



Newsletter

Newsletter August 2022

Dear Members,

The Early Childhood Forum will next year be celebrating its thirtieth anniversary. The Steering Group is now working towards continuing the existence of the forum to ensure that the recent meetings develop the forum to meet the current needs of all aspects of the Early Years. This description of a forum describes effectively what we have been doing since the beginning of COVID, which we have developed, through necessity,

an online discussion board where people can ask questions, share their experiences, and discuss topics of mutual interest.'

New, interested individuals and organisations have been invited to attend the full membership meetings and have expressed their interest in attending further online meetings. Forums are an excellent way to create social connections and a sense of community. They can also help to cultivate an interest group about a particular subject.

Throughout the thirty years ECF has brought together a wide range of groups and organisations and continues to do so. We have been able to attract some very good speakers who have provided excellent information for members. We have links with OfSTED and the DfE and representatives have regularly attended our meetings. Together we are stronger!

As you all know, the Early Years Sector has grown and changed but remains fragmented. It is vital that everyone is talking and working together to understand each other's work in relation to the provision for all children from Birth to 7 years of age. We have been inviting groups who have emerged recently but who are not already members. These include the Early Years Workforce Commission, Nuffield Foundation, Chartered College; Children's Alliance and Children England. They have expressed an interest in continuing to come to our meetings. We would now like to engage them further and invite them to become members.

Most recently we have had the privilege and pleasure of hearing presentations from representatives working in different parts of the UK to hear about their approach to care, development and learning for children within their Early Years settings. i.e. their curricula. To date these presentations have been given by Wales and, Early Years Scotland and Upstart Scotland. A new contact within the DfE attended the presentations from Scotland and wishes to attend future meetings and presentations. Early Years Ireland are being invited to our next meeting to be held in October 2022.

We can, in the future, extend invitations to other countries where the provision for Early Years may widen our knowledge through their different pedagogies.

Whilst we are looking forward to the future, which at this moment in time is extremely important given that there are issues that are impacting upon the ECF Membership and Early Years Provision.

Please refer to the document Early Years - Foundations for Success we sent everyone in April which outlined the many issues of concern and which is attached alongside this letter.



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The Way Forward for ECF

- We must expand the Membership
- We need members to join the Steering Group.
- We need a treasurer
- The Steering Group wishes to include individual members from the membership, who have represented organisations in the past but have had to leave if moving to another organisation or retiring. All have valuable expertise to share with the Forum.
- The current issues with high inflation rates and the rising cost of living have been considered by the Steering Group. We are proposing that the annual fee for institutional membership should be reduced from £120.00 pa to £60.00 pa and that individual membership as described above should be £30.00 pa.
- We wish to encourage attendees to the recent on-line meetings to join the membership too.

The changes listed above must have a majority agreement of the full membership.

Please would you consider the points and respond yes or no by 1st September 2022. We want to make these decisions so that they can be put into place at the AGM. The Terms of Reference will be amended as necessary to reflect the changes and circulated after the Steering Group Meeting on 26th September in time to be finally approved and signed at the AGM on the 12th October.

Thank you all very much for your help at this very uncertain time.

Information about What About The Children? (WATCh?) an ECF member

What About the Children? is a unique children's charity working to 'Raise awareness of the never-changing emotional needs of the under-threes in our ever-changing society.' It promotes the importance of the emotional wellbeing of children from conception to age 3, the period of growth when the brain develops most rapidly and, as research confirms, the time that impacts on future physical and mental health out of all proportion to the rest of childhood. From neurobiological research we know that during the earliest months of life the right hemisphere of the brain is developing particularly rapidly. This is the functioning area for intuitive skills needed for relationships, emotions and empathic understanding. During this period of development, the majority of the synaptic links between the brain cells are formed; constant, close, loving emotional contact is vital for stimulating this synaptic development and critical for future physical and mental health.

Through its website <https://www.whataboutthechildren.org.uk> What About The Children? makes available a range of information including: summaries of relevant research; video material about brain development; and monthly blogs about a range of relevant topics. This is a valuable resource on aspects of infant development and attachment relationships for parents, health professionals, policymakers, students and researchers.

What About The Children? hosts a national annual conference and biennial Goodman Lecture, It publishes a quarterly E News about its work and highlights aspects of early childhood on social media @WATCthechildren.

What About The Children? makes submissions to Parliamentary and other national consultations and, as a member of Early Childhood Forum (ECF) and First 1001 Days Movement (F1001), supports the campaigns



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of like-minded organisations associated with infant wellbeing, child protection, early years education and childcare.

What About The Children? has no paid staff and relies entirely on donations to fund all its work.

Early Years in Scotland

On the 5th July we invited **Claire Middleton, Early Years Scotland (EYS)** and **Kate Johnstone, Upstart Scotland (US)** to tell us about the early years in Scotland and the work each organisation is doing.

Early Years Scotland (earlyyearsscotland.org)

EYS has four areas of work

1. Working directly with children and their families
2. Support for early years settings
3. Professional learning (programme is on the website)
4. Advice and Advocacy.

EY Scotland has 52 staff and a budget of £1.5m and different categories of membership.

‘ **Realising the ambition** ‘ is the refreshed early years national practice guidance for Scotland and presents key information about the characteristics of child development based on research and evidence. .

It was sent to members after the meeting and can be found on education.gov.scot

Ken Muir’s report says that the exams warp the education system. There will be another conversation about education in the autumn.

EYS does not campaign like UPstart Scotland but raises the same issues with the Scottish Government.

EYS advocates for mental well-being of children under 5 and babies born in lockdown.

Upstart Scotland (www.upstart.scot)

US is a voluntary campaigning organisation which was set up in 2015 . It has 10 hours of paid admin,

It aims

to stress the importance, for long-term mental health and well-being, of ensuring that between the ages of three and seven children are free from the pressure of the formal school system and educational target-setting.

to argue the case for play (particularly outdoor play and contact with the natural world) as an inborn human instinct, vital to children’s physical, emotional, social and cognitive development, and seriously lacking in the lives of many 21st century children

- KJ told us that the 24-month check in Scotland filled in by parents is not reliable. ‘Play is the Way’ is a better early childhood development tool .This is the latest book by Sue Palmer and can be ordered from the Upstart website.
- A document with arguments for Play not Tests and a video can also be found on the website.



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- The Early Years Play Pedagogy Tool Kit is a useful resource as is Building the Curriculum 2 - active learning for the early years - both on www.education.gov.

Early Years in Wales

On the 29th April, ECF was pleased to welcome Anna Westall from Early Years Wales to tell us about the work they are doing.

Early Years Wales (www.earlyyears.wales) founding objective 60 years ago was to support parents and families to participate in their children's development from birth through their early years. They believe in the need for services which promote child development and support families .

They have a Pathfinder project which helps all to work together.

Early Years in Wales is birth to seven.

Anna told us that there is a new curriculum for 3-16 year olds in Wales which recognises children's creative and ethical learning. There is also a non maintained curriculum devised by practitioners for practitioners in which rights are embedded.

The **Early Years Action Group** <https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/professionals/our-work/early-years/early-years-action-group/> raises awareness about children's rights and has been working for change since 2020. Politicians are supportive.

Work is being done around salaries - **We Care Wales**. <https://wecare.wales/> Funding is the issue.

The Welsh Government has asked Universities and other bodies to investigate the impact of COVID on children. Swansea University is researching 3-6 year olds.

The Government consults the community, parents and children which means better policies are developed.

Flying Start Wales <https://gov.wales/get-help-flying-start> is a Welsh Government programme which provides care and support for children in their learning and development. It aims to ensure that children in deprived areas experience a wide range of creative and experimental play opportunities in a safe and welcoming environment.

Meeting of ECF Steering Group members with Ben Moon DfE

Three members of the Steering a group, Tricia Johnson, Edwina Mitchell and Melian Mansfield were invited to a meeting with Ben Moon DfE who attended our meeting with the two organisations from Scotland , Early Years Scotland and Upstart Scotland.

The meeting was held on the 12th July 2-3.30pm and we covered many topics including : the role of play in children's development, adult/child ratios, extending early years to age 7 as in other countries, the adverse effects of testing, the problems relating to the Government's attitude to the early years curriculum (one size fits all), how children learn ie not in a straight line, children's talents not being recognised ,the mental health of young children especially as a result of the pandemic, staff not feeling valued nor paid adequately, experts in the sector not being listened to for example in response to the proposals for changes to the EYFS in 2021, the need for a ten year plan, the issues regarding the attitude of Government Ministers who believe they know best .

We asked what Ministers thought education was for. BM told us that the Department officials were aware of some of the issues of recruitment , retention and qualifications and the Early Years team does try to listen when creating or changing policies but Ministers do not always follow what they are told. We asked how we could speak to Ministers directly and BM said that he would try to arrange a meeting with the Minister responsible for Early Years for us. He told us that there had been a suggestion of a public information



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campaign to raise the profile of Early Years. Government initiatives/campaigns do take a long time to materialise but this is on the radar. It will be important to co-ordinate and organise a campaign in time to include Early Years in the manifesto for the next election.

We said that there is not enough focus on how the money spent can achieve what is best for young children and too little listening to the experts.

We said we would be grateful if we can continue to communicate and identify possible routes to follow. Investment in the early years is critical.

We have sent him our document Early Years - Foundations for Success, which went to members and other interested organisations in April, and he has since circulated it to the Early Years team at the DfE. We have asked for any responses from them.

Evidence of Protective Effects of Peer Play in the Early Years

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10578-022-01368-x>,

Quality early years play linked with improved future mental health

Could play on prescription help tackle the 'disaster' in mental health?

As the Commission on Young Lives calls for a national programme of social prescribing to address the 'disaster' in children and young people's mental health, the body of evidence confirming the mental health benefits of play has been bolstered further. A recent report from the University of Cambridge showed that children who learn to play well with others at pre-school age tend to enjoy better mental health as they get older; while another study found that children who spend more time engaged in adventurous 'risky' play are less likely to feel anxious and depressed. Meanwhile the Children's Alliance has also called on the government to implement a National Play Strategy to tackle the mounting mental health crisis for what it calls 'Generation Covid'.

(London Play Playwire Summer 2022. www.londonplay.org.uk)

NOTICE OF NEXT MEETING (via Zoom, details to follow)

Speaker from Early Years Ireland 10.30am. 12th October . Followed by AGM