The Early Childhood Forum is dedicated to advocating for high-quality early years education and care from birth to seven years.  The Forum brings together experts, practitioners, and stakeholders to promote policies and practices that benefit young children and their families.

**Manifesto for the Election: Early Childhood Priorities**

**Key Messages**

* **Critical Early Years**: Recognize the first seven years as the most crucial in a child’s development,
* **Investment Priority**: Prioritize substantial investment in early childhood education and care.
* **Quality and Qualified Staff**: Ensure all settings have well-paid, highly qualified professionls to provide best quality education.
* **Stimulating Environments**: Create environments that encourage exploration and develop children’s interests.
* **Family Support**: Offer robust support for families to address issues early and effectively.

**Focus Areas**

1. **Children from Birth to Three**
   * Emphasize the importance of brain development during these years.
   * Provide support through health visitors and early years staff.
   * Address the crisis in services with attention and investment at the highest levels of government.
2. **The Importance of Play**
   * Highlight play as essential for physical, cognitive, and social development.
   * Ensure play is child-led for maximum benefit.
   * Recognize play’s role in developing language skills, mental health, and empathy.
3. **Support for Children with SEND**
   * Ensure no family has to fight for necessary support.
   * Address capacity issues in successful early years settings.
   * Provide adequate resources and specialist provision for all children.
4. **Staff Well-being**
   * Improve pay and recognition for early years professionals.
   * Alleviate stress by addressing funding and support gaps.
   * Allow freedom for providers to deliver services based on their unique beliefs and values.
5. **Qualifications and CPD**
   * Promote higher qualifications for staff to enhance child development.
   * Address inconsistency in qualification standards.
   * Ensure ongoing professional development and adequate remuneration for qualified staf**f**
   * **The Foundation of Our Future - Investing in Early Childhood**

**Introduction**. The Early Childhood Forum firmly believes that the foundation of a prosperous society begins with its youngest members. The first seven years of a child's life are critical, shaping their future health, learning, and well-being. However, despite the well-documented importance of these early years, the UK currently lags behind many countries in its provision and support for this crucial developmental stage.

**Importance of Early Years**. From birth to age seven, children experience rapid brain development, laying the groundwork for their future. Research has consistently shown that high-quality early childhood experiences lead to better cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes. Conversely, early adversity can result in long-term negative effects on health, behavior, and learning.

**Government Investment**. To truly prioritize early childhood, the government must significantly increase investment in early years provision. This includes ensuring that early years settings are staffed with well-paid, highly qualified professionals. These educators play a vital role in creating stimulating environments that foster exploration and learning, helping children develop resilience and a lifelong love of learning.

**Focus on Birth to Three**. The period from birth to age three is particularly critical. During these years, children's brains are developing at an unparalleled rate. High-quality care and early intervention can prevent future issues, making it imperative that families have access to supportive services, including health visitors and early years educators.

**The Role of Play.** Play is not just a leisure activity for children; it is their work. Through play, children develop essential physical, cognitive, and social skills. It fosters creativity, problem-solving abilities, and emotional resilience. Therefore, ensuring that play is a central component of early childhood education is crucial.

**Supporting Children with SEND**. Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) require tailored support to thrive. The current system often leaves families struggling to access the necessary resources. By increasing support and ensuring adequate funding, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all children.

**Staff Well-being**. The professionals who care for our youngest children are often undervalued and underpaid. Improving their working conditions and recognizing their essential role is critical. A well-supported workforce is better equipped to provide the high-quality care that children need.

**Qualifications and Professional Development**. Ensuring that early years staff have access to high-quality training and ongoing professional development is essential. This not only benefits the children but also helps retain skilled professionals in the sector.

**Conclusion**. Investing in early childhood is investing in our future. By prioritizing these early years, we can ensure that every child has the best possible start in life, leading to a healthier, more educated, and more prosperous society.