

A Charter for Early Childhood

Transforming policy and practice

Our 12 point charter aims to influence the manifestos of all the political parties. Several member organisations have produced their own manifestos and we encourage the whole sector to seek areas for consensus to guide politicians in their decision making, using the latest evidence from research and practice.

The **Early Childhood Forum** (ECF) brings together membership organisations from across the early childhood sector to debate issues, celebrate differences and develop consensus. Together, we champion all young children and their families, promote inclusion and challenge inequalities, discrimination and prejudice.

ECF promotes the principle that a child's best interests are paramount (Children Act 1989) and children have human rights to family life, privacy and dignity (Human Rights Act 1998).

Elements in current policy and practice work against this principle and are barriers to enabling early years practitioners to focus on their key role. For example, the focus on summative assessment, testing and league tables takes staff away from time spent developing relationships with children. Investing in early years is critical.



National and international evidence shows the cost benefits to the public purse of investing in early years for longer term social and economic gains. Fair, devolved funding per child in their early years is needed to improve the health, well-being and educational experiences for all children.

For more information please email: earlychildhoodforum@yahoo.co.uk or visit our new website: earlychildhoodforum.wordpress.com

Our charter - beliefs and principles

ECF believes that early childhood is a crucial stage of life and that:

- the needs of the infant and child must be placed at the centre of the planning and provision of high quality services.
- all children are entitled to participation, provision, play and protection, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and to live without fear of discrimination.
- the safety and well-being of children is central to every aspect of children's learning, health and development.
- knowledge and understanding of child development is fundamental for all practitioners who work with young children.
- parents and the home environment have the strongest influence on children's development.
- learning is a process of development through interaction and experience which begins before birth.
- young children should have equal rights to culturally and developmentally appropriate play-based provision, both indoors and outdoors, which develops their understanding, dispositions, skills and knowledge.
- every child needs sensitive, attuned and responsive care in the first years of life and a key person to support them.
- all parents need support at times to feel confident in raising their children in a loving and supportive environment.

Our Charter for Early Childhood is overleaf >

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as proposed by the
Early Childhood
Forum (ECF):

June 2014

1 Agreement to set up an all-party planning and funding group to develop and implement long term policy for young children's education, health and care.

2 A demonstrated commitment to multi-professional working across education, health and care based on evidence and informed by research and professional guidance from practitioners.

3 Consistent, well funded and effective policies that give parents and carers real choices about whether to stay at home.

4 Universal access to children's centres and related services as a vital route to family support programmes and outreach for vulnerable families or those in crisis.

5 Support for family and child physical and mental health through equitable universal implementation of the health programmes.



6 Formative assessment throughout early childhood to support families and professionals to provide the best possible care and education.

7 A statutory framework for early years from birth extended to age 7 that is coherent and appropriately developed and elaborated for different stages within it.

8 Guidance that acknowledges each child's unique requirements at every stage of development and which recognises the importance of consistent loving care from a main carer in a nurturing environment.



9 A presumption for fully funded inclusion for disabled children and those with special educational needs. Early years providers must have access to specialist support and qualified Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), as in schools.

10 A commitment to work towards universal high quality integrated education, health and care whilst strengthening the entitlement for children in early years to access play and daily outdoor experiences in all provision until age 7.

11 A specialist qualification route which includes graduate staff who are qualified to work in the early years phase (birth to age 7) with a clearly defined pay and career structure and a statutory requirement to participate in continuous professional development.

12 Integrated inspections that are carried out by qualified and knowledgeable inspectors, who have had experience of working with children under age 7.