



Terms of Reference

1. Early Childhood Forum

The Early Childhood Forum (ECF) is a coalition of professional associations, voluntary organisations and interest groups united in their concern about the health, well-being, learning and development of young children from pre-birth to seven, their families and carers, and the practitioners who work with them.

2. ECF Vision and Aim

ECF aims to bring together a coalition of early childhood partners to promote inclusion and challenge inequalities, and to champion quality experiences for all young children from pre-birth to seven.

3. ECF Values

3.1 ECF believes that all babies and young children have a right to high quality care and experiences that promote their emotional and physical health and development.

3.2 ECF believes that inclusion and equality should be central to all early childhood experiences and provision. ECF's inclusion statement states that 'Inclusion is a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down the barriers to participation and belonging'.

3.3 ECF believes that play is an essential experience for all children. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 31 states that 'Every child has the right to rest, play, and to do things they enjoy'.



3.4 ECF believes that it is essential to promote young children's education, health and emotional well-being, with a focus on the whole child, through working with mothers, fathers and carers.

3.5 ECF believes that all organizations should work together in an integrated approach.

4. Activities

ECF is committed to working with its membership organizations collaboratively and collectively on a range of activities.

4.1 Providing support, advice and expertise on early childhood for the sector and Government.

4.2 Building new relationships with parents, families and organisations across early childhood and Government.

4.3 Supporting members' professional development and sharing knowledge.

4.4 Influencing local and national policy and practice to improve the experiences of all young children.

4.5 Listening to children, their mothers, fathers and other carers, to influence ECF's policy and activities.

4.6 Using evidence from research to better understand the developmental needs of babies and children from conception through to age seven.

4.7 Developing resources and initiating and supporting projects with partner organizations



5. Funding

ECF funds its core purposes through annual subscriptions from its membership organizations, and relies also on contributions in kind from its membership organizations such as free rooms for meetings, shared publicity, and most of all members' time to attend meetings and undertake activities with and on behalf of the ECF coalition.

6. Remit

6.1 ECF represents professional organisations with a full or partial focus on early childhood (pre-birth to seven)

6.2 ECF's geographical remit is England.

7. Management and co-ordination

7.1 The Chair is elected from within ECF's membership.

7.2 The post is for 3 years and elections will take place in the November of election years.

7.3 The role of the Chair is to

- Chair all main meetings and steering group meetings
- Take responsibility for elements of the work programme e.g. developing policy positions, campaign activities etc.
- Represent ECF at external meetings and events
- Act as a spokesperson for ECF
- Provide direct communication with members



- Plus Steering Group responsibilities (see point 7.7)

7.4 The Vice Chair will be required to deputise for the Chair when appropriate.

7.5 The Steering Group is comprised of

- Chair
- Vice Chair
- Treasurer
- 4 ECF members

7.6 The Steering Group meets three times a year.

7.7 The role of Steering Group members is to

- Represent a range of perspectives in early childhood
- Support the Chair to develop ECF's work
- Support the Chair in the preparation of agendas and papers for ECF meetings
- Take responsibility for specific projects e.g. consultation responses, printed resources, campaign activities
- Attend main and steering group meetings
- Actively take part in steering group discussions and ensure that decisions taken reflect the full ECF membership
- Represent ECF at external meetings, including with Government and policy makers
- Consider all matters relating to membership applications and make recommendations to ECF members
- Act as a spokesperson for ECF.

7.8 To be quorate 4 members of the Steering Group including the Chair or Vice Chair must be present at meetings.

7.9 Steering Group members should consult the Chair before speaking publicly on behalf of ECF.

7.10 If an elected Steering Group member leaves their current organisation during their term, then they will be expected to stand down.

7.3 Main meetings to which all ECF members and observers are invited take place three times a year.

8. Membership

8.1 To become a full member an organisation must fulfil the following criteria

- Member organisations of ECF must work wholly or in part for children from pre-birth to seven and have a policy, practice or research function.
- Member organisations are ones that represent specific aspects/issues/concerns of the early childhood sector nationally.
- Members organisations should have a policy for equality and anti-discriminatory practice.
- Member organisations must be prepared to sign up to the ECF policy agenda.
- All member representatives must represent the full views of their organisation and agree to report back to the organisation which they represent on the Forum.
- Every member organisation must empower their representative to contribute fully to the work of the Forum and when requested and whenever possible, respond to relevant documents.
- In order to remain in membership of ECF, organisations must normally be represented at least once out of three meetings during the calendar year.



- If a substitute member is to attend a meeting the Chair must be notified in advance.

8.2 Members are currently asked to pay an annual membership subscription of £120 a year. This entitles members to

- Attend three main meetings to engage with expert speakers, access professional development sessions and to discuss policy and practice issues with early childhood colleagues
- Participate in the development of ECF's work and more general Forum activities, including lobbying, projects and events
- Stand for election as Chair or Steering Group member to influence ECF's future development at a strategic decision-making level.

8.3 Observer status is offered to Government department and non-departmental public bodies. Observers are invited to attend ECF meetings to update members on current policy and activities and provide a two way dialogue. They have no voting rights and cannot hold Chair or Steering Group posts.

9. Reviewing Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed by the Steering Group annually from the sign off date.

Note. Throughout this document, the definition of 'early childhood' encompasses the period from conception to age seven.



The terms of reference were initially agreed by the Early Childhood Forum on 20 July 2006. This revised version was signed off on 25 March 2015 and will be reviewed annually.

More information

Visit the ECF website at www.earlychildhoodforum.org

Contact the Chair, Melian Mansfield on earlychildhoodforum@yahoo.co.uk

Update August 2020:

Due to the corona virus, meetings will now take place virtually through Zoom at a greater frequency than before – please see our website for dates of the next Zoom meetings.