



## Early Childhood Forum

### Policy Agenda

#### 1. Introduction

Early childhood from conception to the age of 7 years is a crucial stage of life, shaping long term cognitive, social, emotional and physical development and mental health. The Early Childhood Forum (ECF) aims to create an agenda for debate and action to ensure all babies and young children and their families are equally valued and supported. All ECF policy and practice is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

ECF is a voluntary organisation. It is a coalition of around 20 professional associations, voluntary organisations, interest groups and individual members united in their concern about the health, well-being, development and learning of young children from conception to seven. ECF's geographical remit is ?UK, although it is recognised that member organisations may have a wider sphere of work.

ECF will challenge policy that is detrimental to children's development and fails to uphold children's rights.

The following document outlines the ECF's aims, principles and strategic objectives.

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

#### 2. Vision

ECF believes inclusion is a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down the barriers to participation and belonging. ECF aims to bring together partners in the early childhood sector to promote inclusion and challenge inequalities, and to champion quality experiences for all young children from Conception to seven years, their families and carers.

#### 3. Activities

ECF will do this by:

- Providing support, advice, expertise, and challenge on early childhood for the sector and Government.
- Highlighting the importance of strong relationships between families, carers and their communities in early childhood to the Government.
- Supporting members' professional development and sharing knowledge.

- Influencing and being involved in local and national policy and practice to improve the experiences of all young children.
- Listening to children, their families, carers and their communities through experience, feedback from members and current research to influence ECF's policy and activities.
- Providing better understanding and support for the developmental needs and rights of babies and young children from conception to age seven.
- Using evidence from research to better understand the developmental needs of babies and young children from conception through to age seven.
- Developing resources, initiating and supporting projects with the membership and partner organisations, where practicable. Do we do this?
- Regularly reviewing ECF's ability to influence policy and practice.

#### **4. Objectives**

ECF has five central areas of work which form the basis of its policy agenda:

- Championing children's rights and entitlements
- Supporting training, development and professional education in early childhood
- Promoting working in partnership
- Addressing inclusion, inequalities and valuing diversity
- Evaluating practice and ensuring quality.

##### **4.1 Championing young children's rights and entitlements**

ECF believes that

- All children are entitled to participation in high quality provision, varied opportunities to play, and protection, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The needs of the child must be placed at the centre of policy, planning and provision to achieve and realise their talents and give them the best possible start in life.
- The emotional well-being of children is central to every aspect of children's development, learning and family life.
- Learning is a process of development through play, interaction and experience which begins before birth.
- All children from birth to seven should have opportunities and equal access to a culturally and developmentally appropriate play-based approach, both indoors and outdoors.
- All children are entitled to opportunities and experiences that support and extend learning and develop their understanding, dispositions, skills and knowledge.

- Consistent, sensitive care and interactions which includes listening and responding to children is fundamental if babies and young children are to thrive in the home and other settings.
- All children have a right to inclusion and participation alongside their peers in environments that are accessible and free from discrimination.
- All children have the right to be protected from harm and maltreatment in the home and wider community.

## **4.2 Supporting training, development and education in early childhood**

ECF believes that

- Access to appropriate and relevant high-quality training and education and remuneration is essential for all those working with babies, young children and their families.
- Continuing high quality training and professional development should be available and accessible to enable all those that work with babies and young children to sustain and improve the quality of their practice through review and reflection, building on previous training and qualifications, and current research.
- There should be a higher level of recruitment and retention of under-represented groups in early childhood than currently exists.
- All work places should develop policies that actively facilitate the involvement of all staff in appropriate training, development and education opportunities.
- Training must ensure that a well-qualified practitioner is able to understand personal prejudices and institutional discrimination.
- There should be training regarding regular and meaningful engagement with families, carers and their communities and how to encourage parental participation in an equal relationship alongside practitioners.

## **4.3 Promoting working in partnership**

ECF believes that

- It is essential to develop and maintain an equal but diverse partnership and strong working relationships with members, observers and policy makers.
- The role of families, carers and their communities is critical at all stages as their relationship with the child is key to the emotional well-being, early brain development and learning of their children. A partnership approach should be embedded in all aspects of health and education provision for babies and young children, including policy making, based on an understanding of mutual rights and responsibilities.
- A strategic approach is needed at national, regional and local levels to ensure that policy development and implementation is coherent and co-ordinated, making best use of available resources.

#### **4.4 Addressing inequalities and valuing diversity**

ECF believes that

- Inclusion is a process of identifying, understanding, and breaking down the barriers to participation and belonging.
- Strategies should be in place demonstrating that all babies and young children and their families, carers and communities are equally valued, supported, and respected.
- A full range of support should be available in all local authority areas for all babies and young children to ensure full participation and inclusion, and support in the home environment through home visiting and outreach services to assist parents and other significant care givers.
- Policy, procedure and practice should be anti-discriminatory, challenging stereotypes and positively valuing diversity.
- Individuals should have ongoing opportunities to reflect on and find strategies to challenge personal prejudices and institutional discrimination.

#### **4.5 Evaluating practice and ensuring quality**

ECF believes that

- Continuous quality improvement, which includes consistent responsive age appropriate education and care provision and services, is the basis for improving children's health, well-being, development and learning.
- All those who work with babies and young children should monitor, evaluate, challenge, develop and reflect on their practice continuously.
- Young children, their families, carers and their communities must be fully consulted and involved in evaluation processes through regular dialogue and participation.
- Quality improvement must be based on agreed quality principles
- All practitioners should be involved in quality improvement processes
- Findings from research and evaluation of practice should underpin policy development.

The policy agenda is reviewed annually.

Last reviewed and agreed 23rd February 2023

#### **More information**

Visit the ECF website at [www.earlychildhoodforum.com](http://www.earlychildhoodforum.com)

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