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Historical Developments in Policy for Early Childhood Education and Care

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**Chapter overview**

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), described by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as ‘a comprehensive framework which sets the standards for learning, development and care of children from birth to five’, was first introduced for early childhood providers and schools from September 2008, with revisions made in 2012 and updates in 2014. The introduction of the EYFS thus ended a history of nearly 200 years of discussion and debate surrounding the philosophy, purpose and provision for early childhood education and care in the UK, a period where policy had been advisory rather than statutory. The discussion regarding the appropriateness of the EYFS still continues (as will be seen elsewhere in this book), but finally government policy has been clarified and ratified.

There have been several key reports and Acts of Parliament through the last two centuries that have shaped the nature of provision for children up to the age of 5 years, with most of those elements still evident at the time this book is published. The 1870 (Forster) Education Act, the series of reports from the Hadow Committee between 1923 and 1933 and the Plowden Report of 1967 together constitute the main influences, but other legislation and reports have also contributed to the current situation.

*(Continued)*
This chapter aims to help you develop an understanding of:

- the three key issues that have emerged in the development of mass education in general and specifically in pre-school education:
  - education of the masses should be undertaken for the benefit of the national economy
  - education that liberated children or was child-centred was not always popular with those in privileged positions
  - educational settings should provide nurture and care for children in addition to that provided by the family and serve as a safety net for society
- the historical developments in policy in early childhood education and care
- the policy context in which early childhood education and care is based
- the antecedents that have led to the introduction of the EYFS.

In addition, vignettes of key contributors to the development of early childhood education and care and additional material will be provided on the companion website.

Policy context

The government of education and care in Great Britain and Northern Ireland is complicated, as four countries together form the United Kingdom (UK). As a consequence of the development of the Union, separate regulations apply to Scotland and Northern Ireland than to England and Wales, with further complications arising from devolution to national assemblies during the latter stages of the twentieth century. The commonalities and differences are explored in more detail in Chapter 3, whilst the discussion in this chapter will not seek to highlight differences between the countries. Instead, the exploration of policy conducted here will consider the UK as a single entity, particularly in regard to developments during the nineteenth century. It was during this century that the major elements of discourse emerged.

The EYFS, as will be explored more fully in Chapter 2, establishes a framework for children up to the age of 5 years, an age at which the UK required children to participate in compulsory education following the passing of the 1870 Education Act. Provision for younger children was thus non-compulsory, although there is ample evidence of education and care outside of the home and family environment since the
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first infant school was established by Robert Owen in New Lanark, Scotland, in 1816. In this instance children were admitted at the age of 2 and cared for while their parents were at work in the local cotton mills. As the century progressed the label attached to provision for children younger than 5 years changed, but was generally referred to as ‘nursery schools or classes’, albeit with some examples of ‘kindergarten’ and ‘babies’. The key factor here was to distinguish between the provision offered for older children, for whom ‘infant’ (generally 5 to 7 years of age) and ‘junior’ (over the age of 7 years) schools were established as part of the drive to universal education that took place in the latter stages of the nineteenth century.

The driving forces for nursery provision were twofold: the desire for providing education appropriate to age and the desire to provide alternative care systems for young children than could be found in some social settings. These two driving forces subsequently have been features of state maintained provision and are ones that have also affected the private sector. Whilst at various times and in certain circumstances one or other of these driving forces has been uppermost in terms of policy determination, an examination of this history shows there to be consistent recognition of the centrality of the family (and mostly the mother) as being the most significant feature in the health, well-being and education of a young child. Early childhood education and care was considered supplemental to the family, therefore, and is probably best described by the joint circular on children under school age from the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education issued in 1929 to maternity and child welfare agencies and local education authorities:

The purpose of a nursery school is to provide for the healthy physical and mental development of children over two and under five years of age.

The purpose was thus twofold: ‘nurture’ and education, and these two driving forces have seldom been separated subsequently.

Influences on ‘pre-school’ provision prior to the 1870 Education Act

As indicated above, the first recorded attempt to establish an early childhood education and care setting in Lanark was posited on the need to provide care whilst parents were at work. At this time the instruction of children under 6 years of age was to consist of ‘whatever might be supposed useful that they could understand, and much attention was devoted to singing, dancing, and playing’ (Hadow, 1931: 3). Such schools were thus at first partly ‘minding schools’ for young children (mostly) in industrial areas, but they also sought to promote the children’s physical well-being, to offer opportunities for their moral and social training and to provide some elementary instruction in basic educational functions so that the children could make more rapid progress when they entered school.
At this time mainstream education was being geared to the needs of the industrial revolution, with schools for older children reflecting the immediate need of this rapidly growing economy. ‘Schools of Industry’ were established that focused on providing the poor with manual training and elementary instruction, soon to be rivalled by ‘Monitorial Schools’, which involved the use of monitors and standard repetitive exercises so that one teacher could teach hundreds of children at the same time in one location. In both types of school the curriculum comprised basic literacy and numeracy plus practical activities related to the occupations of the age. Provision for children too young to enter these elementary schools tended, however, to mirror this curriculum rather than offer something more appropriate to their age and capability. Owen’s model of infant schools was copied, notably by Samuel Wilderspin (McCann 1966), although these schools were later criticised as having ‘a mistaken zeal for the initiation of children at too early an age to formal instruction’ (Hadow, 1931: 3).

By 1836 a child-centred approach to infant education, based on the work of Pestalozzi (the Swiss educational reformer), was being promoted through the newly initiated Home and Colonial Society. Here the curriculum specifically rejected rote-learning and was based on providing the child with a secure emotional environment and allowing their development through their senses.

Neither the utilitarian approach to schools, whereby children were trained for industry, nor the emancipatory approach envisaged within the child-centred approach was universally popular however, with key figures in society speaking out against the education of the ‘poor’. Educating children, suggested one MP in 1807, would lead ‘them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them and […] would [eventually] render them insolent to their superiors’.

Nevertheless, calls for more and better education were increasing in number and volume and were endorsed by school inspectors (Hadow, 1926: 8). From around 1830, national funds began to be made available for school building and five Acts of Parliament were passed between 1841 and 1852 designed to facilitate the purchase of land for school buildings and to provide grants for the education of the poor, with the consequence that schools were being built and school attendance was rising.

Unfortunately, and as Gillard carefully documents, successive governments had allowed a divided school system to develop in line with its class structure, a situation further exacerbated by three national education commissions, whose reports – and the Acts which followed them – each related to provision for a particular social class (Gillard, 2011). Only one of these, the Newcastle report of 1861 (and the subsequent 1870 Elementary Education Act) made provision for schools for the masses, whilst the other two continued to support the more privileged middle and upper classes. It was not until well into the second half of the next century, following the 1944 Education Act and the move to comprehensive education in the 1960s, before universal education for the masses superseded the interests of the upper and middle classes (although even now there are still many who would disagree with that statement).
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The Newcastle Commissioners commented, however, that infant schools for children up to the age of 7 were ‘of great utility’, providing places of security as well as of education, since ‘they were the only means of keeping children of poor families off the streets in town, or out of the roads and fields in the country’ (Gillard, 2011). They distinguished two types of infant schools: the public infant schools, which often formed a department of the ordinary day school; and the private or ‘dame’ schools, which were very common in both town and country, but were frequently little more than nurseries in which ‘the nurse collected the children of many families into her own house instead of attending upon the children’ (Hadow, 1933: 17). The subsequent Education Act of 1870 (the Forster Act) effectively saw the demise of Dame schools, however, as infant schools became a permanent part of the public elementary school system. The age of 5 years was established by the Act as the lower limit for obligatory attendance at public elementary schools, with separate provision to be made for infants within the school buildings.

Building regulations

Up to the 1860s, the main objective in separating the infants had been to ensure that the teaching of the older children should not be ‘unduly disturbed’ (Galton et al., 1980: 31). After 1870, building regulations required distinction between the infant school or department and the rest of the elementary school. Infants should always be on the ground floor, with a separate room for ‘babies’, and have their own outdoor playground (or exclusive use at certain times) which should have direct access to the playground and latrines without the necessity of passing through the schoolroom. Thus it was established that provision for nursery school or classes should recognise the distinctive needs of younger children and the need for play, features that can still be seen in the twenty-first century.

The rationale underpinning these regulations appears to stem from a growing knowledge of child development whereby formal ‘lessons’ should be short in length and be followed by intervals of rest, play and song. In Revised Instructions to School Inspectors issued in February 1891 it was advised that the ‘subjects of lessons should be varied, beginning with familiar objects and animals, and interspersed with songs and stories appropriate to the lessons’ (Revised Instructions to Inspectors, February 1891, cited in Hadow, 1933: 27). The guidance also noted that cooperation between the children was judged to be a key factor in their learning.

In a similar vein, the first London School Board appointed a committee chaired by Professor Huxley to review the system of school organisation (Hadow, 1931: 11). The Huxley Committee was convinced of the importance of infant schools, arguing that they protected children from evil and corrupt influences and disciplined them in proper habits, and recommended introducing Froebel’s kindergarten methods into their infant schools. Two leading principles were to be regarded as a sound basis for the education of early childhood:
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(1) The recognition of the child’s spontaneous activity, and the stimulation of this activity in certain well-defined directions by the teachers.

(2) The harmonious and complete development of the whole of the child’s faculties. The teacher should pay especial regard to the love of movement, which can alone secure healthy physical conditions; to the observant use of the organs of sense, especially those of sight and touch; and to that eager desire of questioning which intelligent children exhibit. All these should be encouraged under due limitations, and should be developed simultaneously, so that each stage of development may be complete in itself. (Hadow, 1933: 27)

Thus we can see the first emergence of the learning process in early childhood settings we are familiar with in the twenty-first century whereby young children intersperse formal lessons with play and other activities that sustain and stimulate their natural interest in the world around them.

Understanding child development into the twentieth century

By the early 1900s the environmental conditions needed for the proper physical and mental development of young children were better understood than before, and the training of children below the age of 5 was discussed by both educationalists and doctors. Educationalists argued that the elementary schools were not providing a suitable type of education for under-5s, while doctors suggested that attendance at school was actually prejudicial to health, since it deprived young children of sleep, fresh air, exercise and freedom of movement at a critical stage in their development (Hadow, 1933: 30–31). The newly formed Local Education Authorities (LEAs), formed as a consequence of the 1902 Education Act, sought guidance on the issue. Consequently, the national Board of Education asked five women inspectors to conduct an inquiry regarding the admission of infants to public elementary schools and the curriculum suitable for under-5s. The inspectors were agreed that children between the ages of 3 and 5 did not benefit intellectually from school instruction and that the mechanical teaching which they often received dulled their imagination and weakened their power of independent observation (Board of Education, 1905). Kindergarten teachers were praised, but kindergarten ‘occupations’ – when taught mechanically in large classes – were condemned as being contrary to the spirit of Froebel, the originator of the kindergarten system, which placed emphasis on play, play materials and activities.

The discourse thus continued on the purposes of schools for children under the age of 5 with some prominent campaigners promoting the benefits of formative education, whilst some sought closure of such provision as it damaged health and others suggesting that the nursery school was the best place to bring up young children as:

All observers agree that children attending school are better looked after than by their parents, kept cleaner and tidier, than they would be if they stayed at home. […]
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One capable, motherly, experienced woman, with a suitable number of trained assistants, can superintend the tending and training of a large number of infants; while one woman with a house to clean, a family to feed and clothe, and the washing to do, cannot properly care for one. (Townshend, 1909: 4–5)

Case study

Extracts from: Reports on Children under 5 Years of Age in Public Elementary Schools by Women Inspectors of the Board of Education (1905). London: HMSO.

Miss Munday's Report

In the schools visited for the purpose of this inquiry in London all except four have a separate room or in some cases two rooms for the use of the children under five. This is so far satisfactory, though in some cases the rooms are very small. In situation and aspect, however, they leave much to be desired. Many are due north, or north-east, thus practically sunless.

The furniture of our infant babies’ room still chiefly consists of a huge gallery constructed to hold nominally forty to sixty children, but often containing as many as eighty at the end of the educational year, or if classes have to be put together owing to the lack of sufficiency of staff.

Arrangements for sleeping, either cots or frames, are provided in a few schools, but in some are never used owing to the danger of spreading dirt, infectious and contagious diseases through their use. Four head mistresses informed me that they used to have arrangements for sleeping in the baby rooms, but that they had to have them removed for sanitary reasons. One head mistress told me that she would like a cot in the baby room, but when I asked her if she would put her own little girl, present at school, to rest in it after certain other children had used it, she replied rather indignantly and inconsistently, ‘most certainly not’.

Reflective task

- After you have studied Chapters 1 and 2 drawing on the key policies and reports that have led to the EYFS becoming statutory, reflect on how the political landscape has changed our views of childcare. Do you see any differences from the twenty-first century child and this case study?
Greater clarity on purpose was therefore sought throughout the following period, which included the Great War of 1914–18 and the economic depression of the 1930s, which caused immense poverty.

**Shaping early childhood provision through the twentieth century**

Through the 1921 Education Act LEAs were empowered to provide or aid nursery schools for 2–5-year-olds, although these schools were to attend to the ‘health, nourishment, and physical welfare’ of children attending such schools, including, in one memorable phrase, the ‘cleansing of verminous children’. Even though the Board of Education would make grants for such schools provided they were inspected by the LEA, there was no obligation to do so and a survey undertaken by the Consultative Committee in 1908 showed that, from the 327 LEAs in England and Wales, 32 wholly excluded children under 5 from their elementary schools, 154 retained all children between 3 and 5, while the remaining 136 took a middle course, retaining some and excluding others (Board of Education, 1908). Thus the pattern was set for the next 100 years in that government seemed convinced of the need for nursery education, yet it was not until the twenty-first century that funding matched this desire, a situation perhaps best summed up in the Plowden Report, which noted ‘Nursery education on a large scale remains an unfulfilled promise’ (CACE, 1967: 116).

Whilst there was still an active debate at this time about the nature of primary education, there was growing interest in the works of John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Edmond Holmes, Margaret and Rachel McMillan and Susan Isaacs (see companion website for vignettes of their work). The Hadow committees of 1931 and 1933, which focused on the needs of young children, can be accredited with most successfully taking account of these influences, whilst still recognising the need for children’s health and thus defining the purpose and desired processes of early childhood education and care (Hadow, 1931 and 1933). The reports made recommendations that would shape the national education system for the rest of the century, with Lady Plowden herself confirming that ‘we did not invent anything new’ (Plowden, 1987: 120). In its conclusion the Hadow Committee of 1933 urged the provision of early childhood education and care for children between the ages of 2 and 5 years, stating:

… it is a desirable adjunct to the national system of education; and [...] in districts where the housing and general economic conditions are seriously below the average, a nursery school should if possible be provided. (Hadow, 1933: 187–8)

The series of reports from the Hadow Committee between 1926 and 1933, together with the Spens Report from 1938, which focused on secondary schooling, formed the basis of the discussion around educational provision undertaken by the coalition government during the Second World War of 1939–45.
Planning for a post-war society began in 1940 and was based on the desire, stated by the war-time coalition leader Winston Churchill, of ‘establishing a state of society where the advantages and privileges which hitherto have been enjoyed only by the few, shall be far more widely shared by the men and youth of the nation as a whole’ (Taylor, 1977: 158). This was to lead to the provision of free universal education for all children and young people aged 5–18 through the 1944 Education Act. This was intended to be the establishment of a tri-partite educational system consisting of compulsory primary and secondary education, with further, non-compulsory education beyond the age of 15. Significantly, however, nothing was included about pre-schools provision, although in 1948 the Nurseries & Child-Minder Regulation Act was published, which required local health authorities to register and monitor premises where children under the age of 5 years were looked after for a substantial part of the day. Once again we can see, therefore, the continued engagement of the education and health authorities in the management of pre-school provision.

A Labour government was elected in 1945 and pursued a series of initiatives, including the establishment of the National Health Service, which together sought to create a welfare state to reduce poverty and the influence of social class. When a Conservative government under the leadership of Churchill came to power in 1951, however, it immediately cut spending on education. In the ensuing 13 years of Conservative government, however, they accepted the notion that increased investment in education led to national economic growth. Consequently, public expenditure on education rose from 3% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in 1953–4 to 4.3% in 1964–5, with a concomitant huge improvement in educational provision (Gillard, 2011).

This investment in education was not directed to the under-5s, however, despite a growth in demand that was driven both by greater numbers of women entering employment and increasing numbers of parents desiring some pre-school education for their children. In fact, nursery education during the 1950s faced a long period with no expansion even though this was a time of relative government prosperity. The answer to greater provision, the government signalled through Circular 8/60, lay in the private and voluntary sectors, as there was to be no expansion of local authority nursery school provision (Cleave et al., 1982). Day nurseries only provided a very small number of places, however, and in their absence the Playgroup Movement was started. In 1961 a young London mother, Belle Tutaev, wrote to the Guardian newspaper about how, in the absence of a state nursery place for her young daughter, she had set up a group of her own. The idea proved attractive and groups grew in number dramatically, not only providing necessary care for children but also becoming valuable places of nurture through the direct involvement of parents. By 1973 the Secretary of State, Sir Keith Joseph, described the family support they offered as ‘an essential social service’ (Pre-School Learning Alliance, 2012).
Case study

Belle Tutaev and the birth of playgroups

As a young mother and teacher living in London, Belle Tutaev started the Playgroup movement in 1961 by writing a letter to the Guardian. In the letter, published on 25 August 1961, she asked the Education Minister for more nursery schools and play facilities for children under 5 and encouraged mothers to start their own provision for under-5s.

What happened next?

The response was overwhelming, from people wanting to establish such groups and from some already running them. Belle borrowed a typewriter, set up a duplicator in her garage and started to put people in touch with one another. Within a year, 150 members attended the first AGM of the Pre-school Playgroups Association, which was to become a major educational charity.

By 1966 membership had increased to 1,300 and the new organisation opened its first office, with a staff of two. Within the next year membership almost doubled again, to 2,200, and the Department for Education and Science provided the charity with a grant to employ its first national adviser.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance continued to grow and now supports more than 800,000 children and their families in England through its membership network of more than 14,000 day nurseries, sessional pre-schools, and parent and toddler groups. It directly manages 493 early childhood settings, including 113 registered childcare and early childhood settings, predominantly in socially and economically disadvantaged areas.

Belle was awarded the OBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in 2012 for services to children and families.

Plowden Report

Most commentators recognise the investigation carried out by the Central Advisory Council for Education (CACE: The Plowden Report) in 1967 as being the defining moment for child-centred primary education. Prior to this, and despite the intentions underpinning the 1944 Act, there had been little progress in changing the secondary selection system. Most primary education had been geared to the examination culture of the 11 Plus, the entrance test that determined whether children in the state-maintained
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sector went to grammar, technical or secondary modern schools, with selection all too often becoming the main determinant of life chances. The newly elected Labour government sought to change this inequity and published Circular 10/65, which began with the bold declaration that it intended ‘to end selection at eleven plus and to eliminate separatism in secondary education’ (DES, 1965: para.1). This was the first call for comprehensivisation of the secondary sector and it was in the spirit of the time that the Plowden Committee was established to review primary education and was described as ‘a welcome push in the direction of solving the central problem of educational inequality through its concern with the mainstream of state-provided schools for the vast majority’ (Halsey and Sylva, 1987).

The Plowden Report was the first thorough review of primary education since Hadow (1931) and was commissioned at a time of great change in educational policies. The essence of the findings from the inquiry document was that at ‘the heart of the educational process lies the child’ (CACE, 1967: 1: 7), a philosophy that:

espoused child-centred approaches in general, the concept of ‘informal’ education, flexibility of internal organisation and non-streaming in a general humanist approach – stressing particularly the uniqueness of each individual and the paramount need for individualisation of the teaching and learning process. (Galton et al., 1980: 40)

Whilst not focusing specifically on the under-5s, the committee agreed that nursery provision on a substantial scale was desirable, not only on educational grounds but also for social, health and welfare considerations (1: 296). There should be a large expansion of nursery education which, however, they considered, should be part-time as young children should not be separated for long from their mothers. In the words of Susan Isaacs: the nursery school is not a substitute for a good home: its prime function […] is to supplement the normal services which the home renders to its children and to make a link between the natural and indispensable fostering of the child in the home and social life of the world at large’ (1: 301). In a list of thirteen recommendations the committee determined that, in addition to sentiments already expressed, nurseries should be: for children aged 3–5, the responsibility of education rather than health authorities and under the ultimate supervision of qualified teachers. Such provision should be funded as non-profit-making nursery classes in primary schools or separate nursery centres and to be subject to inspection in a similar manner to all other educational provision (1: 343). The Plowden Committee thus set the standard for nursery provision for the next fifty years.

Austerity rules

The impetus provided by the Plowden Report led to plans for a ten-year expansion of facilities for the under-5s in the government White Paper that withdrew Circular 8/60 entitled: ‘Education: A Framework for Expansion’ (DES, 1972). Places were to be
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available for half of all 3-year-olds and 90% of all 4-year-olds by 1982 and investment was also to be made into playgroups and the training of specialist teachers and assistants, principally through the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB). The 1970s were a period of economic depression, however, shaped by labour disputes and the oil crisis of 1971–3 which together saw the demise of the ‘post-war [welfare] consensus’ (Chitty, 2004: 31). In the absence of continued prosperity, further investment leading towards universal pre-school education was suspended.

The following years featured successive Conservative and Labour governments wrestling with difficult economic conditions that eventually led to application to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial support and the ‘Winter of Discontent’ in 1978, both of which paved the way for the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979. The ensuing period was based on a market-driven policy whereby businesses and public services were to survive, thrive or die according to their use and popularity. The twin-track policy in education was to transfer power from local to central government and to transform schooling from a public service to a market economy. With a drive to reduce inflation proving unpopular and producing increasing social unrest over the ensuing years Thatcher eventually lost power in 1990, by which time investment in education had slumped dramatically in terms of proportion of GDP. In short, there had been no focus of attention on pre-school education with most effort, discourse, policy and legislation focusing on compulsory schooling.

Reflective task

- Reflect on the current economic situation and with reference to the above section, ‘Austerity rules’. Can you identify any similarities and differences?

Resourcing issues

Seemingly the only emergent policy issue during the period of austerity described above that was relevant to children of pre-school age was the prospect of ‘school vouchers’. The prominent Conservative politician Keith Joseph, also Secretary of State for Education from 1981 to 1986, was a champion of the market place philosophy based on the belief that more provision by the independent sector would increase competition and provide more choice for parents. During the 1990s a number of government policies were introduced that encouraged the use of formal childcare, based on the notion of attracting people to work rather than remaining on social welfare. Tax relief for employer-provided workplace childcare was introduced in 1990, for example, followed by the reform of the Family Credit programme for working parents.
in 1994, which allowed some to claim deduction of childcare costs in income assessment. When vouchers for all parents of 4-year-olds to buy part-time nursery school or playgroup places were introduced in 1996 it was on the back of a long debate relating to the marketisation of education.

The incoming Labour government of 1997 brought radical changes to the field of early childhood education and care. In a similar manner to the previous government, it was high on the Labour government’s agenda to minimise poverty and increase quality in early childhood education and care by modernising the services. They demonstrated the commitment of the new government to raising quality in early childhood education and care by investing money in the sector, as well as in research. The voucher scheme was replaced in 1997 with a Nursery Education Grant (NEG) which was paid to providers rather than parents. This was followed by the launch of the National Childcare Strategy in 1998, based on the notion of a mixed economy under the banner of ‘partnership’. This was the first time in British history the government recognized the need for a national childcare policy (Lewis and Lee, 2002). Childcare provision became the responsibility of the Department for Education and Employment, who introduced the first Childcare Unit in 1998.

Consequently the administrative boundary between childcare and early childhood education has been eroded through the funding mechanisms provided by government. Funding channelled through local government, the supply side of funding, has often been allied to funding received by parents, the demand side, that has led to most working parents in the UK constructing ‘packages’ of childcare by using both (Lewis and Lee, 2002). For pre-school providers, and notably playgroups, it created a radical shift as many state-maintained schools were attracted by additional funds and either lowered admission ages for Reception classes or opened new nursery units. By 2001, parents in the UK were spending over £3 billion on childcare, including £1.33 billion on day nurseries – 15% more than in 2000. This was an increase fuelled by a steady rise in employment rates of women with pre-school children, an increasing preference for nursery provision over other forms of childcare and increasing government support to help parents meet the costs (DfES, 2001).

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Into the new millennium

At the beginning of the new millennium, childcare categorised as education could take place in: nursery schools (public or private), nursery classes in schools, reception classes in schools, playgroups and pre-schools, and occasionally with suitably qualified and registered childminders in private homes. Childcare categorised as care could take place in playgroups and pre-schools (in the voluntary sector); out-of-school clubs on school sites, day nurseries, family centres and Early Excellence Centres (in the state sector); day nurseries and community day nurseries,
out-of-school clubs (in the independent sector); with childminders, nannies and au
pairs (in the private sector). Childcare provision designated as education must meet
different standards, and is differently regulated from childcare provision that is
designated as care. Thus, provision for the education of 3- and 4-year-olds could
be offered by childcare centres that registered as education providers (Lewis and
Lee, 2002).

By this time government policy intentions had shifted to aiming to provide a better
start in life for deprived children, using education as a tool. Pre-school education was
seen as a key aspect of helping children to break the ‘cycle of deprivation’ (Baldock
et al., 2009). This did not translate, however, into a long-term ‘coherent policy except
in so far as practitioners and local politicians made something of any opportunities
they offered’ (Baldock et al., 2009: 20). The government’s commitment to improving
early childhood education and care was shown by the launch of the Excellence in
Schools programme (DfEE, 1997). In this White Paper the targets within early child-
hood education and care for the year 2002 were set out. There was an emphasis on
improving quality in early childhood for all children from the age of 4 years, to meet
the local needs of childcare and education, and to improve good practice in early child-
hood. Cohen et al. (2004), in their studies of early childhood education and care systems
of national governments in three countries – England, Scotland and Sweden – and on
the types of children’s services found there, summarised the key features of the post-
1997 period regarding children’s services as:

Split departmental responsibility between welfare (DoH), responsible for day-care/child-
care services, and education (DfEE) responsible for nursery and compulsory schooling.
(Cohen et al., 2004: 55)

This dichotomy of responsibilities between childcare services and formal schooling
had an impact on funding, the structuring of provisions and, of course, upon different
levels of the workforce. As a result this led to a ‘fragmented body of services […] low
levels of publicly funded childcare and early education […] a growing marketisation
of all services […] and an increasing role for central […] controlling government’
(Cohen et al., 2004: 55–6).

It was evident by this stage that the government was seeking to decentralise chil-
dren’s services by delegating the concomitant responsibilities and implementation to
local authorities. The government intended to remain in control, however, by setting
targets with specific measurements, with the focal point for measurement to be the
assessment of all children. Subsequently the decentralisation of early childhood edu-
cation and care began with the requirement of all local authorities to set up an Early
Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) with responsibility for deliver-
ing the National Childcare Strategy (DfES, 2001). The aim of EYDCP was to operate
independently of local authorities to expand childcare provision. This service was later
replaced by Children’s Trusts in 2004.
Towards integrated provision

The Early Excellence Centres programme had been set up in 1997 to develop models of good practice in integrating early education, care and family support services. The government's aim was to establish a network of holistic, one-stop services for children and parents that were to be run under local control and in the context of local need. The commitment to 'lift families out of poverty' and improve educational outcomes for all children was translated into an ambitious and well-funded intervention programme, Sure Start, which commenced in 1998. Sure Start was designed to be a ten-year programme for children under 4 years of age and for families living in deprived and disadvantaged conditions. Glass (1999), influenced by the Head Start intervention programme in the USA, founded Sure Start as an intervention programme to help tackle poverty and offer a good start in life to disadvantaged and deprived children.

Sure Start local programmes were transferred into Children's Centres in 2006, a somewhat precipitate move as the action was taken before the evaluation of Sure Start was complete (as will be discussed further in Chapter 2). It appeared that the government was determined to implement changes and sometimes these changes were probably too hasty. Local authorities felt they were unable to apply these in practice and early childhood practitioners were left with uncertainty as to how best to proceed.

As part of the continued process of devolution, however, local authorities were given the responsibility to develop the Children and Young People’s Plan by 2006, establish the Children’s Trust, and appoint Directors of Children’s Services. They were also responsible for the unification of inspection systems across all children’s services. A ten-year strategy for childcare (DfES, 2004) was developed which aimed to provide out-of-school childcare for all children aged between 3 and 14 years. In consequence, by the end of the first decade of the new millennium expectations and minimum standards for provision of early childhood education and care had been established and consolidated through the statutory framework of the EYFS, with appropriate advice available through the accompanying non-statutory guidance. The evolution and effectiveness of the EYFS, including the revised version of 2012, will be reported and evaluated in the next chapter.

Reflective task

- Study the chapter and with the help of Table 1.1 below reflect on the ideology of each government. Can you identify whether their policies reflect their ideology?
Policy Context

Summary

The policy context explored in this chapter has focused on the legislation and administrative arrangements framing provision over the last 200 years for pre-school children in the UK, and specifically in England and Wales. This process of policy evolution has consistently featured the dichotomy of provision for education and care, with evidence of government intent often matched by a failure to provide adequate funding. By the beginning of the new millennium, however, there were clear indications (by successive governments) that the policy intention was to break the cycle of deprivation and provide a better start in life by using early childhood education and care as a tool. Despite the introduction of a national childcare strategy, however, this has not yet developed into a wholly coherent policy, although the discussion emanating from recent research has informed the development and amendment to the EYFS which will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

Key points to remember

### Table 1.1  
**Historical developments in policy in early childhood education and care**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Key changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>First infant school established in Scotland</td>
<td>Children aged 2 years and above cared for whilst parent(s) worked in local cotton mill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Home and Colonial Society promotes Pestalozzi approach to child-centred education</td>
<td>Early childhood curriculum rejects rote-learning and promotes learning through use of senses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Newcastle Report</td>
<td>Provision of schools for the masses with infant schools up to age of 7 years ‘of great utility [...] to keep children of poor families off the streets’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>(Forster) Education Act</td>
<td>Education for under-5s was non-compulsory, but where provided was to have separate building requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890s</td>
<td>Kindergarten movement</td>
<td>Based on Froebel’s theory and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Revised Instructions to Inspectors</td>
<td>Formal ‘lessons’ should be short in length and be followed by intervals of rest, play and song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900s</td>
<td>Work of Dr Maria Montessori</td>
<td>Emphasis on structured learning, sense training and individualisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Board of Education appoints five Women Inspectors to conduct an inquiry regarding the admission of infants to public elementary schools and the curriculum suitable for under-5s</td>
<td>1905 Report indicates children between the ages of 3 and 5 did not benefit intellectually from school instruction and that the mechanical teaching which they often received dulled their imagination and weakened their power of independent observation</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Historical Developments in Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Education Act</td>
<td>LEAs were empowered to provide or aid nursery schools for 2–5-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923–3</td>
<td>Series of reports from Hadow Committee(s)</td>
<td>Defining the purpose and desired processes of early childhood education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Ministry of Health and the Board of Education issues Joint Circular on maternity and child welfare to local authorities</td>
<td>Care and education were the two driving forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930/33</td>
<td>Work of Susan Isaacs</td>
<td>Two influential books on the intellectual and social development of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Education Act</td>
<td>Expansion of education to the masses, but still not early childhood provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Nurseries &amp; Child-Minder Regulation Act</td>
<td>Local health authorities to register and monitor premises for children under the age of 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Government Circular 8/60</td>
<td>Greater nursery school provision to be in the private and voluntary sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Bella Tutaev letter to the Guardian newspaper</td>
<td>First playgroup established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>The 'Plowden Report'</td>
<td>Part-time nursery provision confirmed desirable on both educational grounds and for social, health and welfare considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child</td>
<td>The Convention (discussed in Chapters 4 and 14) acknowledged that:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Children are seen as full individual human beings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Children are active members of their societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents/family are primary cares and protectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Society has obligation to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The key contribution of the CRC in early childhood education is that governments start thinking of children's participation in policy making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Government policies on tax relief for employers and Family Credit programme for working parents</td>
<td>Principle of educational vouchers established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>19 April 1990 the UK signed the convention</td>
<td>This meant that the UK had to produce a report on how they meet children’s rights and what they plan to do at a policy level to implement all children’s rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>UNCRC confirmed 16 December 1991 and came into force on 15 January 1992</td>
<td>With the final ratification of the UNCRC, the UK government was committed to make all laws, policy and practice compatible (although it registered some reservations which have since been removed). As a result of the rights being embedded in the law and policies, UNCRC should be followed and referred to by courts, tribunals and other administrative processes when making decisions that affect children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>New Labour government</td>
<td>Introduction of Nursery Education Grant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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(Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>National Childcare Strategy</td>
<td>Notion of a mixed economy under the banner of ‘partnership’ (i.e. integrated services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Establishment of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP)</td>
<td>Decentralisation of early childhood education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Every Child Matters (ECM)</td>
<td>One of the most important policy initiatives and development programmes in response to UNCRC. It aimed to reform services and covered children and young adults up to the age of 19, or 24 for those with disabilities. Its main aims were for every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support needed to: stay safe, be healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Children Act 2004</td>
<td>Its primary purpose was to help local authorities and/or other entities to better regulate official intervention in the interests of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Children and Young People’s Plan</td>
<td>Establishment of the Children’s Trust and appointment of Directors of Children’s Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) introduced</td>
<td>Framework of standards for learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government</td>
<td>The UK government began a series of reductions in public spending, intended to reduce the budget deficit. The cuts affected the National Health Service, welfare, education and other public institutions. Policy paper 2010 to 2015 on childcare and early education published (updated 8 May 2015 – see below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Tickell Review</td>
<td>Reviewed the implementation of the EYFS and recommended changes and revisions in the EYFS with emphasis on safeguarding children and fewer bureaucratic processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Revised version of the EYFS</td>
<td>Introduced to ensure less bureaucracy and to increase the role of parents and carers in their children’s learning, reduce the learning and development areas and give added emphasis on the welfare and safeguarding of children; introduction of Age Two check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June: Nutbrown Report published: an independent review of early education and childcare qualifications</td>
<td>The report recommended a clear, rigorous system of qualifications be set in place to ensure a competent and confident workforce as the existing system was confusing, with many practitioners not holding any qualifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Historical Developments in Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Introduction of Early Years Educators</td>
<td>Specialist educators from September with a Level 3 qualification approved by NCTL. The ambition was for the majority of staff working in the early childhood to be Early Years Educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Further revisions to EYFS Early Intervention Foundation published</td>
<td>Stronger emphasis on safeguarding children and readiness for school. Implemented in September 2014 The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) was established to support local agencies and national policy makers to tackle the root causes of problems for children and young people, rather than waiting to address issues once they are embedded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2015 | 2010–2015 government policy: Childcare and Early Education (revised 8 May 2015) | Aims to:  
- extend early learning places to around 40% of all 2-year-olds from September 2014  
- help parents arrange more informal childcare by allowing them to pay a neighbour or relative not registered with Ofsted for up to 3 hours of childcare a day  
- introduce new childminder agencies that will provide rigorous training and match childminders with parents  
- encourage more schools to offer nursery provision and extend provision from 8am to 6pm  
- help schools to offer affordable after-school and holiday care, either alone or working with private or voluntary providers  
- reduce unnecessary regulations to help good nurseries expand their business  
- Progress Check at Age Two and EYFS Profile become the Integrated Review at Age Two  
- Early Years Pupil Premium – March  
- Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) – May  
- 2-year-old early education entitlement – May  
- Childcare Bill – July  
- Introduction of the Baseline Assessment – September  
(For more information and updates visit www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/early-years/latest) |
| 2015 | Introduction of Baseline Assessment | From September 2014 children entering Reception will be assessed face-to-face individually to identify the level of their development |
| 2015 | Clear funding stream identified for supporting early childhood education and care | • Progress Check at Age Two and EYFS Profile become the Integrated Review at Age Two  
• Early Years Pupil Premium – March  
• Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) – May  
• 2-year-old early education entitlement – May  
• Childcare Bill – July  
• Introduction of the Baseline Assessment – September  
(For more information and updates visit www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/early-years/latest) |
Policy Context

Points for discussion

• With reference to the key historical developments summarised in Table 1.1, what similarities and differences in the policy changes can you identify among them?

• Key to recent government policies is the integration of services, the development of a skilful early childhood workforce, and parental involvement. How have these changes affected your practice?

• Discuss the role of the economy in policy formation and the implications for early childhood education and care.

Further reading


For an overview of the social constructions of childhood and education:

For an overview of the key influential philosophers in education:

Useful websites

For more information on government policies and documents:
www.education.gov.uk/publications

References

Board of Education (1905) Reports on Children under Five Years of Age in Public Elementary Schools, by Women Inspectors. Cd 2726. London: HMSO.
Historical Developments in Policy


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