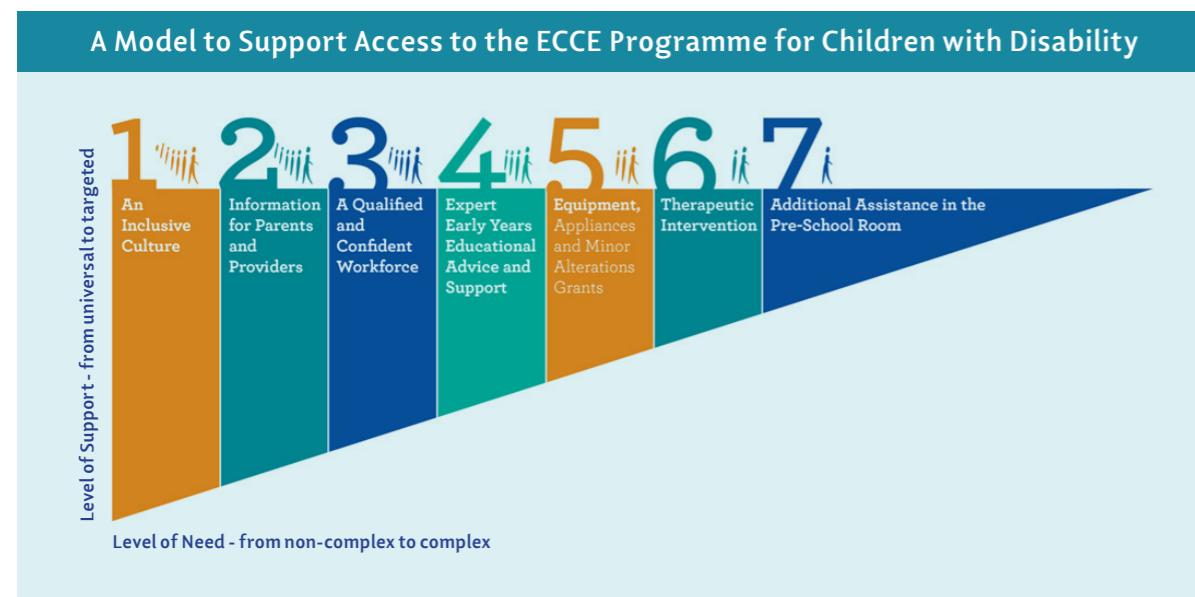
The 'Better Start' initiative was expanded in 2016 to support the implementation of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) which supports access to the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) for children with disabilities. AIM is a child-centred

model of supports which ensures that children with disabilities can access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme in mainstream pre-school settings.

For further information please refer to:
www.play.aim.gov.ie



The Irish representatives described the background planning and implementation of the AIM model of supports, explaining that the supports in AIM vary from universal to targeted, based on the child's need.



Members found AIM to be a great example of investing in the front line to ensure successful implementation of the project. Guernsey officials in particular found it helpful understanding the process of planning and implementation and the engagement undertaken. They subsequently were able to take key elements of learning to reflect in their own models and processes in order to drive improvement. The AIM presentation and supporting documents from Irish representatives informed the preparation of a proposal by Guernsey officials to introduce an Inclusion Fund. Such a fund would support children and their preschools to remove barriers to learning and development and to access high quality teaching, provision and experiences.

In addition, Isle of Man officials are exploring the development of an Inclusion Pathway in order to support their early years settings in removing barriers to learning and development to meet the needs of

all young children. The AIM model was one example of good practice which officials considered when developing a similar model on the Isle of Man.

"The AIM model has been successful in supporting and empowering pre-school practitioners in providing an inclusive educational experience for children with disabilities. This inclusive model puts the needs of the child first and provides a clear supportive pathway for parents and practitioners. As we move towards developing new pathways on the Isle of Man we will be looking to the AIM model as an example of good practice to draw upon".

Chrissy Callaghan (Isle of Man Government)

Scotland, September 2017

Scotland's 'Baby Box'- Supporting Families

The focus of the Edinburgh 2017 work sector meeting was the newly launched Scotland's 'Baby Box' Programme which began as a Scottish Government manifesto commitment in 2016:

"Every newborn in Scotland will be entitled to a 'Baby Box', offering essential items for a child's first weeks – adapting the successful Finnish model which has helped to improve lives for babies and toddlers."

The 'Baby Box' policy team delivered a presentation on how they achieved this. The team described how they met with officials from the Finnish Embassy and with representatives from the Finnish Social Security agency (KELA) who have responsibility for Finland's 'Baby Boxes' for an initial scoping meeting. The team also undertook a great deal of stakeholder consultation with health and education professionals, parents, the third sector and academic experts.

The policy team appointed a 'Baby Box' managing agent via an existing Scottish Government supplier framework. As managing agent, APS Group (Scotland) have prime responsibility for all aspects of the 'Baby Box', including the sourcing of the box and its contents, storage, packing, and delivery.

A small pilot of the scheme was run in Orkney and Clackmannanshire to provide the opportunity to test the 'Baby Box', its contents and the logistics around registration and delivery. In addition, the pilot provided feedback from parents on their use of the 'Baby Box' and its contents. The locations were selected for the pilot because of their geographical spread and diversity of their respective populations.

The pilot proved very successful and feedback from the pilot informed the final choice of the 'Baby Box's' contents. Registration for Scotland's 'Baby Box'

programme began on 15 June 2017, and all babies due on or after 15 August 2017 are entitled to a 'Baby Box'. Boxes began to be dispatched from 15 August 2017.

Scotland's 'Baby Box' programme has been the most successful Scottish Government campaign to date, and the unboxing video on the Scottish Government's Parent Club website is the most viewed Scottish Government video online.

For further information please refer to:
www.parentclub.scot/baby-box

To date, through Scotland's 'Baby Box', APS has created 27 permanent new jobs across contract management, customer contact centre, data processing and logistics functions, providing opportunities for six Modern Apprentices.

Following the presentation, Members were given the opportunity to look through one of Scotland's 'Baby Boxes' before being taken on a tour of the 'Baby Box' distribution centre at APS, where Baby Boxes are assembled, the contents picked and packed, and the boxes dispatched for delivery. Approximately 1,000 'Baby Boxes' are dispatched each week.



United Kingdom, March 2017

The Early Years Policy Workforce site visit - Coin Street Nursery

At the March 2017 work sector meeting in London, Members reflected on the Early Years Ministers' meeting in Cardiff on 25 November 2016 and noted that the Summit had been helpful in underlining the importance of early years to their ministers. The UK Government felt that the meeting was timely and noted that it has now published its Early Years Workforce Strategy.

For further information please refer to:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-workforce-strategy

Members had an opportunity to work through issues relating to the early years workforce, identifying common areas of concern which included: supply and retention in the workforce and career pathways; pay and minimum wage; qualifications; entry levels and up-skilling the workforce including using graduates; annual budget cycles; gender imbalance; private and local authority providers; affordability; and expectations. It was felt that Member Administrations could work with employers to develop career pathways whether through on the job training, formal education, experience within wider social care or professional experience. However, it

was noted that there needed to be a focus on continued professional development which would assist with early intervention and prevention.

The group also discussed the UK's forthcoming exit from the EU. While they noted that there was no immediate impact for the work sector's planned activity, the broader implications for the early years sector was discussed. They noted that there could be changes with regard to recognition of qualifications between the UK and EU Member States. They also noted the potential impact on the workforce in areas where the workforce had a significant percentage of employees from EU Member States. Finally, there were certain projects in some administrations currently in receipt of EU funding which in future might be impacted. The group noted that any changes would only become clear following negotiations or in any subsequent decisions. They agreed to continue to review the changes, particularly with regard to recognition of qualifications.

Members also had an opportunity to visit Coin Street Neighbourhood Centre in London and meet with Jenny Deeks, Head of Family and Children's Centre.



Minutes from London's Waterloo Station, and at the heart of a thriving community, the day nursery and specialist baby care unit provides childcare and education for children aged from three months to five years old. Coin Street nursery is purpose-designed with interactive areas and a safe outside play area. The family and children's centre provides a safe environment that promotes learning and development for families with children aged five years and under. Parents can receive support and advice, access to health and education services and share experiences.

Since the visit to Coin Street Neighbourhood Centre, Guernsey has successfully developed-their first children's centre. Under the management of the



Charity 'Every Child our Future', Bright Beginnings Children's Centre and Day Nursery has continued to flourish and develop.

"In the initial stages, -officials were able to link key personnel to the Coin Street Neighbourhood Centre and share some of their learning, commitments and achievements as a result of the visit. These opportunities are essential for sharing great practice and learning to ultimately improve the lives of our children and families in our own jurisdictions."

Ruth Sharp (Guernsey Government)

