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Introduction: The state we’re in

Peter Moss and Claire Cameron

Today’s [early childhood education and care] services are not simply inadequate in quantity; they are also fragmented and unresponsive to changing needs. One of the few benefits of the present bleak economic climate is that it may offer a chance to review existing policies, experiment with new options and work out better policies not only for pre-school services but for families with young children. (Tizard et al. 1976, 226)

A system flawed and dysfunctional

The words with which we start this chapter appeared in All Our Children: Pre-school services in a changing society, published more than 40 years ago, written by members of the UCL Institute of Education, University College London (IOE). The sad thing is that they could as easily have been written today about England’s system of early childhood education and care (ECEC), a widely used term referring to the range of services providing part-time or full-time education and care for children below compulsory school age, as well as (in some cases) support for their families. This is a book about the continuing need for review, experiment and discussion, written to address the continuing need for transformative change of a system that remains fundamentally flawed and dysfunctional, still fragmented and unresponsive. It is a book about decades of policy neglect followed by intense policy activism, but with no pause for thought, no time given to democratic deliberation about options, in order to guide the transition from one state to the other. It is, therefore, a book about how England missed opportunities to reflect and change direction. But it is a book,
also, about possibilities and hope, about how it might be possible, even at this late stage, to alter course and create an inclusive, coherent and democratic system of early childhood services.

The flaws in the existing system are many, and will be explored in greater detail in the chapters that follow. Despite responsibility for and regulation of ECEC now being unified in one central government department, the Department for Education (DfE), and one central government agency, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted), the ECEC system in England remains deeply split, divided between ‘childcare’ and ‘education’ when it comes to access, funding, workforce and provision; split, too, due to the absence in policy of an integrative and holistic concept, which understands care and education as fundamentally inseparable. The system is fragmented between many types of provision – day nurseries, childminders, preschools (formerly playgroups), nursery and reception classes in primary schools, nursery schools, children’s centres and afterschool clubs – each offering different services to different groups of families and children, producing a disparate sector that both lacks coherence and is socially divisive. The system is further riven by services, both private and public, operating in a market where they must compete for the custom of parent-consumers. To add to this picture of confusion and disconnection, there is an absence of policy synergy with other relevant areas, such as parental leave and health.

The workforce is clearly a vital ingredient in the success or otherwise of any ECEC system. But in England it is not only divided, between a minority of teachers and a large and growing majority of childcare workers, but the latter are professionally and socially devalued, many surviving on poverty wages while, at the same time, many parents complain of the high fees they have to pay. Overall, the workforce remains as gendered as ever, almost entirely reliant on women workers, a major contributor to the gender gap in pay and prospects.

Compared with most other countries, primary education starts early, prematurely curtailing the period of early childhood education. Compulsory school age is 5, but children enter primary school reception classes at age 4. This leaves a weak ECEC sector, short in length and often requiring children to be moved from one type of service to another, and subservient to the compulsory school sector and its agenda, its role increasingly defined in terms of ‘readying’ or ‘preparing’ children for primary school. As such, it is vulnerable to ‘schoolification’, a process that, as the first Starting Strong report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warned, threatens to bring inappropriate practice into early childhood education, narrowing the
education on offer as a focus on literacy and numeracy leads ‘to neglect of other important areas of early learning and development’ (OECD 2001, 42). Such constriction of purpose has been compounded by an increasing policy obsession with predefining and measuring outcomes. This has led to what Loris Malaguzzi, one of the twentieth-century’s greatest educational thinkers and practitioners and a leading figure in the development of early childhood education in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia, described as ‘prophetic pedagogy’ – that ‘knows everything beforehand, knows everything that will happen, does not have one uncertainty’; and to ‘Anglo-Saxon testology’ – with ‘its rush to categorise … which is nothing but a ridiculous simplification of knowledge, and a robbing of meaning from individual histories’ (Cagliari et al. 2016, 421, 378).

Last but not least, the system suffers from a serious democratic deficit. Democracy is missing from ECEC as a stated fundamental value, as a daily practice, and as a means of governing the system and individual services. But there is also an absence of democratic accountability to local communities, as the role of elected local authorities in the system has been hollowed out, leaving the field to a powerful central government (overseeing policy and regulation, and directly responsible for a growing number of academy and free schools) and a myriad of individual services, many run as businesses for profit.

Before going further, and delving into the reasons for this litany of failings, we want to make it clear that our criticisms in this chapter and those that follow are not aimed at those who work in the early childhood sector but, rather, at the system that determines the conditions under which they operate. Early childhood workers have a demanding and important job, and they show commitment to doing it well, despite most being atrociously paid and poorly valued by society. There are examples, too, of individual services that are working with innovation and creativity. But these efforts are made despite of, not because of, the system; a system that fails the workforce as much as it does children and their families.

How did we get here?

Policy neglect: Post-war years

The blame for the flawed and dysfunctional state that ECEC is in today can be laid at the door of a combination of policy neglect and ill-considered policy activism. For five decades after the Second World
War, successive governments showed little interest in ECEC; other areas of education were prioritised, while there was a pervasive indifference, even hostility, to doing anything to support maternal employment (even statutory maternity leave was not introduced until the mid-1970s, the United Kingdom (UK) lagging behind the rest of Europe). Some (mostly left-wing-controlled) local authorities developed part-time nursery education for 3- and 4-year-olds in school-based nursery classes, more and more 4-year-olds were taken into reception classes, and playgroups emerged as a private response by parents and communities to the lack of public provision. Childminders were the main formal provision for children whose parents were employed, though for many years they were sorely neglected. For many years, too, the main day nursery presence was provided by local authorities, as a limited and welfare-orientated service for children deemed to be ‘in need’ or whose single parent was studying or at work. Private day nurseries were few and far between. Overall, therefore, public support for ECEC, such as it was, depended on local authorities, or at least those who gave it some priority, while workforce development figured not at all.

This began to change towards the end of the 1980s, as the number of women with young children re-entering the labour market increased, a shift matched by a rapid growth of private day nurseries, forming a de facto ‘day care’ market, alongside the existing childminding sector. But apart from some improvements to regulation, following the 1989 Children Act, no winds of change ruffled the still surface of early childhood policy until towards the end of the Conservative hegemony, under Prime Minister John Major, when tentative support was introduced for the ‘childcare’ costs of low-income families (the so-called ‘childcare disregard’ for families on benefits) and a commitment was made to introduce universal part-time nursery education. A pilot scheme was put in place to test the use of vouchers as the means to fund this expansion, the intention being to stimulate market competition in provision of this proposed entitlement.

**Policy priority: 1997–2010**

These first stirrings of the winds of change turned to a full-blown gale with the election of a Labour government in 1997. Early childhood education and care became, almost overnight, a policy priority, adopted as a vital component in achieving key government objectives, including increasing women’s employment and reducing child poverty, but much else besides.
These ambitious aspirations are apparent in a 2002 ‘interdepartmental childcare review’ document from the Cabinet Office:

The availability of good quality, affordable childcare is key to achieving some important government objectives. Childcare can improve educational outcomes for children. Childcare enables parents, particularly mothers, to go out to work, or increase their hours of work, thereby lifting their families out of poverty. It also plays a key role in extending choice for women by enhancing their ability to compete in the labour market on more equal terms …

Childcare can also play an important role in meeting other top level objectives, for example in improving health, boosting productivity, improving public services, closing the gender pay gap and reducing crime. The targets to achieve 70 per cent employment among lone parents by 2010 and to eradicate child poverty by 2020 are those that are most obviously related. Childcare is essential for those objectives to be met. (Cabinet Office Strategy Unit 2002, 5)

We can hear in this excerpt the enthusiasm and salvationist tone of the newly converted, inspired by a belief that ECEC might provide what Ed Zigler (2003, 12), one of the founders of the Head Start early intervention programme in the United States, has called a ‘magical permanent cure for the problems associated with poverty’.

Gale-force change brought with it a constant flurry of activity: policy proposals, policy documents, policy initiatives and research reports poured out of Whitehall (see the Appendix for a timeline from 1997 to 2020 showing the main policy developments in ECEC and parenting leave, the subject of Chapter 13, in England). And much happened on the ground as a result, including:

- both policy responsibility and regulation were integrated and centralised, within the national education ministry and the national schools inspectorate
- an early years curriculum was introduced, along with an assessment procedure for 5-year-olds
- workforce qualifications were improved and a new professional role introduced
- the Sure Start early intervention programme was initiated and rapidly spread, while 3,500 children’s centres were opened in less than a decade
• entitlement to nursery education for all 3- and 4-year-olds was established and implemented
• new types of public subsidy came on stream.

Services increased throughout the period of the Labour government across most forms of provision. Private day nurseries, which as noted earlier had begun to grow under the Conservative government, continued to increase rapidly after 1997 and throughout the next 13 years (while local authority day nurseries disappeared). In a 2004 update of its national Childcare Strategy, the government could claim that the:

National Childcare Strategy has delivered an additional net 525,000 new registered childcare places in England since 1997, benefiting 1.1 million children. By 2008 the number of childcare places will have doubled since 1997. These places are in a wide range of settings. (HM Treasury 2004, 22)

These figures, it should be noted, include places for children of school age as well as those under 5 years of age.

Between 2005 and 2010, the number of places in full-time childcare for under 5s grew further by 40 per cent (from 511,000 to 716,700) (Brind et al. 2011, 54). Places for under 5s in primary schools grew from 791,500 in 2006 to 825,500 in 2010, the growth in school provision being considerably less than for full-time childcare because such provision was already quite high in 1997, due to the active policy of a substantial number of local authorities. However, as already noted, children’s centres grew from none to 3,500 in less than a decade.

Resources devoted to early childhood also increased; public expenditure on ECEC rose substantially during the 13 years of Labour government, though from a low starting point. The main additional items were the costs of the early education entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds, childcare tax credits to subsidise parents’ use of private childcare services, and the Sure Start programme followed by children’s centres. Brewer (2009) estimated that total government spending on ECEC in England in 2008/9 came to £5.3 billion – or around 0.4 per cent of GDP – with the three items above accounting for just over three-quarters (77 per cent) of this expenditure.

Yet this newfound priority, and accompanying activity, failed to fix the glaring flaws in the system in England – indeed, in some respects it made them worse. Developments in public funding only served to widen the childcare/education divide, with direct funding to services for delivering early education but a variety of subsidies paid to parents for use of
A new graduate professional qualification – the Early Years Professional (EYP) – was created, but EYPs lacked parity of status and conditions with school teachers. The government set the modest goal of a graduate leading all day nurseries by 2015, but this was never achieved and was subsequently rescinded. Children’s centres were innovative but varied in the range of services they offered (some, for example, offered family support and advice and not early education and childcare), and added to the welter of different types of services. Deliberate promotion of marketisation and private providers created more division in the system and less inclusion for children and families, with children from more-advantaged backgrounds more likely to attend private day nurseries than their less-advantaged peers.

A fundamental problem was the failure by government to make space and take time to deliberate upon the ECEC system – what there was in 1997 and what might be needed to transform it in order to remove flaws and dysfunctionalities. A report was commissioned early on from a senior Treasury official, Norman Glass, to examine early intervention – from which the Sure Start programme emerged – but there was no early report on the ECEC system overall, setting out current problems and possible future directions. England participated in the OECD’s major comparative study of early childhood policies, Starting Strong, with a review by an OECD team undertaken in 2000 – but no attempt was made to use this experience and the review’s overall conclusions to think about reform to the system. Much early childhood research was commissioned by the government, including evaluations of Sure Start and a longitudinal study of the effects of early education – but such research did not extend to studying the ECEC system overall and its effects: for example, in a system heavily reliant on markets and private provision, there was no research funded by the government into how these worked in practice and with what consequences.

Above all, there was never any democratic politics of early childhood. Loris Malaguzzi argued that education is ‘always a political discourse whether we know it or not. It is about working with cultural choices, but it clearly also means working with political choices’ (Cagliari et al. 2016, 267). Put another way, education policy and practice should be based on asking and deliberating upon political questions – questions that produce alternative, and often conflicting, answers. Such questions as: What is our image of the child, the early childhood centre, the worker in the centre? What is the purpose of early childhood education and care, what is it for? What do we mean by ‘education’ and ‘care’? What are the fundamental values of ECEC, and what ethics should it work with? It is
on the basis of such questions and the choices that they evince, produced through democratic deliberation and contestation, at different levels and engaging a full range of stakeholders, that transformative change might have been introduced after 1997. It never happened. Instead, government focused on technical questions, most famously, ‘what works?’

In the absence of such research, such reflection, such deliberation, and reinforced by the government’s belief in market solutions to public policy, the upshot was successive missed opportunities for transformation. Instead, the approach adopted was ‘more of the same’ when it came to the basic system of provision and its delivery, with various new programmes and projects grafted on to the existing ramshackle structure. In the words of a recent study of England’s post-1997 experience:

The English story was one of stalled integration. Transferring responsibility for ECEC and SACC [school-age childcare] to education initiated a process of integration, with an integrated inspection system and a 0–5 curriculum. But progress towards a fully integrated ECEC system as in Sweden, eradicating the ‘early education’/‘childcare’ divide, halted before it tackled the ‘wicked’ issues of access, funding, workforce and provision … Overall, therefore, England combined continuity in the system’s dysfunctional aspects with discontinuity in its major attempt at radical reform [children’s centres]. Diversity of providers and funding, with uniformity of content and practice, continued under the firm direction of a highly centralised government. Moreover, while much attention was paid to the impact of early childhood intervention (e.g., large national studies of Sure Start and the effectiveness of early childhood education), the overall system of ECEC and SACC was never evaluated. (Cohen et al. 2018, 11)

Policy in the age of austerity: 2010–2020

This sorry story gets sorrier if we consider what has happened since the end of Labour’s term in power. Governments since 2010 have maintained a policy interest in ECEC but continued to avoid addressing the flaws and dysfunctionalities of the system. Indeed, in some respects they have, once again, worsened:

• Increased emphasis has been placed on school readiness in revising the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, the early years curriculum).
• Another professional qualification has been introduced – the Early Years Teacher (EYT) – but again without parity of status or conditions with school teachers.

• The childcare/education split has been accentuated, both in the language of government (for example, in policy documents titled *More Great Childcare* or *More Affordable Childcare*) and in policy (for example, introducing ‘tax-free childcare’, a new subsidy for parents using ‘childcare services’ and, most egregiously, through the introduction of 30 hours’ free ‘childcare’ for 3- and 4-year-olds with employed parents).

Government policy has had other deleterious effects. Sustained austerity measures, in particular savage cuts to social security payments and local authority funding, have made life harder for many families with young children and led to a drastic reduction of children’s centres and a diminution of the role of those that survive. A report published in April 2018 (Smith et al. 2018), summarised below, paints a sorry picture of the current state of the last Labour government’s flagship policy:

As many as 1,000 Sure Start centres across the country have closed since 2009 – twice as many as the government has reported … By its peak in August 2009, there were 3,632 centres, with over half (54%) in the 30% most disadvantaged areas. However, in recent years, its status as a key national programme has diminished, accompanied by substantial budget cuts, the suspension of Ofsted inspections and increasingly uneven local provision … By 2017, sixteen authorities who had closed more than half of their centres accounted for 55% of the total number of closures. But in areas with fewer closures there’s been a reduction of services and staff, leading to fewer open access services such as Stay and Play and more parents having to rely on public transport to find a centre offering what they need … According to the report, ‘services are now “hollowed out” – much more thinly spread, often no longer “in pram-pushing distance”. The focus of centres has changed to referred families with high need, and provision has diversified as national direction has weakened, leading to a variety of strategies to survive in an environment of declining resources and loss of strategic direction.’ (Sutton Trust 2018)

The winds of change have turned decidedly chilly.
Why we’ve written this book

In our view, the ECEC system in England is a failure on many counts; it does not work for children or parents, or for workers or society. The problems are wide-ranging, deep-seated and long-lasting. Tweaking things, what the social theorist Roberto Unger (2004, lviii) describes as ‘reformist tinkering with the established system … [consisting] simply in the accumulation of practical solutions to practical problems’, is totally inadequate to the scale of the challenge. So, too, is action that ‘remains within the same mode of thought, a transformation that is only a way of adjusting the same thought more closely to the reality of things’ (Foucault 1988, 154). Without a fundamental change of thinking, a new ‘mode of thought’, change is necessarily superficial, not transformational.

That is why we call for transformative change, which starts from re-thinking, for as the philosopher Michel Foucault argues, ‘as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible’ (Foucault 1988, 154). An essential ingredient of such re-thinking is to ask, deliberate on and make choices about political questions, such as the ones cited above. From re-thinking and making new political choices may follow root-and-branch reform that tackles the flaws and dysfunctions of a system that has grown without adequate thought, rigorous examination of alternatives and democratic deliberation; as Helen Penn (2019, 5) has pointed out, an acceptance of the private market, a salient feature of ECEC services in England, ‘happened almost without debate. The market’s ubiquitous hold on the sector is rarely discussed and unconditionally accepted.’

Of course, none of this is easy. ECEC is set in its ways; interests are vested, assumptions are entrenched and ideas about what is possible are circumscribed. Nor is the current state of affairs in ECEC due to chance but, instead, it has been shaped by strong forces. For example, it is no accident that early childhood services in England are so comprehensively marketised, so reliant on private for-profit providers and so in thrall to targets and standardised assessment. Rather, this is the product of a neoliberal ideology that places great value on competition and individualism, markets and private provision, an ideology that has spread globally but has taken deepest root in the UK and the United States – and which has shrugged off all criticism with the Thatcherite mantra ‘there is no alternative’. While neoliberalism’s hegemony brings with it, as part of its armoury of governance, new public management and its principles that include defining explicit standards and measuring performance to
ensure ‘output control’ (see Moss 2013 for a fuller discussion of neoliberalism and ECEC).

Or to take another example, it is difficult to understand what has happened in ECEC in England over the last 25 years, in particular the unrestrained direction of policy from Whitehall (the seat of England’s national government in London), without appreciating just how centralised the nation is. This has been so for centuries, England long being one of the most centralised states in Europe; but it has become more so in recent years as an already powerful national government has weakened the capacity for intermediate bodies to initiate, influence or mitigate developments, bodies such as local authorities, trades unions and universities. To take one example, local authorities in England (some, not all) were pace-setters in the provision and integration of ECEC services in the 1970s through to the 1990s, but today this level of government is a pale shadow of its former self, its powers much reduced and its funding cut to the bone, with past functions assumed by either central agencies or private providers.

Given such circumstances, it would be easy to conclude that it is too late and too difficult to embark on transformative change, that ways of thinking and doing things are too encrusted to regain free movement. That is a possibility. But we have chosen to reject this conclusion. Given sufficient thought, time and commitment, given a growing awareness that there are in fact alternatives, we think transformative change is still, just, within the national grasp. After all, so much of what seems taken-for-granted today would have seemed fanciful and far-fetched only 40 years ago – there has been a lot of transformative change since 1979 in response to the growing hegemony of neoliberalism. But even neoliberalism, powerful and persistent as it is, is not immutable and is arguably in crisis – part of the profound problems of our day, rather than the solution.

Milton Friedman (1982, ix), one of the godfathers of the neoliberal regime that has spread so far and wide since the 1980s, and which reaches deep into England’s contemporary ECEC, had a clear insight about transformative change as far back as the 1960s, when his ideas had little traction:

Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.
It is with these words in mind that we address transformative change in ECEC. We have set out to examine the ECEC system in England as it exists today, developing a critique of the state we are in. We have set this critique within a wider context, of the material and health conditions of families with young children, many of whom have faced very hard times during a period of prolonged and deep austerity. Not that we think ECEC is a ‘magical permanent cure’ for poverty, homelessness and so much else that is wrong with society today. But we think it essential to start by acknowledging the reality of life for so many in contemporary England.

Important as it is, we want the book to be more than critique. We want it to be constructive and positive, paying equal attention to how to tackle the many flaws in the current ECEC system, and so bring about transformative change that will create an ECEC system that is integrated and coherent, inclusive and democratic, and that can contribute (along with other policies and services) to bettering the lives of young children and their families. Our aim, in Milton Friedman’s (1982, ix) words, is to ‘develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable’ – indeed to insist that there are indeed alternatives.

The book approaches its task of critique and transformation by drawing on experts in the field working at or otherwise connected to the IOE, each setting out the current problems in their field and proposing how to move towards transformative change. We hasten to add that we make no claim for IOE’s monopoly of ECEC wisdom; there are many other sources around the country. But we have seen the book as an opportunity to benefit from institutional connections that link up diverse disciplinary and other perspectives.

As well as domestic expertise, many contributors draw on knowledge from abroad. We think that reference to the policies and experiences of other countries is important. This is not because we believe in a simple transference model between countries; given very different past traditions, current understandings and national contexts, such simple ‘policy borrowing’, even if considered desirable, is manifestly impractical. Rather, we look to other countries for two reasons. First, to remind readers that there are alternatives, and by so doing enabling them to ‘stand against the current of received wisdom … interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode [one’s] experience and making them stutter’ (Rose 1999, 20). Second, to act as a provocation to thought and questioning – to ask why we think, talk and do things in a particular way and how might we think, talk and act differently.
What follows

Before providing the customary overview of what follows this introduction, we want to make two important points about the scope of the book. First, where are we looking? Although the focus of the book is England, we hope it will be of wider interest and relevance. While acknowledging some significant differences with other parts of the UK (for example, curriculum), to which responsibility for ECEC has been devolved, there are substantial similarities between the ECEC systems of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. And because there are similarities, too, with other anglophone countries, all of which have proven particularly susceptible to neoliberal ideology and policy, we hope that this book also speaks to readers beyond the UK.

Second, what are we looking at? We have said, at the beginning, that this book is about the system of early childhood education and care encompassing ‘the range of services providing ... education and care for children below compulsory school age as well as (in some cases) support for their families’. But the age range is not, in practice, that clear-cut. Five years old may be the official age for compulsory school attendance, but many children actually enter the primary school system before that; while aspects of ‘early childhood’ carry over into primary school, for instance the EYFS, which includes reception classes, the first year of primary school. Given that in most other countries, compulsory school age starts at 6 years, and that authors in this book make the case for following suit in England, the book strays on occasion beyond ‘up to 5 years of age’.

Having clarified these parameters, we can set out our offering. Chapters 2 and 3 provide some necessary context, examining the difficult circumstances that many young children and their families live in today, with poor health and inadequate incomes and housing. We then turn to consider early childhood education and care, investigating the divided state of the system (Chapter 4), the unhappy situation of the workforce (Chapter 5) and to what extent we can speak of a public ECEC system (Chapter 6). We consider different aspects of early childhood services themselves, and what goes on inside them, including the curriculum (Chapter 7), learning (Chapter 8), listening (Chapter 9), democracy (Chapter 10), assessment and accountability (Chapter 11) and food and eating (Chapter 12). Chapter 13 considers the relationship between ECEC and another important policy area for young children and their families, parenting leave. The book concludes (Chapter 14) with some reflections and proposals about a new direction for ECEC, as one possibility for transformative change.
The need for the book is, we believe, clear and urgent. The early childhood field in England has fallen under a dictatorship of no alternative in recent years, with critical voices largely confined to arguing how best to make adjustments to things as they are: tinkering with, rather than questioning, basic assumptions and values, structures and practices. In short, the focus has been fixed on the system as it is – the state we’re in – and not on what we as a society might want and hope for – what we want for our children. Drawing on the wealth of experience and expertise at IOE, both national and international in scope, this book aims to contest that dictatorship, to ask critical questions and to propose radical reform: in short, to put ECEC back on the political agenda as a subject that calls for political questions to be asked and political choices to be made.

Appendix


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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Labour government elected with Tony Blair as prime minister</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Government introduces early excellence centres, to provide models of high-quality, integrated services</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>• Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) announces Sure Start, targeted intervention programme for children under 4 and families</td>
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<td>• Entitlement to free part-time early education for 4-year-olds</td>
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<td>• Responsibility for childcare moved to Department for Education and Employment</td>
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<td>• National childcare strategy set out in Green Paper</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>• More generous demand subsidy for childcare costs, ‘childcare credit’</td>
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<td>• First Sure Start projects</td>
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<td>• Parental leave introduced following adoption of EU directive</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>• CSR announces further expansion of Sure Start, to reach one-third of poor children by 2003/4</td>
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<td>• Government announces plans for 900 neighbourhood nurseries in disadvantaged areas</td>
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<td>• Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Labour government re-elected</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>• Inter-departmental childcare review</td>
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2003
- Birth to Three Matters: A framework to support children in their earliest years
- The Day Care and Child Minding (National Standards) (England) Regulations
- Report of inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié
- First 32 children’s centres established; early excellence centres to become children’s centres
- More services brought into Department for Education and Skills including children’s social services; first Minister for Children
- Every Child Matters Green Paper; proposals include Children’s Trusts, common assessment framework, Sure Start children’s centres, extended schools and a Children’s Commissioner
- Paid paternity leave introduced; maternity leave extended from 9 to 12 months

2004
- Funding announced for children’s centres in 20% most disadvantaged wards by 2008; later target increased from 1,700 to 2,500 children’s centres
- Children Act [1989] 2004 requires that all sites providing for children under 8 years must be registered with Ofsted and meet national standards
- Additional funding announced to provide children’s centres in each of 20% most disadvantaged wards by 2008; later target increased from 1,700 to 2,500 children’s centres
- Entitlement to free part-time early education for 3-year-olds
- Children Act provides legal underpinning for Every Child Matters initiative; duty on health, education, youth justice and social services to cooperate; enables local authorities to set up Children’s Trusts to promote integrated working and all areas to have these Trusts by 2008
- Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children: A ten-year strategy for childcare published, including 3,500 children’s centres by 2010

2005 Labour government re-elected
- Local authorities gain more control over children’s centres; local Sure Start projects start being wound up
- Consultation paper on Children’s Workforce Strategy

2006
- Children’s centre funding to be via local authorities, not centrally; 1,000 centres open
- Childcare Act places new duties on local authorities, including to secure sufficient childcare for employed parents
- Government response to Children’s Workforce Strategy consultation, including the early years professional as new model; one in every children’s centre by 2010 and in every ‘full day care setting’ by 2015
2007  Gordon Brown becomes prime minister
  • Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) created, taking responsibility for youth justice and anti-social behaviour by young people

2008  • Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) introduced, incorporating curriculum and standards for services for children from birth until end of first (reception) year in primary school; EYFS profile to assess attainment of early learning goals (ELGs)
  • Phase 3 of children’s centre expansion begins
  • DCSF issues Practice Guidelines for the Early Years Foundation Stage. All managers must hold relevant level 3 qualification and half of other staff level 2, where there is a child aged under 8 years old

2009  • Government announces free, part-time early education to be extended to the most disadvantaged 2-year-olds
  • Apprenticeships, Skills and Learning Act places duty on local authorities to establish and maintain sufficient children’s centres to meet local needs
  • DCSF with Department for Work and Pensions, Cabinet Office & HM Treasury publish update on 10-year strategy: Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare. Building on the 10-year strategy

2010  • Target of 3,500 children’s centres reached
  • ‘Additional paternity leave’ introduced; mothers can transfer part of maternity leave to fathers

Conservative-led Coalition government elected, with David Cameron as prime minister
  • Major cuts in public funding initiated
  • DCSF becomes Department for Education (DfE); government bans term ‘Every Child Matters’
  • Free early education for 3- and 4-year-olds increased from 12.5 to 15 hours per week for 38 weeks a year (570 hours per year)

2011  • Review of EYFS

2012  • Revised EYFS introduced following review
  • Supporting Families in the Foundation Years setting out government’s vision for early help and intervention
  • Free, part-time early education for 20% most disadvantaged 2-year-olds
  • Two government policy papers: More Great Childcare and More Affordable Childcare
  • Local authorities required to produce an annual report and action plan to explain how they are ensuring there is sufficient childcare in their area
  • Foundations for Quality (the ‘Nutbrown review’) reviews ECEC qualifications, including recommendation for early years specialist with qualified teacher status
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>• Early years teacher replaces early years professional, but without qualified teacher status</td>
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| 2014 | • Introduction of free, part-time early education for 40% most disadvantaged 2-year-olds  
• Plans announced for a reception baseline assessment (RBA) to measure the abilities of 4- and 5-year-olds at the start of school  
• Shared parental leave introduced; mothers can transfer a longer period of maternity leave to fathers |
| 2015 | • Children’s centre funding down by 35% and 250 closed since 2010; reduction in services by many others  
**Conservative government elected with David Cameron as prime minister**  
• Childcare Bill published including doubling of free ‘childcare’ hours (from 15 to 30 a week) for 3- and 4-year-olds with employed parents |
| 2016 | • The phased introduction of universal credit affects childcare payments for those in receipt of this benefit. They will be eligible for up to 85% of childcare costs regardless of how many hours they work  
• First attempt at an RBA halted in face of widespread criticism  
**June 2016: United Kingdom European Union membership referendum (Brexit referendum): UK votes to leave EU. Theresa May becomes prime minister** |
| 2017 | • Revised EYFS introduced  
• ‘Tax-free childcare’ scheme starts  
• 30 hours’ free ‘childcare’ for 3- and 4-year-olds with working parents  
• A new RBA announced, to be introduced from 2020 as a baseline measure to track pupils’ progress during primary school  
**Minority Conservative government elected with Theresa May as prime minister** |
| 2018 | • New ELGs announced and revised EYFS piloted |
| 2019 | • Second attempt at an RBA piloted  
• DfE launches a public consultation on revising the EYFS, including proposed changes to the ELGs and the EYFS profile assessment  
**Conservative government elected with Boris Johnson as prime minister** |

**References**


