

FIRST REPORT

The Education and Employment Committee has agreed to the following Report:— EARLY YEARS

INTRODUCTION

1. A quiet revolution has been taking place in the education of children in the early years. The greatly increased number of places for four year olds has led to practically universal provision for this age group. The number of places for three year olds has also greatly increased. The "Sure Start" programme has been introduced to improve the chances of children from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds from the very beginning of their lives. The responsibility for inspecting childminders has been transferred to OFSTED by the Care Standards Act 2000. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has issued detailed curriculum guidance for what is now termed the foundation stage (3 to 5+ years).
2. The Education Sub-committee announced on 28 July 1999 its intention to carry out an inquiry into Early Years Education. The Sub-committee published detailed terms of reference on 28 October 1999 and invited the submission of written papers by 17 January 2000. The initial terms of reference were:

The inquiry will examine:

- the appropriate content of Early Years education, taking into account the recently published Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) Early Learning Goals;
- the way in which it should be taught;
- the kind of staff that are needed to teach it and the qualifications they should have;
- the way quality of teaching and learning in the early years is assessed; and
- at what age formal schooling should start.

The inquiry will focus on education, although it will take account of other relevant early years issues including for instance the potential impact of the Government's "Sure Start" programme, currently being piloted, on early learning. The broad age range with which the inquiry is concerned is three years old up to Year 1 of primary school.

As the inquiry proceeded, a very strong case was made in the evidence received for extending our inquiry to cover in addition the years from birth to three years of age.^[1] The final sentence of the terms of reference was amended by the Sub-committee to read "The broad age range with which the inquiry is concerned is from birth to eight years of age".^[2]

3. The Education Sub-committee invited a number of experts to a private seminar on 2 February 2000. Following the seminar, we appointed Professor Christine Pascal of University College, Worcester, Mrs Rosemary Peacocke, the Chair of the Oxfordshire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, and Professor Kathy Sylva of the Department of Education, University of Oxford, as specialist advisers to the Sub-committee for the Early Years inquiry. We are very grateful to these distinguished experts for their invaluable assistance.
4. We held six formal oral evidence sessions at Westminster between March and June 2000, and we also took oral evidence in public at County Hall, Oxford on 4 April 2000. The oral evidence, which has already been made public in printed form and on the Internet,^[3] is re-published with this Report. Lists of witnesses and written papers included in the oral evidence appear at page xlvi. We received a number of other written papers, several of which are published as Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence published with this Report.^[4] A list of those papers which we have placed in the Library is at page li. We are grateful to all those who contributed to the inquiry.
5. Our inquiry was greatly helped by a paper prepared by Ms Sarah-Jayne Blakemore for the

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST)[5], which summarised scientific research on the development of the brain and the psychological development of children, and studies that have compared the outcomes of different types of pre-school education, and discussed the implications of this research for Early Years education policy.[6] We are very grateful to Ms (now Dr) Blakemore for her study, and to the British Psychological Society which funded her secondment to POST.[7]

6. The Sub-committee's visit to Oxfordshire on 4 April included visits to Early Years settings in Abingdon, Radley and Oxford. The Sub-committee also visited Bristol on 10 May and Haringey on 15 June 2000. We are grateful to all those whom the Sub-committee met on their visits, and especially to Mr Graham Badman, the Chief Education Officer of Oxfordshire County Council (a former specialist adviser to the Sub-committee), Ms Airlie Fife, Bristol City Council Education Adviser, and Ms Zena Brabazon, Head of Early Years and Play at the London Borough of Haringey, each of whom enabled the Sub-committee to get the maximum benefit from visiting a range of Early Years settings in the limited time available.

7. The Education Sub-committee also had three days of meetings and visits in Denmark from 6 to 8 June 2000. The education of very young children goes to the heart of any society's most basic values. The parallels and contrasts which the Sub-committee encountered in Denmark on a range of issues—from families where both parents go out to work, to the roots of adult illiteracy, to the assimilation of asylum-seekers—gave rise not only to useful insights into alternative approaches to bringing up children but also to fundamental questions about the assumptions which underpin the British approach to educating children. We are grateful to Mr Philip Astley, the British Ambassador in Copenhagen, and his staff, particularly Mr Peter Cook and Ms Marianne Hedegård, for arranging a most enlightening programme for the Sub-committee's short visit. Notes on all the visits, at home and abroad, appear among the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence published with this Report.

8. We adopt in this Report the terminology used in other recent publications in this area, such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*. [8]

Particular terms used include:

setting

practitioners

parents

includes local authority nurseries, nursery centres, playgroups, pre-schools, accredited childminders in approved child-minding networks and schools in the independent, private or voluntary sectors, and maintained schools

the means by which adults find out what children know or can do. It may consist of a portfolio describing children's work or play in a preschool setting or even an informal set of tasks which children are asked to complete in order to show what knowledge or skill they possess.

adults who work with children in the settings

includes legal guardians as well as mothers and fathers

the knowledge, skills or dispositions which we wish learners to develop. The knowledge, skills and attitudes which are part of the Foundation Stage curriculum are described in the QCA document *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000).

assessment

curriculum

includes "establishing relationships with children and their

parents, planning the learning environment and the curriculum, supporting and extending children's play, learning and development and assessing children's achievements and planning their next steps". —QCA *Curriculum Guidance*, page 1. By convention, the word 'teaching' is used to describe this activity, but it does not necessarily mean that it is carried out by a person with qualified teacher status.

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Reception class

A class in school in which the children have mainly reached the age of four by the 31st August just before the beginning of that school year—so most children will have their fifth birthday while in Reception.

Year 1

A class in which the children have mainly reached the age of five by the 31st August just before the beginning of that school year—so most children will have their sixth birthday while in Year 1.

PARENTS

9. Parents need to know and understand that children start learning before birth.[9] Ms Rosemary Roberts of Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) in Oxford said that there was good reason to play tapes to pregnant mothers for their babies to listen in the womb.[10] There is considerable evidence that maternal behaviours, such as smoking, drug or alcohol abuse and poor diet can affect the physical and neurological development of children.[11]

"Every child is individual and unique, and it is the task of each adult who comes in contact with the child to ensure that he or she has access to a broad and balanced curriculum. However, equality of opportunity cannot be achieved if all children are treated the same. There must be a recognition of diversity, so that there is no discrimination." —*Asquith Court Early Years Curriculum*, 1999, page 34.

10. Parents are the first and most enduring educators of their children.[12] As one private nursery explained "Parents are the most important people in a child's life. They are the child's first teachers". [13] Financial and social pressures can make it difficult for parents, particularly fathers, to contribute to their children's learning. The new concept of education in the Early Learning Goals values the contribution of parents, alongside educational settings in fostering children's learning. Dr Gillian Pugh told the Sub-committee: "If we want good outcomes for children, then we must look to the role of parents as their children's educators".[14]

11. We visited the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) project in Oxford and were interested and impressed with a programme which aims to bring about a significant improvement in educational improvement—especially in literacy—to a whole community of children, from their birth, through working with their parents and other important adults. Access to PEEP is for all children in the area, from birth to five, and a new developmentally appropriate curriculum is delivered to babies and parents in weekly sessions. Children may borrow books which they choose for themselves, and parents are given small individual booklets in which they can keep records of

their children's activities and progress. Members of the Sub-committee observed babies of only a few months listening to stories and sharing in songs and music with their parents under the guidance of a leader. PEEP complements existing pre-school and school provision and is aiming to develop a successful, sustainable, and transferable model.[15]

12. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project, which includes the Sub-committee's specialist adviser Professor Kathy Sylva as one of its principal investigators, is a five-year longitudinal study which assesses the attainment and development of children between the ages of three to seven years.[16] The study investigates the contribution to children's development of individual and family characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, languages, parental education and the educational environment at home.[17] The researchers found that the mother's own educational background was highly significant, with children whose mother had higher levels of academic qualifications showing better results on all measures.[18] Children with fathers in professional occupations showed higher attainment for literacy skills, early number skills and non-verbal skills.[19] Certain aspects of the home learning environment were found to have a significant impact, even after controlling for parents' occupations and education.[20]

13. According to Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford, another of the principal Effective Provision of Pre-School Education researchers, "One of our most important findings to date is that there is this heavy impact of social and family characteristics and background but that the educational environment that parents create can span across the different backgrounds to create a positive outcome".[21] Professor Sylva told the Sub-committee that

"ours is the first study in Britain to show that more important than the mother's educational qualifications is what the mother does with the child. Education matters, qualifications matter, but if the mother reads to the child, plays rhyming games, sings songs, talks about letters and sounds, and takes the child to the library, these behaviours at home are more important and can compensate for a low [mother's] educational level".[22]

14. Involving parents in the daily activities of their children's settings is an effective way to develop parents' skills and confidence and also to provide additional adult support for children's learning in the setting. Dr Pugh told the Sub-committee that "both parents, whether present or absent, need to understand that they have an absolutely critical role in relation to their children's learning".[23]

WAYS
ADULTS
HELP
CHILDREN
LEARN

- Encourage children to talk about how they feel, for example after a disagreement, when they are excited at seeing

snow,
or
at
the
birth
of
a
sibling.

- Create a story with children, asking them to predict what will happen next.
- Ask children to tell you about what they are going to do before they do it, and ask them to suggest possible outcomes, for example, 'It might break because there are too many

- in
it'.
- Help children to identify patterns, for example, 'He always sleeps in the day', draw conclusions, 'The sky has gone dark, it must be going to rain', explain effect, 'It sank because it was too heavy', predict, 'It might not grow in there if it is too dark', and speculate, 'What if the

bridge
falls
down?'

- Ask children to give reasons, further explanations or evidence for what they say.
- Take an interest in what and how children think and not just what they know.
- Encourage children to explore and ask about the meanings of words.
- Encourage children to explain sometimes how things work in words rather than

actions.

—
QCA
*Curriculum
Guidance,*
page
59.

15. Professor Lesley Abbott of Manchester Metropolitan University argued that "parents are educated by seeing a different model of working with their children and I think the closer involvement in their child's pre-school or early education offers the parent the opportunity to see a different model of handling, a different way of responding to their children's needs".[24]

16. Professor Abbott recognised the importance of parents being able to choose to bring up their children entirely in their own home:[25] "I would just say that parents need to know how exciting, interesting and stimulating early childhood education is".[26] Ms Ann Jamieson of the Early Childhood Education Forum reminded the Sub-committee that "before the fifth birthday all this is voluntary. This education exists for children whose parents wish it".[27] Dr Nick Tate, then the Chief Executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, made a similar point: "The nature of the balance shifts with the different years. At pre five, because people are not obliged to send their children to school, the rights and views of parents are probably rather more important and stronger at that age, or should be, than they are post five".[28] Dr Margy Whalley of the Pen Green Centre Research, Training and Development Centre in Corby called for "a power sharing approach with parents where the rhetoric about parents as first educators becomes a reality. I think we have hugely underestimated parents' aspiration for their children and the ability of parents to become advocates on behalf of their children".[29]

17. We recommend that the Government should develop a Parents' Charter to be visible in every Early Years setting which affirms the centrality of the parent in the development and education of their child and welcomes them as vital educators of their children.

18. The learning which children bring from home to their pre-school settings needs to be built upon. **We recommend that the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should make the necessary resources available to support parental participation in Early Years activities.**

19. Parents should be involved in helping practitioners to draw up individual profiles of their children to help the process of planning for their learning. We recommend that the DfEE should develop new forms of developmental profile at entry to school which would include parents' own contributions to assessment and planning. This dialogue between parents and practitioners should be one of the main points of the Parents' Charter.

20. Some parents have fewer advantages and resources than others with which to bring up children. **We recommend that there should be more support given through the health, social services and education services working together to provide assistance to parents. We recommend that the Government should work with BBC Online and other innovative providers to produce appropriate programmes on parenting.**

CHILDMINDERS

21. Childminding is an important part of care provision for parents with children—especially those under three—for a variety of reasons, but mainly because the parents are able to make choices about the type of provision which best suits their needs.[30] Parents with older children may employ a childminder to provide care before or after a half day session at playgroup or nursery class. A childminder can be near the parents' home or work, and also can be available for the parents if they work unsocial hours. Some parents prefer their child to be cared for in a home with one or two other children and always with the same carer, whom they have selected.

22. Childminders are required to register under the regulations of the Children Act 1989.[31] Their interests and needs are catered for by the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership in each local authority area. The National Childminding Association (NCMA) has welcomed some of

the 14 proposed National Standards put forward in the DfEE's consultation pack,[32] particularly that all newly registered childminders should attend a recognised childminders introductory course before, or within six months of, starting childminding.[33]

23. We are encouraged that the new proposed standards also specify that providers should meet individual care needs and promote their welfare and that they should plan and provide a broad range of activities to develop children's emotional, physical, social and intellectual capabilities. Close co-operation and partnership with parents to meet the needs of the children both individually and as a group is crucial to successful childminding. **The physical security of the children being looked after should never be compromised.** As Mr Chris Woodhead, then Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, told the Sub-committee:

"the security, the wellbeing of the child is obviously paramount and that is the first thing that we must be able to demonstrate through our regulation and inspection".[34]

24. We are very concerned that all quality national standards put forward for childcare should be of an equally high standard. The guidelines ban shaking as a punishment[35] but would allow childminders to smack children with the agreement of their parents.[36] This is totally unacceptable in our view in any setting, but particularly where the carer is often working in isolation. The National Childminding Association argued that smacking babies can never be acceptable practice in any childcare setting, and drew attention to a recent MORI poll which showed that most people believe that children under two should never be smacked by parents, let alone a by a professional childcare worker like a registered childminder.[37]

25. We are equally concerned about the proposal that childminders should be allowed to smoke while caring for children. In no other setting would this be allowed.[38] In its recent Report,[39] the Health Select Committee drew attention to evidence from the Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health who concluded that "smoking in the presence of infants and children is a cause of serious respiratory illness and asthmatic attacks. Sudden infant death syndrome ... is associated with exposure to environmental tobacco smoke. The association is judged to be one of cause and effect"[40] and the report of the Confidential Enquiry into Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy which indicated that Sudden Infant Death Syndrome was substantially more prevalent in households where an infant was exposed to tobacco smoke.[41] The National Childminding Association argues that smoking in front of children can also never be acceptable practice in any childcare setting.[42]

26. **We endorse the DfEE's recommendation that childminders should attend a recognised childminder's course within six months of starting childminding and that regular in-service courses should continue to be a part of every childminder's programme.**

27. **We recommend that no childminder should be allowed to smack any child in their care.**

28. **We recommend that no childminder should be permitted to smoke in the presence of any child in their care.**

DAY NURSERIES

29. Day nurseries form a large part of the provision for the Early Years and receive children from the age of a few months to five years. Some parents who work long hours find this provision meets their needs for day care.

30. The National Day Nurseries Association is very concerned about the overall quality of provision. They welcomed the Early Learning Goals and told the Sub-committee that they had "long argued for the enhancement of Early Years qualifications and the development of a ladder of progression".[43] The aims and objectives for the curriculum of one private day nursery are that "the first prime aim and objective is to produce happy, confident children who are interested in all they see, hear and do and who have enquiring minds. All other aims and objectives stem from this".[44]

31. It is difficult to maintain close relationships with parents in day nurseries since the parents are frequently hurrying to work in the mornings and eager to get home after a long day at work. The nurseries are aware of this and express the need for a close partnership between parents and children. There is concern in the private sector that there are two separate inspection systems, since the Early Learning Goals " ... have provided a unique opportunity for day nurseries to be part of the process of early education and be recognised for their expertise through the OFSTED inspection process".[45]

INTEGRATION INITIATIVES: SURE START

32. The years from birth to five plus are crucial in determining children's life chances. Sure Start sets out to address the challenge of helping children in more disadvantaged areas. Sure Start is not so much an education and care initiative but an integration of care and health services. There was clear evidence of the benefits of providing quality support services for babies and young parents. The objectives, scale and scope of the Sure Start initiative are most impressive. Although it was at a very early stage of development, it was felt by many witnesses that this targeted intervention programme in areas of high disadvantage had the potential to break cycles of dependency and to combat social exclusion and educational under-achievement. According to Ms Tan Lea, the Director of the Rosehill Littlemore Sure Start in Oxford:

"One of the enormous strengths about Sure Start, which is different from the way some services are currently delivered, is that having targeted an area of disadvantage with a lack of resources you are then talking about universal provision, so you are getting over the bit that says, you are only getting this because you are in need and they are stigmatising services. After all, the challenge will be making sure these services are accessible to the broadest group of people".[46]

Dr Gillian Pugh of Coram Family warned that Sure Start should not be separate from the rest of Early Years education:

"Sure Start is fantastic, it is one of the most exciting things this Government is doing. However, Sure Start will only be effective if it becomes a mainstream strategy and not a short term initiative which disappears in four years time. In addition it needs to change the way we run services across the country, not just in the 250 areas in which it is based. It will only work if the lessons we learn from working with children under three are consistent and continuous with what we know about working with children from three upwards".[47]

33. We recommend that the years from birth to five plus should be viewed as the first phase of education, in which the involvement of families and parents will be crucial. Since education and care are inseparable, there should be a universal service under the leadership of a single Government Department.

34. We recommend that Government funding should be made available to support the sharing of best practice and learning from the experience of the Sure Start centres.

INTEGRATION INITIATIVES: EARLY EXCELLENCE

35. The Early Excellence Centre pilot programme provides clear and pioneering evidence of how models of integrated services for children and families might be developed across the UK over time. The high quality of provision in these Centres provides strong models of good practice in integration which were being disseminated nationally, and internationally. Early evidence on the effectiveness of this programme also indicates the cost effectiveness of this policy strategy.[48] Dr Margy Whalley, the Director of the Pen Green Research, Training and Development Centre in Corby, told the Sub-committee that, for her, improving the quality of Early Years training would be about

"re-conceptualising early years education and care as being about learning in a much wider sense. It is going to be about learning for little children and it is recognising that learning begins at birth, it does not begin at three. It is about learning for the parents and staff whatever their starting point. It is not a narrow view of education, it is a very broad view of education, and it is about taking on board parents as equal and active partners in that from the very beginning".[49]

36. Ms Margaret Hodge, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities, told the Sub-committee: "We are also involved in new ways of delivering services, trying to get an integrated service across care, education and health with the Sure Start Programme and the Early Excellence Programme, and there are some interesting and very positive results coming out of that work".[50]

37. Dr Gillian Pugh was an enthusiastic advocate for Early Excellence Centres which

"can provide education and care from 8.30 am to 5.30 pm all the year round for all the children Not only are children provided for, but there is education and support too for parents Through support from health authority and social services, families have access to health visitors, clinical psychologists, speech therapist and social workers. This surely must be the service of the future. But to achieve it requires a great deal of 'joined up' working between local authorities, health authorities and voluntary organisations, and additional

mainstream funding to support the crucial work with parents".[51]

38. As part of the one-stop shop support offered by Early Excellence Centres, parents can take courses to increase their parenting skills, their employability and their self confidence.[52] The initial evidence from the Early Excellence Centres is that they can address a range of needs and allow parents to develop their own abilities.[53]

39. The delivery of integrated early childhood services in Early Excellence Centres brings considerable benefits in the form of cost savings from reduced spending on other services: for example, research suggests that for every £1 invested on integrated services, £8 is saved on alternative services. Early intervention for children with special needs leads to greater likelihood of the child being successfully integrated for compulsory education in mainstream school, a saving of some £7,000 per child-year.[54] Ms Hodge told the Sub-committee that these findings were very much in line with American experience.[55]

40. Early intervention is particularly important for children with special needs. The Royal National Institute for the Blind pointed that "it is all too easy to overlook the special needs of small numbers of children".[56] For example, only two out of a thousand children are likely to be visually impaired. Thus placements will rarely encounter children who require specialist intervention and support for their visual impairment. Mencap argued the case for the integration of education and therapeutic plans for individual children, especially for disabled children who receive education and care in more than one setting.[57] The National Autistic Society emphasised that the issue of identification was the primary concern in the Early Years setting, and one that they shared with the other Special Educational Needs agencies. They cited pioneering work on dyslexia, for example, which had illustrated the cost effectiveness of early identification.[58] Early identification of children with emotional or behavioural difficulties can also help not only the individual child and their family to receive the support they need, but can also prevent adverse consequences for the quality of education for the other children in the setting. Children who lack adequate parental care or supervision deserve particular attention, which is more likely to be provided in an integrated setting which addresses the needs of the parents as well as the child.

41. Research has also demonstrated the benefits of providing integrated education and care services for children alongside family support and adult training, in combatting social exclusion, child poverty, educational underachievement, welfare dependency and unemployment.[59] The challenge of bringing together previously disparately delivered services was referred to by several witnesses but the benefits of doing so were viewed as providing an incentive to move service delivery to a more integrated model nationally.[60] In their background report on the United Kingdom for the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care, Dr Tony Bertram and Professor Christine Pascal wrote that

"It has become clear from international government and NGO studies that policies which aim to integrate and coordinate educational, social and health initiatives are likely to be more effective and more wide ranging in their impact, particularly when one ministry is given the leadership, monitoring and evaluative role. Given this evidence, the Government is committed to the development of early childhood services which integrate a range of services, including education, care, health, adult training and family support. They support the view that education and care are inseparable and want to develop a more comprehensive support structure around children and families which can meet a wide range of needs".[61]

42. We recommend that there should be substantially increased Government support for, and investment in, integrated initiatives like Sure Start and Early Excellence Centres.

43. We recommend that the evidence from comprehensive evaluations of Early Excellence and Sure Start should be used actively within Government across Departments to support and promote the further development of integrated policy and practice under the leadership of one Department.

RECEPTION

44. We saw an example in Oxfordshire of an Early Years Unit which had been developed when funding became available. It was staffed by a teacher with qualified teacher status and a Learning Support Assistant. Recording a child's progress is integral to the Foundation Stage. Ms Anne-Marie Graham, the Head of Kirklees Early Years Service, doubted that the kind of record-keeping required

could be carried out on a daily basis by a single teacher with 30 children.[62] Ms Hodge told the sub-committee she wanted to move to a one to fifteen ratio in Reception classes.[63] The required ratio in playgroups is one to eight and one to thirteen in nursery schools.[64] Ms Hodge referred to a trial under way with Coram Family of a ratio of 2 to 26, with one being a qualified teacher.[65] As Ms Hodge emphasised, the qualifications and the quality of the individual working with the child are equally important.[66] **We recommend that the adult:child ratio should be no more than fifteen-to-one in Reception and Year 1.**

45. There is a concern that not all teachers in Reception classes have been adequately trained in the Early Years. There is a danger that very young children may be receiving inappropriately formal training because a teacher with qualified teacher status may not be fully equipped to adopt the different approach required to deliver best practice in the Foundation Stage. The Teacher Training Agency is now doing more to ensure that the Early Years specialism is included as an option for trainee primary school teachers.[67]

THE BEGINNINGS OF LITERACY

Thomas notices the six letters in his name whenever he sees them, such as 'h' at the beginning of 'house'.—QCA *Curriculum Guidance*, page 60.

Marcus says that his name begins with the sound 'm', Faraz with 'f' and Tommy with 't'. He shows a visitor the letters that represent these and other sounds.—QCA *Curriculum Guidance*, page 60.

46. The QCA's *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* includes a table (below) which shows some of the different settings children attend before and during the foundation stage. It makes clear the marked variation in the ages at which children begin pre-school settings and later Reception and Year 1 classes in primary schools.

47. In the Reception year teachers are encouraged through the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's *Curriculum Guidance* gradually to introduce more structured learning of literacy and numeracy skills. There is disagreement as to how formal this learning should be, with the vast majority of professionals[68] believing that numeracy and literacy in the foundation stage should be introduced informally, especially through play, games and informal conversation.

48. The Literacy Hour and Mathematics Lesson are part of the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy. At present both recommend that a sustained lesson of approximately one hour should be in place in Reception classrooms before the end of the Reception year to ensure a smooth start to formal teaching in Year 1. Many professionals expressed concern that overly formal instruction in the Reception class would impede the learning of young children, especially boys.[69] There is some evidence that in practice OFSTED inspectors expect to see whole-class formal teaching in the Reception year.[70] This expectation influences teachers to adopt a formal approach to literacy throughout the foundation stage, especially in the Reception year.[71]

49. Dr Nick Tate, then the Chief Executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, explained to the Sub-committee that because of the various pressures on the Early Years curriculum it had been difficult to craft a compromise wording in the *Curriculum Guidance* on the requirements of the literacy and numeracy strategies.[72] In the final published document, the compromise wording states that by the end of the Foundation Stage children should be prepared to move on to the literacy and numeracy hour requirement which comes in at the beginning of Key Stage 1.[73] This approach responds to the concerns raised in evidence[74] that much Reception class provision was too formal. The new approach gives Reception teachers the professional autonomy to make their judgement about when and how the literacy and numeracy strategy should be introduced, according to the needs of the children.

		January	September	September	September
A September-born boy		3.3 years Joins nursery class	3.11 years In nursery class	4.11 years Joins reception class	5.11 years Joins year 1 class

An October-born girl with a hearing impairment	Specialist teacher at home from age six months. From age two attends a local authority family centre two mornings each week	3.2 years Continues to attend family centre two mornings each week	3.10 years Joins nursery school that has special unit	4.10 years Remains in nursery school—joins reception class with support in summer term	5.10 years Joins year 1
A December-born girl	Joins nursery centre soon after second birthday	3.0 years Remains in nursery centre	3.8 years In nursery centre	4.8 years Joins reception class—moves to mixed-age (reception and year 1) class in January	5.8 years Remains in reception/year 1 class
A February-born boy with learning difficulties	Receives Portage home teaching from age one	2.10 years Joins assessment unit in special school	3.6 years In special school nursery	4.6 years Joins mainstream reception class	5.6 years Joins year 1
A March-born boy	Cared for by childminder from age nine months	2.9 years With childminder plus visits to childminders' drop-in	3.5 years Remains with child-minder, who is now accredited as education provider, plus two mornings at pre-school	4.5 years Joins reception class plus before- and after-school care with same childminder	5.5 years Joins year 1
A June-born girl		2.6 years At home and attends parent/toddler group	3.2 years Joins independent school early years class	4.2 years Remains in school early years class	5.2 years Joins year 1
An August-born boy		2.4 years At home	3.0 years Joins playgroup	4.0 years Joins reception class	5.0 years Joins year 1

Source: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*, 2000, page 7.

50. In her letter to OFSTED of 8 May 2000, Ms Hodge emphasised that although the full sessions of the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson should be established by the end of the Reception year, it was perfectly acceptable earlier in the year for the elements of the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson to be delivered flexibly across the day.^[75] In oral evidence to the Subcommittee, OFSTED confirmed that inspectors would expect to see a flexible approach: "we have reissued guidance very recently to inspectors to remind them that there is ¼ flexibility and that they should not therefore expect to see every aspect of it (the Literacy Hour) covered in that way that is set out in the QCA and government guidance".^[76]

51. There has been considerable concern that the expansion of Early Years provision will mean children being taught formally, perhaps in large groups, too early. **We recommend that children below compulsory school age should be taught informally in ways that are appropriate to their developmental stage and their interests. We recommend that in Reception and Year 1 classes**

there should be fifteen or fewer children for each member of staff working with the children in the class.

52. Children in the Foundation Stage learn best through play, experience and conversation. **We support the approach in the *Curriculum Guidance* issued by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority that more structured learning should be introduced very gradually so that, by the end of the Reception year, children are learning through more formal, whole class activities for a small proportion of the day.**

53. Teacher training will now have to be looked at again to prepare teachers properly for the new Foundation Stage. **We recommend that training for the Reception year should be moved out of Key Stage 1 training and into the training for the Foundation Stage.**

54. **We recommend that initial and inservice training programmes for Early Years practitioners should emphasise the skills and knowledge necessary to both involve and support family members. We recommend that the Teacher Training Agency and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority should emphasise in their guidance and the teacher training syllabus the skills for working with adults as well as those for teaching young children.**

AGE OF SCHOOL ENTRY

55. Five years of age has been the starting point for school education since the Education Act 1870. Thus children in the UK have entered school one or two years earlier than their peers in other countries, including most of Europe and North America. The 'early entry' of British children should be compensated by informal education offered to children in Reception classes where children of varying levels of maturity are taught through informal means and at a pace appropriate for the child. The trend over recent years has been that in practice children enter school as 'rising fives'—in other words as four year olds.

56. In December 1994, our predecessor select committee produced a brief Report which drew attention to the fact that between 1983 and 1993 the number of children under five attending school had increased by 25 per cent.^[77] The latest statistics record 100 per cent of four year olds participating in some form of education, with 57 per cent of four olds attending infant classes in primary school.^[78]

57. **Many of those giving evidence argued that the age of school entry was less important than the kind of curriculum and teaching young children encounter when they enter statutory schooling.**^[79] The Pre-School Learning Alliance expressed concern that most children start primary school when they are four years old,^[80] and that this was in effect a lowering of the starting age for school which had occurred "without recourse to either public or parliamentary debate and without evidence to support the efficacy of such a change".^[81] There was concern that the younger, summer-born children in particular could be intimidated by an earlier start to their schooling.^[82] In their joint paper, the Early Childhood Education Forum, the Local Authority Early Years Coordinators Network and the Early Childhood Unit called for the present Reception year to be placed outside statutory schooling and into the Early Years stage, with the consequence that children would always enter primary school after their fifth birthday.^[83]

58. We have been concerned by the evidence that parents have come under inappropriate pressure to enrol their children in Reception classes before they are ready. That pressure may come from a number of sources, including:

- the need for schools to 'capture' pupils to secure funding for places
- parents feeling that they will miss out on their school of choice if they do not take up a place at the earliest opportunity
- school settings providing a cheaper solution to childcare needs than alternatives which may cost money or offer fewer hours
- a single September date of entry in many local education authority areas.

We recommend that the Government should review the limitations in practice on the operation of parents' choice for entry to primary school, to ensure that the needs of children to be placed in appropriate settings are paramount.

17. Ms Margaret Hodge, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities at the Department for Education and Employment, told the Sub-committee that she felt strongly that the argument over the school starting age was "redundant".^[84] What mattered, in her

view, was whether the nature of the experience was appropriate to the age and stage of development of the child.[85] Professional and parent groups[86] alike believe that, provided the teaching and resources are appropriate to the age of the child, the age of statutory schooling should remain at the term after which children turn 5 years.

18. We recommend that the compulsory age of school entry should remain at the term after the child's fifth birthday; and the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage should be fully implemented in primary schools to ensure that children receive the style of education appropriate to their stage of development.

AFTER RECEPTION

19. There should be a sensitive transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. Baseline Assessment currently takes place in the first half of the first term in Reception. All maintained primary schools are required to adopt a baseline assessment scheme accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Since the start of the autumn term 1997, teachers have assessed all new 4-5 year old pupils within seven weeks of starting primary school. The assessment covers as a minimum the basic skills of speaking and listening, reading, writing, mathematics and personal and social development. There are more than 80 schemes of baseline assessment accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Teachers are able to use the information from the baseline assessments to plan their teaching to match individual children's needs. It is the intention that, over time, schools will be able to judge children's progress against their original baseline assessment.

20. Early Education warned that "the current focus on targets for older children in reading, writing and mathematics inevitably tends to limit the vision and confidence of early childhood educators. Such downward pressure risks undermining children's motivation and their disposition to learn, thus lowering rather than raising levels of achievement in the longer term".[87] The Professional Association of Early Childhood Educators[88] called for early formal assessment to be abandoned: "inappropriate formalised assessment of children at an early age currently results in too many children being labelled 'failures', when the failure, in fact, lies with the system".[89] The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority are working towards a common assessment to allow for national comparability.[90] Now that the Reception year is part of the new Foundation Stage, there are grounds for reconsidering the best time for the child's first formal assessment.

21. **We recommend that baseline assessment should be moved to the start of Year 1.** This would enable teachers in Key Stage 1 to have a description of where children are in their learning in order to enhance practice and to serve as a baseline from which to measure children's developmental progress.

THE CURRICULUM

"Learning for young children is a rewarding and enjoyable experience in which they explore, investigate, discover, create, practise, rehearse, repeat, revise and consolidate their developing knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes. During the foundation stage, many of these aspects of learning are brought together effectively through playing and talking."—QCA <i>Curriculum Guidance</i> , page 20.
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22. Children need more than to be kept in a safe place. Building on previous efforts to set out desirable learning outcomes from Early Years education, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has been working with professionals in the field to develop an appropriate approach to Early Years education. The Early Learning Goals[91] published in 1999 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority were broadly welcomed by Early Years workers,[92] parents and the press. They consist of six domains of learning and development and specify particular knowledge, skills and attitudes in each of them which most children should acquire during the Foundation Stage (3 to 5+ years). The areas of learning are:

- Personal, social and emotional development
- Communication, language and literacy

- Mathematical development
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Physical development
- Creative development.

Their strong focus on personal, social and emotional development makes quite clear that the motivational and affective side to learning is as important as the cognitive side.

1. Early Years practitioners have also welcomed the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's more recent *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*^[93] which offers a detailed description of how children can be supported in development, related to each curricular area. The many ways adults can support children's learning are described in the *Guidance* document and present a complex array of teaching strategies, some of them instructional. Most relate to 'teaching' through informal, play-based means in which children are invited to learn through exploration and play. The extract in the Table below from the QCA's *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* illustrates the recommended approach to the early learning goals for behaviour and self-control, as part of the curriculum for personal, social and emotional development. The role of the practitioner in listening to children and communicating with them and their parents is clearly brought out.

"Successful personal, social and emotional development is critical for very young children in all aspects of their lives and gives them the best opportunity for success in all other areas of learning."—QCA *Curriculum Guidance*, page 28.

EARLY LEARNING GOALS FOR SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Progression from age three to the end of the foundation stage

Stepping stones	Examples of what children do	What does the practitioner need to do?
Make connections between different parts of their life experience.	Alice pushes the playdough with the palms of her hands, adds more flour and pushes again. 'This is how I help my mum to make pizzas,' she says.	Provide activities and opportunities for children to share experiences and knowledge from different parts of their lives with each other Develop positive relationships with parents.
Show a strong sense of self as a member of different communities, such as their family or setting.	The children have been brought together to discuss watching a mother bathing her baby earlier in the session. The children talk about babies and younger brothers and sisters at home and how they are cared for. Rehana said, 'My mum puts oil on my baby sister's skin when she has had a bath.'	Create a feeling of openness so that children are able to learn from one another and from each other's family experiences. Anticipate the best from each child and be alert to their strengths.
Have an awareness of, and show interest and enjoyment in, cultural and religious differences. Have a positive selfimage and show that they are comfortable with themselves..	Harry looks at the 'weaving loom' created from wire netting on the garden fence. He asks the practitioner how to do it, who says, 'Why don't you ask Shamimara? She wove the streamers in the netting. She can show you.' Later, Harry and Shamimara look at books showing people weaving in different countries. Charlie is a wheelchair user. When the practitioner asks the group for help in finding the repeated phrase in the big book they are using, he volunteers. 'I can read it. I am a good reader.' He propels the wheelchair, unaided, up to the book where he points to and reads the words.	Strengthen the positive impressions children have of their own cultures and faiths and those of others. Ensure that materials and images used and displayed are accurate and non-stereotypical. Give children opportunities to be curious, enthusiastic, engaged and tranquil, so developing a sense of inner self and peace.

Understand that people have different needs, views, cultures and beliefs, that need to be treated with respect. Understand that they can expect others to treat their needs, views, cultures and beliefs with respect.	Bulent's brother had got married and he was showing the photographs to a group of children. They talked about why the bride had money pinned to her dress and, with the practitioner, talked about the different customs they had experienced at weddings.	Encourage children to talk with each other about similarities and differences in their experiences and the reasons for those similarities and differences. Ensure all children are given support to participate in discussions and to be listened to carefully.
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Source: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*, 2000, pages 42-43.

2. The *Curriculum Guidance* stresses the role of play as the vehicle of most learning in the Foundation Stage, especially for children of the younger ages:

"Learning for young children is a rewarding and enjoyable experience in which they explore, investigate, discover, create, practise, rehearse, repeat, revise and consolidate their developing knowledge, skills, understandings and attitudes. During the foundation stage, many of these aspects of learning are brought together effectively through playing and talking".[\[94\]](#)

"There is no division between play and work, for children's work is play, and its importance cannot be over-emphasised."—*Asquith Court Early Years Curriculum*, 1999, Page 7

3. There is wide variation in Early Years settings in the teaching skills (in their widest sense) of the workforce.[\[95\]](#) There is also disparity in the resources for play[\[96\]](#) (and thus for learning).

LEARNING ALONE

Brent
was
playing
on
his
own
with
the
'small
world'
toys.
'This
one's
going
to
get
the
lorry
¼
but
the
car
comes
in
¼
this
is

dad—
no,
no,
no
¼
now
you'd
better
go
to
bed.'—
QCA
*Curriculum
Guidance,*
page
56.

Paul
was
intrigued
by
the
automatic
barrier
in
the
car
park.
He
set
up
a
stick
across
two
chairs
and
raised
it,
saying,
'Barrier
up!'
every
time
anyone
came
through.

—
QCA
*Curriculum
Guidance,*
page
56.

LEARNING
FROM
ADULTS
IN
THE
COMMUNITY

A
group
of
children
was
being
visited
by
an
elderly
neighbour
of
the
setting.
She
had
been
invited
to
join
the
group,
show
her
lace
and
demonstrate
how
lace
is
made.
The
children
gathered
round
and
sat
quietly
while
she
told
them
all
about
it.

—
QCA

*Curriculum
Guidance,*
page
32.

The
children
were
very
excited
when
the
local
city
farm
brought
a
lamb
to
visit
them.
They
all
wanted
to
hold
the
bottle
to
feed
the
lamb,
but
waited
quietly
until
it
was
their
turn.

—
QCA
*Curriculum
Guidance,*
page
36.

4. We support the Qualification and Curriculum Authority's *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*, which illustrates rather than imposes stepping stones for a child to progress from the age of three to the end of the foundation stage.
5. We recognise that the scale of the challenge in the *Guidance* to practitioners, who will need to have imagination and flexibility to enable children to learn in ways appropriate to their developmental stage.

6. We recommend that training to assist practitioners to enhance children's personal, social and emotional development should be supported by the DfEE.

7. We recommend that innovative practice in ways to foster children's personal, social and emotional development should be disseminated widely through the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment gives insight into children's interests; achievements and possible difficulties in their learning from which next steps in learning and teaching can be planned. It also helps ensure early identification of special educational needs and particular abilities.—QCA *Curriculum Guidance*, page 24.

8. Assessment of preschool age children is vital. It consists usually of observational notes made by the staff, portfolios of children's work, and developmental charts emphasising progression from simpler to more complex stages. Skill at developmental assessment varies across and between the several sectors of Early Years education.[\[97\]](#)

9. Parents have a vital role to play in the assessment of children in the Foundation Stage. The Professional Association of Early Childhood Educators, known as TACTYC,[\[98\]](#) underlined the need for parents "to be kept informed about up-to-date practices and what is known about young children's learning and development".[\[99\]](#)

10. We recommend that the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should expand training opportunities, particularly in the voluntary and private sector, to enhance the level of teaching skill, including planning and assessment.

OUTDOOR SPACE

11. The settings which we visited showed the diversity of buildings and facilities which exist for the education and care of young children.[\[100\]](#) There is great disparity in provision. Some provision is in large and spacious rooms with facilities which include access to the outside play area. Other settings are in small areas with no indoor space for vigorous play, or room to store adequately what minimal equipment they possess. The quality of education and care does not depend exclusively on the physical environment, but good practice can be enhanced and become best practice with the right building and facilities.

LEARNING

OUTDOORS

It
was
a
very
windy
day
and
the
children
spent
some
time
outdoors,
running
around.
They
watched
the
way
the
wind
blew

the
leaves
around
and
the
sounds
it
made.
Some
children
used
musical
instruments
to
recreate
the
sounds,
while
others
moved
like
the
blowing
leaves.

—
QCA
*Curriculum
Guidance*,
page
126.

12. There is widespread concern nationally that children and young people are having insufficient physical exercise. "Experts in the fields of mental and physical health join the voices of those in social services and education to alert policy makers to the inadequacy of children's current physical experiences. Children have a far more sedentary life-style than their predecessors".^[101] It is essential that young children should have regular access to outdoor play spaces which are equipped with appropriate and challenging equipment. The National Association of Head Teachers emphasised that physical development should be at the heart of the curriculum.^[102]

13. Young children need space, both indoors and out to give opportunities for active physical play. This is vital for children's health and well-being, and is an important part of the child's all round pattern of development. Devon County Council Curriculum Services argued that the principles and aims of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31) could only be achieved if "the activities are flexible, so that children can respond to them in a way that is conducive to their individual learning patterns, and that the adults are trained observers, so that they can recognise and respond to the developmental needs of the children to maximise their learning potential".^[103]

14. Access to the outdoors is more than a recreational exercise; it offers activities planned to develop skills and confidence across the whole curriculum. The Campaign for State Education (CASE) "believes that all early years provision should include welcoming and well maintained indoor and outdoor space with a wide variety of materials and equipment to reflect cultural diversity, provide a range of different experiences and meet the needs of the children".^[104]

15. In our Report on *School Meals*, we placed our recommendations on nutritional standards for school meals in the context of an overall effort to promote a healthier nation.^[105] We quoted evidence that young children were healthier in the 1950s than in the 1990s, partly because children

now spend less time playing outdoors.[106] One positive development in encouraging school-age children to take more exercise is the use of 'walking buses' to encourage even the youngest children at primary school to walk under supervision to and from school as an alternative to motor transport. [107]

16. Children's intellectual development can be affected if there is a lack of opportunity for physical development. Early Education[108] stated that "Concepts of relationships, literacy, numeracy, and cause and effect all stem from practical bodily interactions with the environment. Opportunities for active physical exercise are thus an important part of the content of early education, encouraging scientific skills of investigation, and expressive movement".[109]

17. The evidence from Montessori developed this thinking further: "Outdoors, children are able to garden, collect and identify leaves, label trees, study cloud formations, even find geometric shapes in shadows ... going outside provides occasions for new levels of responsibility and independence". [110]

18. The Early Learning Goals, which have been warmly received by practitioners,[111] are very clear on the importance of physical development in the Early Years, and see its value beyond mere physical activity, affecting the self esteem of young children which is crucial for all learning. "Physical development in the foundation stage is about improving skills of co-ordination, control, manipulation and movement. Physical development has two other very important aspects. It helps children gain confidence in what they can do and enables them to feel the positive benefits of being healthy and active. Effective physical development helps children develop a positive sense of well being".[112]

19. One part of the research carried out as part of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project[113] investigates the characteristics of pre-school environments which include space and furnishings as well as other aspects of practice, organisation and activities. Settings in which the best practice was observed all had opportunities for play and learning outdoors as well as indoors. [114]

20. Members of the Sub-committee who visited a Forest School in Denmark were very impressed by the emphasis placed on learning in the outdoor environment. The children played outdoors whatever the weather, and enjoyed picnics in the rain. Emphasis was placed on learning through the natural environment.[115]

21. Ms Lesley Staggs of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority told the Sub-committee that outdoor play was "threaded throughout" the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's *Curriculum Guidance* document:[116] "Clearly what we have tried to do with the guidance is not to be prescriptive ... because different settings can deal with issues on different ways".[117] One example given in the *Curriculum Guidance* is of a childminder who makes good use of a local leisure centre for large scale play.[118] Ms Zena Brabazon of the Local Authorities Early Years Co-ordinators Network emphasised that safe areas for outdoor play were "absolutely critical" for children to learn to have social relationships as they grow up.[119] Ms Brabazon took Members of the Sub-committee round Early Years settings in Haringey where covered outdoor areas were provided for year-round outdoor play.[120]

EARLY LEARNING GOALS FOR MOVEMENT

Progression from age three to the end of the foundation stage

Stepping stones	Examples of what children do	What does the practitioner need to do?
Move spontaneously within available space. Respond to rhythm, music and story by means of gesture and movement. Can stop.	Sean heard a plane flying overhead and looked up to watch it. He put out his arms and moved around, making engine noises. He did this for several minutes before lying down. 'Now the plane has landed,' he said.	Provide safe spaces, undertake risk assessment, create 'zones' for some activities, explain safety to both children and parents. Plan time for children to explore space available and their own potential for moving within it. Give as much opportunity as possible for children to move freely between indoor and outdoor

		<p>spaces.</p> <p>Be alert to the safety of children, particularly those who might overstretch themselves.</p> <p>Ensure children wear appropriate clothing while being sensitive to the requirements for modesty in some cultures and religions.</p> <p>Talk to children and help them explore new ways of moving.</p> <p>Offer a range of stimuli to generate movement, including music, songs, action rhymes and stories.</p>
<p>Move freely with pleasure and confidence</p> <p>Move in a range of ways, such as slithering, shuffling, rolling, crawling, walking, running, jumping, skipping, sliding and hopping.</p> <p>Use movement to express feelings.</p> <p>Adjust speed or change direction to avoid obstacles.</p> <p>Negotiate space successfully when playing racing and chasing games with other children</p>	<p>A favourite tape was playing outside. The children moved enthusiastically, using their arms and legs and shaking their heads in time to the music.</p>	<p>Provide additional challenge and stimulus through access to a range of resources. Join in and make suggestions where appropriate, for example, 'Can we get from here to the wall without ¼?'</p> <p>Provide safe mirrors as children experiment with and observe gesture and facial expressions.</p> <p>Teach safety techniques such as getting onto the slide or picking up a bulky object.</p> <p>Teach skills which will help children to keep themselves safe, for example responding rapidly to signals including visual signs and notes of music, role play with road layouts.</p> <p>Introduce language of negotiation and cooperation, such as 'share', 'wait', 'take turns', 'before' and 'after'.</p>
<p>Go backwards and sideways as well as forwards.</p> <p>Experiment with different ways of moving.</p> <p>Initiate new combinations of movement and gesture in order to express and respond to feelings, ideas and experiences.</p> <p>Jump off an object and land appropriately.</p>	<p>Obi crossed the swinging bridge on the climbing frame. He enjoyed making it swing as he went across.</p>	<p>Encourage children to move both individually and as part of a group.</p> <p>Use music of different kinds and from a variety of cultures with space, time, opportunity and encouragement to respond.</p> <p>Encourage children to make a response to stories and rhymes with actions, such as 'The wheels on the bus.'</p> <p>Teach and encourage children to use the vocabulary of movement such as 'gallop' and 'slither', of instruction such as 'follow', 'lead' and 'copy' and of feeling such as 'anger', 'excitement', 'anxiety' and</p>

		'affection'. Provide props for children to hold that encourage and support their movement and dance. Endorse success and offer challenges on an individual basis without comparing children's attainments. Model safety consistently, for example tidiness and mats in place, and teach children how, for example, to approach things safely.
Move with confidence, imagination and in safety	A large group of children are 'Going on a bear hunt' and carry out the actions of the story outdoors, interpreting the different ways of moving and carefully avoiding bumping into each other.	Talk with children about their actions and encourage them to explore different ways of representing ideas and actions as they move. Provide opportunities for children to repeat and change their actions so that they can think about, refine and improve them.

Source: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*, 2000, pages 104-105.

22. Ms Staggs acknowledged that for some settings there would be resource implications in developing facilities for outdoor play.[121] Ms Hodge recognised the need for more capital investment in the Early Years.[122] She hoped that more Early Years settings, particularly in the private and voluntary sectors, would be able to share outdoor spaces by establishing pre-schools on the site of an existing primary or secondary school.[123]

23. The requirements of the Early Learning Goals state that every child needs sufficient space outdoors[124] but this is not always available. **We recommend that every setting that is inspected by OFSTED should have such areas available to the children. We recommend that if necessary the DfEE should make specific grants to Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships to make this provision possible and should assist settings in receipt of grant also to pursue other sources of funding, such as the New Opportunities Fund.**

24. **We recommend that the funding of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should be increased to enable children who have no opportunity for outdoor play, to have safe and secure facilities regularly available to them so that they can play and learn outdoors as well as indoors.**

25. **We recommend that Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in relatively disadvantaged urban areas should plan to provide a range of outdoor experiences appropriate to the age of the children including, for example, visits to urban farms, the countryside, woodland and the seaside, where the environment is used by skilled practitioners to instruct, stimulate and expand the imagination of children.**

QUALITY ASSURANCE: THE EARLY YEARS WORKFORCE

26. The Foundation Stage in children's education requires a highly qualified and stable workforce. The Professional Association of Early Childhood Educators[125] argued that England should be working towards a system where all key staff are qualified teachers.[126] Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project had found that managers qualified at NVQ level 5 or graduate degree level created better quality environments for children.[127]

27. Currently Early Years practitioners are working in circumstances where low wages and low status predominate. New employment legislation (such as the minimum wage and the Working Time

Directive) has enormous implications for pre-schools.[128] Approximately half of pre-school assistants were paid less than half of the minimum wage.[129] The Pre-School Learning Alliance warned that such employment legislation tipped the scale towards closure of pre-schools including playgroups and nurseries: "the costs of running pre-schools can no longer rely on subsidy from staff willing to work for nothing, or for substantially less than the minimum wage".[130] Ms Margaret Hodge, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities, said that she had been "shocked" by the number of cases where the minimum wage had caused a problem for pre-schools.[131] It was argued that low pay was linked to high staff turnover, which was a factor in the lack of investment in staff training.[132]

28. The vast majority of Early Years practitioners are women. Ms Julie Fisher, the leader of the Oxfordshire Early Years Advisory Team, told the Sub-committee that the low level of pay in the Early Years profession may be one of the reasons why it did not attract men.[133] The Professional Association of Early Childhood Educators[134] complained that for too long the Early Years had been considered as relating only to lower status, female workers: "strong efforts must be put into place by policy makers to increase salaries and status in early years teaching so that, for example, male teachers are encouraged to work in this phase".[135]

29. According to the National Early Years Network, "the issues around the gender balance within the workforce in the early education field need urgent attention. Men have an important role to play in the care, education and support of young children and their families with potentially far-reaching consequences for children's healthy and balanced intellectual and emotional development".[136] Ms Clare Power of the National Training Organisation said that in her experience men were increasingly comfortable attending childcare courses.[137] Mrs Mary Dickins, the Training Development Officer of the National Early Years Network, underlined the importance of children having effective male role models in the settings in which they were being cared for.[138]

30. Ms Susan Hay of Nurseryworks told the Sub-committee in her oral evidence on behalf of Early Education that "there is a place for the gifted amateur, the intuitive carer, but only if they are not being required to do something which is beyond their knowledge and understanding and insight in terms of observation planning and so on and so forth for the learning of that child".[139] An alternative view was expressed by the television producers David and Clare Mills, who argued that "overcoming the weakness of institutional care while exploiting its potential strength and at the same time assessing, promoting and monitoring age-appropriate development of whole groups of children is extraordinarily demanding. It leaves little or no place for 'gifted amateurs'".[140]

31. Ms Hodge told the Sub-committee that three to four million pounds a year was being spent on a campaign to recruit more people into the Early Years sector.[141]

32. We were impressed in Denmark by the standing of the 'pedagogues', who are trained professionals working with children either in Early Years settings or in afternoon activities for school-age children.[142] The 'pedagogues' are members of a well-regarded and highly respected profession, which is almost on a par with qualified teachers in terms of pay. Both written and oral evidence expressed an overwhelming concern with training and the quality of people working in Early Years settings.[143]

33. This concern goes to the very heart of the current debate on the Early Years and deserves the highest priority for Government action. **We recommend that as a long term vision the DfEE should foster the creation and development of a ladder of training for Early Years practitioners which could lead to a graduate qualification equivalent to that of qualified teachers.** Our detailed recommendations on training in the immediate future are set out below.

34. We recognise the quality of the contribution which has been made over many years to the care and development of children in the Early Years by non-qualified staff, many of them volunteers. Some of these staff may have first come into contact with Early Years settings as parents. We have no wish to deter such people from their chosen vocation of working with young children, as part of a team under the guidance of appropriately qualified practitioners. Our welcome for their contribution is linked to our recommendations that over time all practitioners in the Early Years sector should be equipped through the acquisition of appropriate qualifications to deliver a better quality of provision for children.

35. **We recommend that every setting outside a home which offers early education should have a trained teacher on its staff. Trained teachers should also be involved in the networks which**

support childminders looking after children in the Foundation Stage.

36. We recommend that Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should publish regular surveys of the costs of childcare in their local authority areas, as well as surveys of the typical rates of pay in their area for different categories of practitioners in the Early Years sector.

37. We recommend that the Government with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should adopt an objective of ensuring equitable pay and conditions for all categories of practitioners across all settings in the Early Years sector.

38. We urge the DfEE to examine the reasons for the low recruitment of men into the Early Years sector and to make strenuous efforts to address the imbalance in the Early Years workforce.

39. We welcome the national recruitment campaign, led by the DfEE, for Early Years staff, including Early Years teachers, and we recommend that particular efforts should be made to attract men as part of this campaign.

QUALITY ASSURANCE: TRAINING

40. The crucial importance of a well trained and well qualified Early Years work force was emphasised throughout the inquiry as a major factor in the development of high quality early education and care services. Parents who would not dream of hiring a plumber without qualifications seem to be prepared to leave their children in the care of unqualified staff.[144]

"Effective education requires both a relevant curriculum and practitioners who understand and are able to implement the curriculum requirements. Effective education requires practitioners who understand that children develop rapidly during the Early Years—physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially."—QCA *Curriculum Guidance*, page 13.

QCA goals page 13.

41. The link between practitioner training and children's educational progress was highlighted by several witnesses. For example, Early Education told the Sub-committee: "Teaching in the early years demands particular skills in educators which go beyond the direct transmission of knowledge. This is the stage when the foundations for life long learning are laid".[145] The Professional Association of Early Childhood Educators[146] in its written evidence drew attention to the "ample evidence that fully qualified early years teachers offer enormous benefits to children's learning: the work of Pascal and Bertram (1998), Sylva (1999), and Moyles and Suschitzky (1998), in particular show unequivocally that quality outcomes to children's learning are a result of the involvement of qualified teachers".[147] Similarly, Dr Gillian Pugh of Coram Family drew upon the research evidence:

"There is a clear link between the quality of early years provision and the quality of the teachers and other early years educators working with them ... Effective early education requires a well qualified workforce, all of whom should be appropriately trained. All early years settings should employ or have regular access to early years teachers. Teaching young children is a skilled and demanding job. As the RSA Report (1994) argued, early years teachers require a breadth of knowledge, understanding and experience which is not required of those trained to teach older children".[148]

42. There was some debate about the role of qualified teachers within the early childhood workforce and the requirement that all early educational settings should be led by a qualified teacher . In her analysis of the written evidence submitted to the Sub-committee, Ms Eva Lloyd of the National Early Years Network told the Sub-committee that:

"The majority of respondents see it as essential that all those working in the Foundation Stage should have a recognised early years qualification. However, independent day nurseries and the Children's Society believes that it is 'vital that education in the early years is not seen as the prerogative of teachers'. Opinion varies as to the appropriate qualification for those in charge of early years settings delivering early education, but the majority of respondents, including PLA, come down firmly on the side of a qualified early years teacher being the

appropriate person. Alongside this person, qualified support staff such as nursery nurses and classroom assistants should be employed. The Sub-committee is urged not to overlook this 'invisible professional'." [149]

43. The National Day Nurseries Association has long argued for the enhancement of Early Years qualifications and the development of a ladder of progression, but "we do not, however, accept that the present focus on all early years qualifications should lead to qualified teacher status ... the ladder of progression should enable early years staff to achieve qualifications that allows them to attain a status of equivalent value to that of a teacher. We would see this as running parallel and complementing the work of an early years teacher". [150]

44. Dr Pugh told the Sub-committee: "The majority of early years practitioners are not teachers, and although many are very experienced, lack of funding means that not all are sufficiently well qualified. As recommended by the Early Childhood Education Forum and the recent review of playgroups (1999), all managers of nurseries or playgroups should be qualified to graduate level or equivalent, and all practitioners to NVQ Level 3". [151] The Early Years Curriculum Group supported the drive towards establishing a graduate teacher in every setting "in order for that setting to be managed by a professional who is sufficiently trained to understand the complexities of how children learn, how areas of learning progress and how to respond to individual and collective learning needs. This is a challenging and complex task and needs high intellectual ability". [152] The Early Years Curriculum Group argued further that "the second and other adults in every setting should be qualified. It is not acceptable that at such a crucial— perhaps the most crucial—time in a child's life, that their learning is planned, taught and managed by unqualified adults". [153]

45. The current enormous diversity and complexity of the qualifications base for Early Years workers was evident. Witnesses talked about the low qualification base of the Early Years workforce, the 'muddle' of training options available and the difficulty for employers and parents to make sense of the different types and levels of practitioner training found in Early Years settings. [154] Ms Margaret Hodge, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities, outlined the scale of the challenge:

"I think it is going to take time to get to our objective. We will not achieve this overnight. It is going to take time partly because of the diversity of the settings that are out there and with which we are working, and partly because of the lack of qualifications and training within the workplace. 44 per cent of people in the last workforce survey we had, which was in 1998 and we are just about to commission a new one, did not have an appropriate qualification, one in four in pre-schools do not, 70 per cent of child minders do not. One in five private nurseries do not. Those are the figures. There is a huge task ahead of us in supporting and training those who work with young children". [155]

46. There remains a substantial unmet need for training. The Pre-School Learning Alliance referred to a survey carried out by the Local Government Management Board which had found that more than 67 per cent of pre-schools/playgroups reported that paid staff had significant training needs. "The survey also showed that more than half of the pre-schools and playgroups in the sample reported that lack of time and lack of funding were constraints on undertaking training. In addition, only 22.5 per cent of pre-schools/playgroups had a training budget, with the average annual value being only £380. The cost to students of undertaking training can be considerable. As mature students, pre-school workers are unable to access vocational training on the same terms as 16-19 year olds". [156]

47. There was also evidence that for many practitioners, particularly in the private and voluntary sectors, there was poor access to many training opportunities because of inflexible course delivery and cost. [157] Over time, this situation has resulted in a poorly qualified work force with limited access to further professional development. In their background report on the United Kingdom for the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care, Dr Tony Bertram and Professor Christine Pascal wrote:

"There remains a shortfall in the numbers of qualified early childhood practitioners coming into the profession. This is a central concern as the development of the services and the commitment to quality will crucially depend on the ability of the profession to attract and retain high quality and well trained staff. Access to well articulated, coherent and appropriate training opportunities for many early years practitioners is improving, and cross sector

training opportunities are now available at every level, from basic vocational training to higher degrees".[\[158\]](#)

48. Witnesses welcomed the increased Government investment in Early Years training which was being planned and led largely by the local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships. [\[159\]](#) Ms Hodge told the Sub-committee: "We need to invest in training We deliberately this year put £8 million into establishing the training programme around the early learning and Foundation Stages. Next year there is £13.5 million in the Standards Fund to that purpose, not enough but it is a good start. A lot of money is being focussed on the private and voluntary sector".[\[160\]](#)

49. The establishment of the Early Years National Training Organisation and the development of a national 'climbing frame' of Early Years qualifications were seen by witnesses to mark a major achievement in the development of a more highly qualified and professional Early Years work force. The need for flexible training options, with open access and affordability, which took practitioners from NVQ 1 through to postgraduate level was a key theme in much of the evidence on training. In its written evidence the Early Years National Training Organisation (EYNTO) told the Sub-committee that the qualifications level within the sector is low: "the Early Years NTO believes that new regulations are needed which require everyone working in the sector to undergo an introductory training course within six months of joining the sector so that everyone achieves a Level 2 or 3 qualification within five years of joining the sector".[\[161\]](#) The EYNTO pointed out one of the problems in expanding training: "Childcare workers are keen to undertake training—but the single biggest barrier they perceive is time. This is a structural barrier which prevents women with family responsibilities (the majority of the childcare workforce), from accessing training on a long term basis. If the professionalism of the workforce is to be increased, therefore, this issue needs to be addressed".[\[162\]](#)

50. The need to increase access for all staff to continuing professional development opportunities was stressed by many respondents, who argued that this in-service training was as vital as initial training requirements, and should be more equitably available across the sectors. In her review of the evidence submitted to the Sub-committee, Ms Eva Lloyd of the National Early Years Network (NEYN) told the Sub-committee: "Virtually all respondents stress the need for opportunities for continuing professional development for all early years staff during the working day and the need for accreditation of prior learning and experience. NEYN calls for the establishment of INSET days for all early years workers, equivalent to those for teachers. Regular opportunities must be provided for in-service training and support from specialist advisers. A realistic investment in training is recommended by the majority of respondents".[\[163\]](#)

51. We recommend that there should be continued Government investment in training at all levels in the Early Years sector.

52. We recommend that there should be national targets for training so that within ten years all Early Years practitioners have appropriate and specialist levels of training, with all heads of centres, nurseries and playgroups being at graduate level or equivalent and all other early childhood workers at NVQ Level 3 or equivalent.

53. We recommend that all training should be adequately funded, and in particular, that there should be Government grants for mature and part-time students, and better support for those following NVQs.

54. We recommend that all early childhood workers should have access to continuous professional development as of right. Qualified Early Years teachers should visit the settings outside the home to work alongside practitioners to assist their professional development.

55. We recommend that further education, higher education and other training institutions should develop more flexible training options (such as distance learning, workplace training and modularised training), to increase access across the sectors.

56. We recommend that Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should provide positive leadership and financial support to make training more accessible and affordable for the private and voluntary sectors.

57. We recommend that higher education institutions, in conjunction with the Teacher Training Agency, should develop Early Years training options at higher levels (postgraduate) to enhance the Early Years trainer work force. We recommend that the Teacher Training Agency should sponsor places on Early Years postgraduate courses.

58. We recommend that the Early Years National Training Organisation should take a strong lead in the dissemination of the new Early Years qualifications 'climbing frame' to ensure that employers and parents understand what the range of qualifications mean.

QUALITY ASSURANCE: INSPECTION

59. Inspections were a topic which raised many and varied issues about whether they were appropriately carried out, why there were two separate types of inspection and whether there was a danger of teaching to the test. Dr Gillian Pugh of Coram Family called for an alternative approach: "Yes, you need inspection but you need nourishment and that comes through your ongoing in-service. The model of self-assessment with a mentor, with occasional inspections, seems to me is going to do a great deal more than people coming in and waving sticks on a very regular basis".[\[164\]](#)

60. During the Sub-committee's visit to Bristol it was strongly argued when teachers have prepared for an inspection through a system of self-evaluation and support of colleagues there has been less stress. Inspection reports have cited the impact of the Effective Early Learning evaluation and improvement process and commented on its contribution to the development of practice and the quality of provision.[\[165\]](#)

61. Concern was expressed by witnesses that there was a lack of Early Years expertise in OFSTED, and there was a long way to go before everything was right. The London Borough of Barnet Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership recommended "that all Ofsted inspection teams receive training by qualified and experienced early years practitioners to develop a consistent view of what appropriate learning looks like in the foundation stage ... and that all Ofsted teams include an inspector who is an experienced and qualified early years practitioner".[\[166\]](#) Mr Chris Woodhead, then Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools for England, told the Sub-committee that, as in any other sector, inspectors in Early Years should be "of high quality and have relevant personal experience of the area they are inspecting".[\[167\]](#)

62. The Sub-committee were told that it was not appropriate to have two separate inspections for the nursery schools, nursery classes and four year olds in reception classes, and for those in the voluntary and private sector. Ms Julie Fisher of the Oxfordshire Early Years Advisory Group said "there is a divide of different qualifications of the inspectors, a different length of time they will spend in a setting, different training they receive and different criteria they use. All of those things will lead to an undermining, to some extent, of the notion that there can currently be a level playing field".[\[168\]](#) Mr Woodhead pointed out that the existence of two inspection systems stems from the different requirements under the Education Acts.[\[169\]](#) In his view "it would be inappropriate if we were to mount exactly the same form of inspection for every context".[\[170\]](#)

63. There is a great deal of concern about the stress caused to teachers by OFSTED inspections. Mr Woodhead thought that the infrequency of inspections in schools should mean that no teacher should feel stressed.[\[171\]](#) In conversations during the Sub-committee's informal visits to schools, several teachers described the stress experienced before, during and after an OFSTED inspection.

64. There is a real danger, with the demands of the Early Learning Goals, that there will be teaching to the test in many instances.[\[172\]](#) There is a general welcome for the decision to combine the two separate social services and OFSTED inspections,[\[173\]](#) but there is concern about the lack of expertise in the Early Years.[\[174\]](#)

65. We recommend that the OFSTED's Director of Early Years should have substantial experience of the care and education of young children. In our view it is also essential that there should be a strong element of both Early Years experience of education and care within the team.

66. In our view OFSTED should recognise that the manner of inspection should a change from the current climate of extreme stress in schools both before and during an OFSTED inspection to one of support.

67. We recommend that the inspection should include the self evaluation undertaken in the setting, so that it will be more effective in improving the quality of provision.

68. We expect to subject the performance of the OFSTED Early Years Director to regular scrutiny as part of the accountability of OFSTED to Parliament, specifically to this Select Committee.

EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDCARE PARTNERSHIPS

69. The welcome diversity of provision in the Early Years sector can lead to competition for scarce resources. It is argued that one reason children start school as young as they do is because it is in schools' interests to maximise their income from funded places for four year olds (and, increasingly, three year olds). It is claimed parents feel that unless they put their children into a nursery class attached to a primary school they will not be place for the child when he or she reaches the statutory age. One of the roles of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships is to reconcile the various interests and to focus on providing good quality education and childcare for children in all settings. The annual Early Years Development and Childcare Plans, agreed locally, are subject to approval by the Secretary of State.[175] It is estimated that the investment in funding for early education, childcare and family support over the period will amount to some £7.5 billion.[176]

70. The Early Years and Development and Childcare Partnerships have only been in operation for less than three years and, in this short time, have been effective in most areas. Where, to begin with, there was unequal partnership between members, there was dissatisfaction with the outcomes of key decisions.[177] In Partnerships where the Chair is seen as an independent figure, this situation has improved.[178]

71. The Partnerships are totally independent and work as a local initiative. Ms Margaret Hodge, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities, said "We would not want to dictate from the centre how partnerships work, but what we do want is genuine partnership, open working, an inclusive mechanism which ensures that everybody feels that they have a stake in the development of services locally".[179]

72. One of the main issues for every Partnership is that of quality. Every setting which is approved by OFSTED has the same grant for each four year old. It is unrealistic to expect the same quality from a well resourced nursery where there are graduate staff, to a setting where there are few resources or facilities and few qualified staff with possibly no qualified teachers. It is the task of the Partnership to raise standards and enhance quality in all settings, and this is expensive, time consuming and labour intensive.

73. Training of staff is the key to raising standards in all settings, but this presents Partnerships with difficulties. According to Ms Julie Fisher of the Oxfordshire Early Years Advisory Group, "although everybody can undertake training, and increasingly people are, it is very hard to make up on a deficit where one sector starts with a four year graduate training to specialise in how children learn, what they should learn and all that entails. When you are trying to make up that sort of gap, very often it is too massive ... one day's training does not make up that sort of gap".[180]

74. The Partnership approach enabled representatives of all those concerned with the education of young children—the local authority, the voluntary sector, the school sector, the health sector, the private and independent sector, employers, ethnic minority representatives and, very importantly, parents—to meet together around a table to discuss the issues which concerned them.[181] It would be an advantage for planners also to be included in the Partnership. Consideration could be given when giving conditional planning permission for large scale developments to the inclusion as 'planning gain' of on- or off-site of child care facilities on the scale appropriate to the expected workforce or local population in the new development.

75. Having meetings of the Partnership open to the public helps to engender the trust that has been established between the various interests. The Sub-committee was informed that the meetings of each of the three Partnerships represented by the witnesses appearing on behalf of the Local Authorities Early Years Co-ordinators Network were open to the public.[182] Ms Hodge told the Sub-committee that she could see absolutely no reason why the meetings of Partnerships should not be open to the public.[183]

76. We recommend that the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should continue to be supported in every way, but particularly in the consistent training for members and Chairs.

77. The most effective Partnerships have Chairs who are regarded as independent, from both the local education authority on the one hand and from too close an identification on the other hand with any of the other sectors represented on the Partnership. **We recommend that all Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should work towards establishing an independent Chair who is acceptable to all members.**

78. We recommend that quality should be monitored closely by the DfEE where Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships are not working well and that these Partnerships should be identified, supported and have the opportunity to observe and emulate good practice where it already exists.

79. We recommend that every meeting of a Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership should be open and that members of the public should be invited and encouraged to attend.

FUNDING

80. There has historically been a low base of funding and investment in early education in the UK compared with other developed countries. The structure of funding in education has favoured education at the later stages. The funding of care for young children has not been viewed as a public responsibility at all in the UK unless the child was deemed to be 'at risk' in some way. Provision for families where parents worked or were in training was largely left to the market place. This situation has changed radically in the last three years. Ms Hodge told the Sub-committee:

"I remember when I was sitting in your chair, Chairman, that we were very concerned, if you look at the OECD comparative figures, that we probably invested less than any other country in the early years. I hope that by the action we have taken in the three years we have been in Government that we are turning that around. Certainly in the recent visit we had from the OECD I felt that they were looking at what we were doing as an exemplar of cutting edge practice now, and so there has been a real shift".[\[184\]](#)

81. Free early education places for four year olds in schools and nurseries in the maintained sector are funded by the Under Fives Standard Spending Assessment, which is calculated according to the population of birth to three year olds and the number of four year old children in local education authority maintained provision. Local education authorities determine through their Fair Funding arrangements how the standard spending assessment should be distributed to schools and nurseries in the maintained sector.[\[185\]](#)

82. The specific nursery education grant is based on a headcount of eligible four year old children attending settings in the private and voluntary sectors (and for new places in the maintained sector since the last schools census). Funding for three year olds is not based on universal provision. It is planned to expand the proportion of three year olds able to access a free place to two-thirds by 2002. The required funding is being phased in, beginning with the areas of greatest social need.[\[186\]](#)

83. International research has demonstrated the cost effectiveness of investment in early education and care by the state.[\[187\]](#) The links between funding and the quality of early education and care provision have also been demonstrated.[\[188\]](#) Recently, the need for a significant increase in funding, and a shift in funding priorities, has been acknowledged at Government level and significant increases in the funding for early education and care has occurred. In their background report on the United Kingdom for the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care, Dr Tony Bertram and Professor Christine Pascal drew attention to "the international evidence emerging from economic, social and educational sources [has] provided the Government with an irrefutable case for significantly increased investment in services for young children and their families".[\[189\]](#) There has also been pressure to revise the funding structure in favour of the youngest children.[\[190\]](#)

84. The separation of funding streams between education, health, social services, has been demonstrated to limit the effectiveness of delivering integrated, comprehensive early education and childcare.[\[191\]](#) The differential in funding levels between the state, private and voluntary sectors has also led to inequalities in the quality of provision. There are moves to bring these different funding streams together to support the further integration of Early Years services.[\[192\]](#) There is also a shift to allocate funding for the local development of Early Years services through Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships to encourage partnership and collaboration between sectors, and more locally responsive delivery of services.[\[193\]](#) The Chief Education Officer for Oxfordshire told the Sub-committee: "I do not think you can separate the social services provision for families and childcare from an education authority. They are one and the same thing, which is why the Children's Committee makes sense".[\[194\]](#) He also told the Sub-committee that the whole mechanism for funding "needs to be sorted" and "we need to look carefully, because we have been talking a lot about granting funding today, at getting the balance right between the revenue funding

and the hypothecated funding that comes through grants because otherwise you have so many programmes that are so earmarked you get the tail wagging the dog. That is true of both social services and education. There needs to be a radical examination".[195]

85. We recommend that the increased Government investment in early education and care should be sustained over a long-term period.

86. We recommend that those responsible in the DfEE should continue to review the relative fairness of access to funding for places, staff, resources, capital, and training across the sectors in the Early Years.

87. We recommend that the long-term aim of DfEE Early Years funding policy should be to ensure the development of a diverse and innovative pre-school sector which meets the need of children and parents in all situations.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

88. According to the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology overview of the research on the development of the brain and its relevance to Early Years education,[196] educators often cite scientific research on brain development when arguing for particular Early Years educational practices.[197] Neurobiological research is often cited as evidence for the importance of enriched, stimulating early childhood environments (see Box below).

ENRICHED ENVIRONMENTS

Animal studies

Early studies showed that laboratory rats raised in an 'enriched' environment, with wheels to spin, ladders to climb on, and other rats to play with, have up to 25 per cent more synapses per neuron in brain areas involved in sensory perception than 'deprived' rats, raised alone in a lab cage with no 'playmates' or toys. Furthermore, the rats raised in complex environments perform learning tasks better than deprived rats. In subsequent studies, Greenough and his colleagues showed that the brains of adult rats form new synapses in response to new experiences and toys (Greenough et al., 1987).

Human studies

Recent studies have demonstrated that Romanian babies reared in severely deprived conditions, with no sensory or social stimulation, are more likely to have delayed development of skills such as walking and talking, and impaired social, emotional and cognitive development (O'Connor et al., 1999).

Greenough, W. T., Black, J. E., & Wallace, C. S. (1987). Experience and brain development. *Child Development*, 58: 539-559.

O'Connor, T.G., Bredenkamp, D & Rutter, M (1999). Attachment disturbances and disorders in children exposed to early severe deprivation. *Infant Mental Health Journal*20(10): 10-29.

Source: POST Report 140, June 2000

89. As noted in the Box, research on animals suggests that the ability to create synapses in response to new experiences seems to persist throughout life. So, although the effects of complex environments occur more readily in younger animals, they endure throughout life. Overall, the research does not support the argument for a selective educational focus specifically on children's earliest years.[198] Although babies' brains undergo a large amount of change in the first few years of life, parts of the human brain continue to develop well into adolescence and beyond. Even the adult brain is capable of change. It is therefore difficult to make direct links from the neuro scientific evidence to specific early childhood environments, experiences and early childcare policies.[199]

90. The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology overview concluded that while studies on brain development are of interest, they are more difficult to relate to Early Years education policy than studies on the development of children and different educational systems. Certain skills, such as walking, talking and emotional understanding, develop naturally in almost all children allowed to

play with their siblings and peers and explore their environment. Other skills, such as reading, writing and maths require teaching, but there is no convincing evidence that teaching these skills early (before about six) is advantageous. International studies suggest that a later school starting age (age six or seven) might be beneficial, provided that school is preceded by high quality preschool provision. Comparative education studies support the results of developmental psychology studies, finding that well resourced preschools that encourage the development of emotional, cognitive, social skills and feelings of self efficacy through natural activities such as play and exploration result in lasting social and educational benefits, especially for children from deprived backgrounds.^[200]

91. We recommend that the advances in knowledge about brain development should be kept under examination by DfEE-funded researchers in the education field so that Early Years policy is kept up to date and consistent with the available scientific evidence.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that the Government should develop a Parents' Charter to be visible in every Early Years setting which affirms the centrality of the parent in the development and education of their child and welcomes them as vital educators of their children (paragraph 17).
2. We recommend that the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should make the necessary resources available to support parental participation in Early Years activities (paragraph 18).
3. Parents should be involved in helping practitioners to draw up individual profiles of their children to help the process of planning for their learning. We recommend that the DfEE should develop new forms of developmental profile at entry to school which would include parents' own contributions to assessment and planning (paragraph 19).
4. We recommend that there should be more support given through the health, social services and education services working together to provide assistance to parents. We recommend that the Government should work with BBC Online and other innovative providers to produce appropriate programmes on parenting (paragraph 20).
5. The physical security of the children being looked after should never be compromised (paragraph 23).
6. We endorse the DfEE's recommendation that childminders should attend a recognised childminder's course within six months of starting childminding and that regular in-service courses should continue to be a part of every childminder's programme (paragraph 26).
7. We recommend that no childminder should be allowed to smack any child in their care (paragraph 27).
8. We recommend that no childminder should be permitted to smoke in the presence of any child in their care (paragraph 28).
9. We recommend that the years from birth to five plus should be viewed as the first phase of education, in which the involvement of families and parents will be crucial. Since education and care are inseparable, there should be a universal service under the leadership of a single Government Department (paragraph 33).

10. We recommend that Government funding should be made available to support the sharing of best practice and learning from the experience of the Sure Start centres (paragraph 34).
11. We recommend that there should be substantially increased Government support for, and investment in, integrated initiatives like Sure Start and Early Excellence Centres (paragraph 42).
12. We recommend that the evidence from comprehensive evaluations of Early Excellence and Sure Start should be used actively within Government across Departments to support and promote the further development of integrated policy and practice under the leadership of one Department (paragraph 43).
13. We recommend that the adult:child ratio should be no more than fifteen-to-one in Reception and Year 1 (paragraph 44).
14. We recommend that children below compulsory school age should be taught informally in ways that are appropriate to their developmental stage and their interests. We recommend that in Reception and Year 1 classes there should be fifteen or fewer children for each member of staff working with the children in the class (paragraph 51).
15. We support the approach in the *Curriculum Guidance* issued by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority that more structured learning should be introduced very gradually so that, by the end of the Reception year, children are learning through more formal, whole class activities for a small proportion of the day (paragraph 52).
16. We recommend that training for the Reception Year should be moved out of Key Stage 1 training and into the training for the Foundation Stage (paragraph 53).
17. We recommend that initial and inservice training programmes for Early Years practitioners should emphasise the skills and knowledge necessary to both involve and support family members. We recommend that the Teacher Training Agency and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority should emphasise in their guidance and the teacher training syllabus the skills for working with adults as well as those for teaching young children (paragraph 54).
18. Many of those giving evidence argued that the age of school entry was less important than the kind of curriculum and teaching young children encounter when they enter statutory schooling (paragraph 57).
19. We recommend that the Government should review the limitations in practice on the operation of parents' choice for entry to primary school, to ensure that the needs of children to be placed in appropriate settings are paramount (paragraph 58).
20. We recommend that the compulsory age of school entry should remain at the term after the child's fifth birthday; and the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage should be fully implemented in primary schools to ensure that children receive the style of education appropriate to their stage of development (paragraph 60).
21. We recommend that baseline assessment should be moved to the start of Year 1 (paragraph 63).

22. We support the Qualification and Curriculum Authority's *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*, which illustrates rather than imposes stepping stones for a child to progress from the age of three to the end of the foundation stage (paragraph 68).
23. We recognise that the scale of the challenge in the Guidance to practitioners, who will need to have imagination and flexibility to enable children to learn in ways appropriate to their developmental stage (paragraph 69).
24. We recommend that training to assist practitioners to enhance children's personal, social and emotional development should be supported by the DfEE (paragraph 70).
25. We recommend that innovative practice in ways to foster children's personal, social and emotional development should be disseminated widely through the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (paragraph 71).
26. We recommend that the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should expand training opportunities, particularly in the voluntary and private sector, to enhance the level of teaching skill, including planning and assessment (paragraph 74).
27. We recommend that every setting that is inspected by OFSTED should have such areas available to the children. We recommend that if necessary the DfEE should make specific grants to Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships to make this provision possible and should assist settings in receipt of grant also to pursue other sources of funding, such as the New Opportunities Fund (paragraph 87).
28. We recommend that the funding of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should be increased to enable children who have no opportunity for outdoor play, to have safe and secure facilities regularly available to them so that they can play and learn outdoors as well as indoors (paragraph 88).
29. We recommend that Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in relatively disadvantaged urban areas should plan to provide a range of outdoor experiences appropriate to the age of the children including, for example, visits to urban farms, the countryside, woodland and the seaside, where the environment is used by skilled practitioners to instruct, stimulate and expand the imagination of children (paragraph 89).
30. We recommend that as a long term vision the DfEE should foster the creation and development of a ladder of training for Early Years practitioners which could lead to a graduate qualification equivalent to that of qualified teachers (paragraph 97).
31. We recommend that every setting outside a home which offers early education should have a trained teacher on its staff. Trained teachers should also be involved in the networks which support childminders looking after children in the Foundation Stage (paragraph 99).
32. We recommend that Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should publish regular surveys of the costs of childcare in their local authority areas, as well as surveys of the typical rates of pay in their area for different categories of practitioners in the Early Years sector (paragraph 100).

33. We recommend that the Government with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should adopt an objective of ensuring equitable pay and conditions for all categories of practitioners across all settings in the Early Years sector (paragraph 101).
34. We urge the DfEE to examine the reasons for the low recruitment of men into the Early Years sector and to make strenuous efforts to address the imbalance in the Early Years workforce (paragraph 102).
35. We welcome the national recruitment campaign, led by the DfEE, for Early Years staff, including Early Years teachers, and we recommend that particular efforts should be made to attract men as part of this campaign (paragraph 103).
36. We recommend that there should be continued Government investment in training at all levels in the Early Years sector (paragraph 115).
37. We recommend that there should be national targets for training so that within ten years all Early Years practitioners have appropriate and specialist levels of training, with all heads of centres, nurseries and playgroups being at graduate level or equivalent and all other early childhood workers at NVQ Level 3 or equivalent (paragraph 116).
38. We recommend that all training should be adequately funded, and in particular, that there should be Government grants for mature and part-time students, and better support for those following NVQs (paragraph 117).
39. We recommend that all early childhood workers should have access to continuous professional development as of right. Qualified Early Years teachers should visit the settings outside the home to work alongside practitioners to assist their professional development (paragraph 118).
40. We recommend that further education, higher education and other training institutions should develop more flexible training options (such as distance learning, workplace training and modularised training), to increase access across the sectors (paragraph 119).
41. We recommend that Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should provide positive leadership and financial support to make training more accessible and affordable for the private and voluntary sectors (paragraph 120).
42. We recommend that higher education institutions, in conjunction with the Teacher Training Agency, should develop Early Years training options at higher levels (postgraduate) to enhance the Early Years trainer work force. We recommend that the Teacher Training Agency should sponsor places on Early Years postgraduate courses (paragraph 121).
43. We recommend that the Early Years National Training Organisation should take a strong lead in the dissemination of the new Early Years qualifications 'climbing frame' to ensure that employers and parents understand what the range of qualifications mean (paragraph 122).
44. We recommend that the OFSTED's Director of Early Years should have substantial experience of the care and education of young children. In our view it is also essential that there should be a strong element of both Early Years experience of education and care within the team

(paragraph 129).

45. In our view OFSTED should recognise that the manner of inspection should a change from the current climate of extreme stress in schools both before and during an OFSTED inspection to one of support (paragraph 130).
46. We recommend that the inspection should include the self evaluation undertaken in the setting, so that it will be more effective in improving the quality of provision (paragraph 131).
47. We expect to subject the performance of the OFSTED Early Years Director to regular scrutiny as part of the accountability of OFSTED to Parliament, specifically to this Select Committee (paragraph 132).
48. We recommend that the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should continue to be supported in every way, but particularly in the consistent training for members and Chairs (paragraph 140).
49. We recommend that all Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships should work towards establishing an independent Chair who is acceptable to all members (paragraph 141).
50. We recommend that quality should be monitored closely by the DfEE where Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships are not working well and that these Partnerships should be identified, supported and have the opportunity to observe and emulate good practice where it already exists (paragraph 142).
51. We recommend that every meeting of a Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership should be open and that members of the public should be invited and encouraged to attend (paragraph 143).
52. We recommend that the increased Government investment in early education and care should be sustained over a long-term period (paragraph 149).
53. We recommend that those responsible in the DfEE should continue to review the relative fairness of access to funding for places, staff, resources, capital, and training across the sectors in the Early Years (paragraph 150).
54. We recommend that the long-term aim of DfEE Early Years funding policy should be to ensure the development of a diverse and innovative pre-school sector which meets the need of children and parents in all situations (paragraph 151).
55. We recommend that the advances in knowledge about brain development should be kept under examination by DfEE-funded researchers in the education field so that Early Years policy is kept up to date and consistent with the available scientific evidence (paragraph 155).