

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Childcare and Early Learning - Policy Position Paper

Policy Position Paper

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Executive Summary

- i. Education, including early learning, is a key factor in determining an individual's life chances. High quality early learning plays a key role in a child's development, and can have significant beneficial impacts for those children most at risk of educational underachievement. It also has an important role in tackling disadvantage and in developing an understanding and respect for diversity.
- ii. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland urges prompt action to ensure appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare and early-years provision to meet the diverse needs of parents, carers, and children from across the range of equality categories.
- iii. Delivering improvements to childcare and early learning has the potential to advance equality of opportunity for parents - particularly mothers, carers and children - including those with a disability and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- iv. While debates often focus on childcare for young children, it is important to recognise the importance also to those who may benefit from access to childcare services into their teenage years – including for older children with disabilities.
- v. While recognising the current context, including pressures on available resources, the Commission urges prompt action to advance equality via the provision of appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare and early learning provision.

Summary of recommendations for Childcare and Early Learning

- vi. Action is required to:
 - Provide appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare and early-years provision to meet the diverse needs of all children.
 - Promote equality of opportunity for parents / carers, including overcoming barriers to parental employment.
 - Maximise the quality and sustainability of Childcare and Early Learning services.

- Tackle gender stereotypes concerning Childcare and Early Learning roles.
- Support and encourage employers to develop carer friendly policy and practices, including maximising flexibility.

Wider Recommendations

- vii. We also consider that there is an opportunity via the provision of childcare and early-years support to take steps in support of addressing wider inequalities in education. Accordingly we recommend action to:
- Address inequalities in attainment and access experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children;
 - Tackle prejudice-based bullying and challenge stereotypes;
 - Engage with parents / families / carers and the wider communities of key equality groups;
 - Ensure the quality of educational experiences received by children with Special Educational Needs (SEN);
 - Provide tailored support to ensure the effective participation in education of every looked after child;
 - Embed equality of opportunity and good relations within learning;
 - Mainstream equality and good relations issues into the education, training and continuous professional development of early years / childcare providers;
 - Routinely teach children together via a shared curriculum in shared classes, in support of better advancing a shared society:
- viii. Action is also required with regards to better targeting interventions and tracking impacts; collecting and using equality data to inform decision making; in leadership and stakeholder involvement; and in ensuring appropriate investment and resourcing.
- ix. For further information, please visit www.equalityni.org/childcare or contact publicpolicy@equalityni.org

1 **Childcare and Early Learning**

- 1.1 Quality childcare and early learning provision goes beyond merely providing care for a child, providing a vital opportunity to support the learning and development of children across a range of equality groups and disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 1.2 Across this paper we focus on Childcare and Early Learning provision in relation to the wider range of professional caring and early-years services¹ outside of the compulsory education system, from when a child is born to their teenage years.
- 1.3 While debates often focus on the benefits of childcare for young children, their families or the economy, it is important to recognise the importance also to those who may benefit from access to childcare services into their teenage years – including for older children with Disabilities or Special Educational Needs.
- 1.4 While this paper centres on childcare provision, in Section 6 we summarise a number of our recommendations for education, which have key relevance also to early education.

Provision in Northern Ireland

- 1.5 Children in Northern Ireland are currently entitled to a ‘funded’ pre-school place in the year before they start their first year of primary school.
- 1.6 A pre-school place is normally provided across five sessions per week, each lasting 2.5 hours per day (part time) or, in some cases, 4.5 hours per day (full time), during the school year. This amounts to 12.5-22.5 hours per week.
- 1.7 These places are funded by the Department of Education (DE) and are not compulsory but follow a set curriculum.
- 1.8 Beyond this, there is a variety of financial support towards the cost of registered childcare. Those in receipt of working tax

¹ A variety of different types of services are available, including childminders and Approved Home Child-carers, pre-schools, day nurseries, playgroups and out-of-school care, and are provided by the private, public and community and voluntary sectors.

credits² and Universal Credit³ may also be able to get support for their childcare costs from registered providers if they are working (up to 85% for those on Universal Credit, until a child is 16).

- 1.9 For those not claiming benefits and earning a minimum income, tax-free childcare⁴ provides a 20% top-up of childcare costs up to £2,000 a year for each child up to age 11. This goes up to £4,000 a year and to age 16 if a child is disabled.
- 1.10 Childcare Vouchers⁵ allow eligible parents to sacrifice salary, to pay for their childcare costs for children under 16 (17 for children with disabilities). The Childcare Voucher scheme closed to new entrants in October 2018.
- 1.11 There are also some targeted supports in place, such as Sure Start⁶, which focuses on disadvantaged areas, and Toybox⁷, which focuses on Traveller children.

Current Context

- 1.12 In general terms, the situation in Northern Ireland remains one where, for many families, there is insufficient access to appropriate Childcare and Early Years support, and the cost is too high. This impacts on children who are unable to access the developmental opportunities childcare and early learning support offers. It also impacts on parents/ carers and employers/service providers, where lack of provision may impact ability to access and maintain employment and training. There are also wider matters relating to attitudinal issues, gender stereotyping and the associated models of childcare and its wider role.
- 1.13 A 2021 analysis⁸ by the Sutton Trust has set out that Northern Ireland offers the least support for childcare in the UK, while in 2023 the Economic and Social Research Institute reported that

² See [UK Government: Working Tax Credits](#) (accessed 12/02/24). Note applications to working tax credits have closed, and current claimants will be migrated on to Universal Credit.

³ See [UK Government: Universal Credit and Childcare](#) (accessed 12/02/24).

⁴ See [UK Government: Tax-Free Childcare](#) (accessed 12/02/24). Note this is only available if earning the equivalent of the National Minimum or Living Wage for 16 hours per week, and less than £100 000 per year.

⁵ See [UK Government: Childcare vouchers and other employer schemes](#) (accessed 12/02/24).

⁶ See [NIDirect: Sure Start Services](#) (accessed 12/02/24).

⁷ See www.early-years.org/toybox-project (accessed 12/02/24).

⁸ Sutton Trust (2021) [A Fair Start? Equalising Access to Early Education](#), p. 26.

Northern Ireland had slightly fewer hours of pre-school provision compared with Ireland⁹.

- 1.14 In June 2023, a childcare review by the Department of Education reported that the majority of parents on low and middle-incomes “*consider childcare to be unaffordable*”, with those on higher incomes also struggling”¹⁰.
- 1.15 The COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent / ongoing recovery, demonstrated the fundamental importance of good quality and affordable childcare and early learning provision to families, the economy and society. The effective provision of childcare and early-years support is a necessary component of the recovery from wider and persistent impacts of the pandemic, both in facilitating the economic participation of parents / carers, and in addressing the impacts on the educational and developmental progress of children.
- 1.16 In 2023, the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland¹¹ highlighted the importance of high-quality early years provision, outlining that it:
- ‘improves learning overall while simultaneously helping to narrow the gap between more and less advantaged children. In addition, investment that could improve access to special educational needs (SEN) services and provide support for other specific types of need (as experienced by disadvantaged families, newcomers and Roma/travellers) in early years could provide a significant long-term saving as well as improving long-term outcomes for children’.*
- 1.17 At the societal level, while attitudes and roles with respect to parenting / caring responsibilities are changing, caring remains an issue that is disproportionately undertaken by women. Cultural change, at all levels, is thus also crucial for addressing the impact that children and caring have on mothers’ labour market participation.

⁹ ESRI (2023) [Early childhood education and care in Ireland and Northern Ireland](#), p. 9.

¹⁰ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, p. 116.

¹¹ Independent Review of Education (2023) [Investing in a Better Future: The Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland Volume 2](#), para 1.24.

Proposals to Improve Childcare

- 1.18 Despite a government consultation in 2015¹², to date a Childcare Strategy has not been introduced in Northern Ireland.
- 1.19 The 2020 New Decade, New Approach¹³ agreement included a commitment that the Executive would publish a Childcare Strategy and ‘deliver extended, affordable and high-quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4’. The Commission welcomed the proposed focus on both child development and parental employment, in the context of advancing equality for children, parents and families from a range of equality categories.
- 1.20 However, we also noted with concern the update¹⁴ provided to the Assembly later in 2020 that there is *“no allocation currently available for childcare within the DE budget”* and that if funding is approved *“design, planning and phased implementation will take a number of years”*.
- 1.21 In September 2022, then-Education Minister McIlveen MLA confirmed that the Strategy would be an ‘Early Learning and Childcare Strategy’, which would ‘ensure a coherent package of support during the early years of a child’s life which supports learning and enables parents to work’. The Minister also indicated plans to expand pre-school provision for all children aged 3-4 in Northern Ireland to a minimum of 22.5 hours per week¹⁵, as part of the Strategy.
- 1.22 In February 2024, Education Minister, Paul Givan MLA, outlined¹⁶ the intention to deliver *“a bespoke and affordable scheme for Northern Ireland ...[that will] align with the financial support that is already provided by the Government to assist with childcare costs, principally through universal credit and the tax-free childcare scheme”*. He also indicated plans to standardise pre-school sessions for 3-4 year-olds to 22.5 hours, with an aspiration to raise provision to 30 hours for this age group. The mechanism for doing so and criteria for eligibility are however not yet clear.

¹² In 2015, the former OFMDFM carried out a consultation on a draft Executive Childcare Strategy.

¹³ NIO (2020) [New Decade, New Approach](#), Appendix 1, para xi.

¹⁴ [AQO 507/17-22](#), AOs week ending 24 July 2020

¹⁵ DE (2022) [McIlveen announces move towards 22.5 hours of funded pre-school for all children](#)

¹⁶ NIA (12/02/24) [Official Report Volume 153, No 3, Session 2023-2024](#), pp. 46-49.

1.23 While recognising the current financial context, including pressures on available resources, there remains a need for prompt action.

Early Learning, Childcare and Equality

1.24 Education, including early learning, plays a key role in determining an individual's life chances. The Commission recognises and reinforces the wider value of education, beyond solely the achievement of qualifications.

1.25 Even at the earliest stages, education can provide exposure to literature, language, sport, activities, art, and music; as well as allowing individuals to develop an understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds.

1.26 High quality early-years provision plays a key role in children's development, and can have significant beneficial impacts for those children most at risk of educational underachievement. It also has an important role in tackling disadvantage¹⁷.

1.27 There is a long-standing body of evidence pointing to the importance of effective early-years provision. For example, European Commission research (2012) found that children who attended high quality provision had better performance in school, and better economic and social outcomes in later life¹⁸. A number of reports from Northern Ireland have¹⁹ highlighted that early interventions are more effective and less complex than later remedial action.

1.28 In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the loss of access to formal pre-school education had a detrimental impact on children's development that could span across their lifetimes. Those for whom early learning provision has the most significant impact, including children from minority ethnic

¹⁷ Employers for Childcare and JRF (2024) [Tackling disadvantage through childcare in Northern Ireland](#)

¹⁸ EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) Final Report

¹⁹ For example, Purvis, D., (2011) [Educational disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class, A Call to Action](#), p 7; PUP (2015) Firm Foundations, [Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class Education: Getting it right for every child](#); Save the Children (2013) [Too Young to Fail, Closing the educational achievement gap in NI](#); DE (2017) [A compendium of evidence on ethnic minority resilience to the effects of deprivation on attainment](#)

communities and new residents¹¹, and children with disabilities²⁰, may feel the impact most acutely.

- 1.29 The Equality Commission has long-standing interests in childcare and early learning provision. In 2013 we published our ‘Policy Positions on Childcare’²¹. This work took account of research contracted by the Commission in 2013 on childcare provision in Northern Ireland²² as well as wider sources, including stakeholder engagement. The research had identified the lack of affordable and appropriate childcare provision and recommended the implementation of a Childcare Strategy. In 2018 (updated 2022) we also published our ‘Equality in Education: Policy Recommendations’²³ – including recommendations of relevance to early years.
- 1.30 For over a decade, the Commission has called²⁴ for effective childcare and early learning provision that ensures appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare that promotes equality of opportunity not only for the child, but also for parents and carers, to the benefit of wider society and the economy.
- 1.31 We have set out that such action should ensure that childcare and early learning provision meets the diverse needs of children and families from across the equality groups – including for disabled children, children from minority ethnic communities and new residents, and those from rural communities.
- 1.32 We have also reinforced the importance of tackling gender stereotypes relating to parenting and childcare roles; as well as the need to encourage positive attitudes to childcare; and remove barriers to parental employment.

²⁰ DE (2015) [Study of Early Education and Development: meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities in the early years](#), page 11

²¹ ECNI (2013) [Policy Positions on Childcare](#)

²² McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), ECNI.

²³ ECNI (2018) [‘Equality in Education: Policy Recommendations’](#). See also www.equalityni.org/education/policy

²⁴ For example: [Recommendations for a Programme for Government \(PfG\)](#) (2022); [Childcare and COVID-19](#) (2020); [COVID-19 and Education: Equality Considerations](#) (2020); [Equality in Education: Policy Recommendations](#) (2018); [Gender Equality: Policy Priorities and Recommendations](#) (2016); [Response to NI Executive’s consultation on a draft Childcare Strategy 2015- 2025](#) (2015)

- 1.33 While recognising the current economic context, including pressures on available resources, there remains a need for prompt action if economic policy goals are to be attained, and if inequalities are to be tackled. Childcare and early learning provision must meet the diverse needs of children, families, employers, service providers and the wider economy.
- 1.34 We urge the earliest prioritisation of actions that will extend appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare and early learning provision to advance equality for children, parents, carers and families – to the benefit of wider society and the economy.
- 1.35 We also highlight our broader recommendations in relation to education, many of which will be relevant to decision makers when considering early education. For further information, see section 6 of this paper.

2 Overview of Recommendations

- 2.1 The Commission considers that there is need for action across three broad areas:
- Childcare and early-years provision to meet the diverse needs of all children in Northern Ireland.
 - Childcare and early-years provision to meet the diverse needs of parents / carers and wider society.
 - Overcoming barriers to employment.
- 2.2 We also consider that action is required across a range of Government strategies, programmes and plans including with regards to targeting interventions and tracking impacts; equality data; leadership; stakeholder involvement; and appropriate resourcing.
- 2.3 There is also an opportunity via the provision of childcare and early-years support to take steps in support of addressing wider inequalities in education.

2.4 With regards to childcare and early learning specifically, we recommend action to:

- Provide appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare and early-years provision to meet the diverse needs of all children.
- Promote equality of opportunity for parents / carers, including overcoming barriers to parental employment.
- Maximise the quality and sustainability of childcare and early learning services.
- Tackle gender stereotypes concerning childcare and early learning roles.
- Support and encourage employers to develop parent / carer friendly policy and practices, including maximising flexibility.

3 Childcare and early years provision to meet the diverse needs of all children in Northern Ireland

Provide appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare and early-years provision to meet the diverse needs of all children.

3.1 Childcare and early learning must be appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable to meet the diverse needs of children across Northern Ireland.

3.2 Provision should be such so as to meet the specific needs for children from across the full range of equality groups, including disabled children, those from minority ethnic communities and new residents (who may not have English as a first language), as well as those from rural communities.

3.3 Decision-makers should monitor uptake of provision across the equality grounds, and ensure our services reflect international best practice, taking account of lessons from provision in Great

Britain, Ireland or wider relevant jurisdictions in relation to schemes to improve access to Childcare and Early Learning²⁵.

Supporting rationale

- 3.4 High quality early learning plays a key role in children's development and can have significant beneficial impacts for those children most at risk of educational underachievement.
- 3.5 There is a long-standing body of evidence pointing to the importance of effective early provision²⁶, with the benefits particularly evident for children from disadvantaged background²⁷. It is generally understood²⁸ ²⁹ that early interventions are more effective and less complex than later remedial action.
- 3.6 Save the Children³⁰ has argued that given the gap in children's development by the age of three, the highest priority should be given to the development of a fit-for-purpose early childhood education and care model.
- 3.7 2015 work by Purvis³¹ argued that while Sure Start has done excellent work there are many more children who would benefit but are not referred, are ineligible or are referred late. Purvis also noted the impact of a lack of attention to early development from antenatal care through to early language therapy interventions for those entitled to free school meals.

²⁵ For example [The Access and Inclusion Model Homepage - Access and Inclusion Model \(aim.gov.ie\)](https://aim.gov.ie). This scheme provides general and targeted support to all preschools to improve inclusivity and improve access for SEND, with plans for expansion to cover all childcare.

²⁶ For example, EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) Final [Report](#); Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons et al (2010) Early Childhood Matters: evidence from the effective pre-school and primary education project, cited in Northern Ireland Assembly Research Paper (2013) [Early Years Provision](#), NIAR 68-13

²⁷ ESRI (2023) [Early childhood education and care in Ireland and Northern Ireland](#), p. 6.

²⁸ Purvis, D., (2011) [Educational disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class: A Call to Action](#), p 7

²⁹ PUP (2015) [Firm Foundations, Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class Education: Getting it right for every child](#)

³⁰ Save the Children (2013) [Too Young to Fail: Closing the educational achievement gap](#) in NI, p.3

³¹ Purvis, D., (2011) [Educational disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class: A Call to Action](#), p 7

- 3.8 Early and effective provision can have a significant impact on children from particular equality groups – including children from minority ethnic communities³² and disabled children³³.
- 3.9 ECNI funded research identified a number of key equality issues around access to childcare and early learning³⁴:
- childcare provision for disabled children was identified as very deficient, with not enough suitable facilities for them;
 - migrant, minority ethnic and Traveller families have additional requirements from childcare services that were not being fully met. Some faced cultural and language barriers; services were not inclusive enough; and childcare costs were important, as such families were often in a lower income group;
 - lone parents experienced more acutely many of the issues faced by couples, and faced additional barriers to using childcare and maintaining employment;
 - parents with more than one child, and those with young children also faced high childcare costs and difficulties in balancing work and childcare;
 - problems in accessing childcare in rural areas were also identified, made difficult by poorer transport links and problems with the sustainability of providers.
- 3.10 The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)³⁵, UN Convention on Rights for People with Disabilities (UNCRPD³⁶), and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)³⁷ all impose obligations on Government to fulfil the rights of all children and particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds or children with a disability.

³² DE (2017) [A compendium of evidence on ethnic minority resilience to the effects of deprivation on attainment](#)

³³ DE (2015) [Study of Early Education and Development: meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities in the early years](#), p. 11

³⁴ McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), ECNI.

³⁵ See [UNCRC Art 24 and 29](#) which informed the statutory duty to provide childcare in the Childcare Act 2006 (GB) See also art 2.1 in relation to safeguarding these rights without discrimination.

³⁶ [UNCRPD Art 7 and 24](#)

³⁷ [CERD Art 1 and 2](#)

- 3.11 The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its 2023 Concluding Observations on the UK³⁸, were concerned at the inequalities in educational attainment and outcomes for children in disadvantaged situations and recommended that all children have access to adequate and affordable early childhood education.
- 3.12 Childcare and early learning provision should also meet the needs of children with special educational needs or disabilities, including through appropriate access to specialists such as educational psychologists and speech therapists³⁹.
- 3.13 The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have noted⁴⁰ that '*If identified and supported early, young children with disabilities are more likely to transition smoothly into pre-primary and primary inclusive education settings*'.
- 3.14 For some families, the issue is one of the availability of appropriate provision, including in relation to suitable facilities for disabled children. 2023 research commissioned by DE⁴¹ found that many parents of these children responding to their survey reported challenges in accessing childcare. The research⁴² also raised concerns around the training of providers to work with disabled children.
- 3.15 Likewise, a 2023 survey conducted by Employers for Childcare found⁴³ that responding families who had a disabled child used fewer hours of childcare, were twice as likely to be using no childcare at all, and more likely to be using informal childcare only.
- 3.16 For others, it is more an issue of affordability, which has been raised⁴⁴ as a particular challenge for low-income households, those on Universal Credit, one parent families, disabled parents and parents with a black ethnic background. In 2023, an Employers for Childcare survey found that, on average, parents

³⁸ Committee of the Rights of the Child (2023) [Concluding observations on the combined 6th and 7th periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), para 47.

³⁹ Independent Review of Education (2023) [Investing in a Better Future: The Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland Volume 2](#), para 1.56.

⁴⁰ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) [General comment No. 4 on the right to inclusive education](#), para 67.

⁴¹ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp. 46-47.

⁴² RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp. 54-55.

⁴³ Employers for Childcare (2023) [Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2023](#), p. 33.

⁴⁴RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, p. 131.

responding were spending around £9,360 a year on childcare, and the average costs of a full-time childcare place in Northern Ireland was £10,036 a year, an increase of 14% since 2021⁴⁵.

- 3.17 UK-wide schemes to assist with the costs of childcare, through tax-free childcare⁴⁶ and Universal Credit⁴⁷, are available only where at least one parent is working, and in many circumstances, in two-parent households, both parents must be working and earning a minimum amount to access support. In one-parent households where the parent is not employed due to health/ disability or caring responsibilities, they cannot access support through these schemes.
- 3.18 In 2019, well before current inflationary pressures, the Committee on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has highlighted⁴⁸ their concern *‘that childcare costs remain excessive, in particular in Northern Ireland, which constitutes an obstacle for women in entering into and progressing in the workplace’*.
- 3.19 For Traveller and minority ethnic families, the main barrier may be one of accessibility, with lack of local family support networks limiting access to informal care and language and cultural barriers limiting access to wider childcare services⁴⁹.
- 3.20 We know from wider research that in England there is a lower take-up of early education entitlements for those who speak English as an additional language, and for children from minority ethnic communities⁵⁰.
- 3.21 Other research⁵¹ has found that policy and programmes supports appear to be less well established for children and families from migrant and minority backgrounds in Northern Ireland. It highlighted that one concern is awareness of available entitlements, supports and services. The Toybox

⁴⁵ Employers for Childcare (2023) [Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2023](#), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁶ For more information, see www.gov.uk/tax-free-childcare (accessed 12/01/2023)

⁴⁷ For more information, see www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/universal-credit-payments-children-and-childcare (accessed 12/01/2023).

⁴⁸ CEDAW (2019) [Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8, para 45.

⁴⁹ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp. 56-57.

⁵⁰ JRF and Coram Family and Childcare (2023) [Tackling Disadvantage Through Childcare](#), p. 15

⁵¹ Economic and Social Research Institute (2023) [Early Education and Care in Ireland and Northern Ireland](#), pp. 63-65.

programme was identified in this ESRI (2023) research as a 'good initiative for the purposes of encouraging participation and improving long-term outcomes for Traveller children'.

- 3.22 Some families will face multiple barriers to accessing childcare and early-year support, which may impact on their ability to take up employment (see next section).

4 Childcare and early years provision to meet the diverse needs of parents / carers and wider society.

Promote equality of opportunity for parents / carers, including overcoming barriers to parental employment.

- 4.1 Alongside providing for the child, childcare and early learning provision should promote equality of opportunity for parents and those providing care, to the benefit of wider society and the economy.
- 4.2 Provision in Northern Ireland should be sufficiently flexible to take account of the conditions that would facilitate parents, particularly mothers, and carers to better access employment and training.
- 4.3 In particular, the Commission calls for urgent action to address shortfalls in provision of childcare for children under school-age, and to ensure sufficient provision before and after the school day, that alongside providing for the child, might facilitate wider economic participation of parents / carers, including for those with older children with a disability.
- 4.4 Information on childcare and early-years provision and availability should be easily accessible, including for those who do not speak English as a first language.

Supporting rationale

- 4.5 The availability of appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare and early learning provision to meet the needs of all children is a fundamental part of the process of assisting parents, particularly mothers, and those providing care – to enter, remain in, progress in and return to work, and hence of advancing employment equality⁵².
- 4.6 Appropriate childcare has benefits both in the short-term (e.g. the ability to deal with sickness of a child) and with long-term career development (which may be affected if it is not possible to return to work in the same type of role, or to take on new roles).
- 4.7 Access to childcare support beyond early-years is also important, not only for working parents, but also for those with caring responsibilities for older children with a disability.
- 4.8 There are also considerable potential economic and social benefits of increased employment of parents and those providing care, including economic growth and poverty reduction⁵³.
- 4.9 ONS data⁵⁴ shows that the majority of parents in Northern Ireland with dependent children were employed in 2021 (64% full time and 19% part time). However, within that there are differences in the proportions employed, and in the nature of employment. For example, 91% of all men with dependent children were employed, while only 80% of all women with dependent childcare were employed. Further, many more women worked part-time hours, with 31% of women with dependent children working part-time, compared with only 5% of men.
- 4.10 DE sponsored research⁵⁵ from 2023 suggests that many parents, particularly those in low-income households, report that a lack of access to formal childcare has prevented them or their partner from increasing hours of work. It also suggests

⁵² McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), ECNI.

⁵³ McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), ECNI.

⁵⁴ ONS (2021) [Families and the labour market, Northern Ireland](#)

⁵⁵ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp. 132-142.

that challenges in accessing childcare have a particular effect on employment opportunities for parents of disabled children.

- 4.11 An Employers for Childcare survey (2023)⁵⁶ found that many parents responding, particularly mothers, changed their working arrangements due to the cost of childcare, and that childcare stress impacts on their productivity in work. Lower income households reported that they were more likely to have to stop work due to childcare costs⁵⁷.
- 4.12 The provision, and uptake, of childcare (or lack thereof) should also be seen in the overall context of overcoming wider barriers to parental employment, including employability. Childcare, whether for younger or older children, should be delivered in a way which facilitates parents and carers to overcome barriers to work.
- 4.13 Mainstream employment programmes do not always address the needs of those with caring responsibilities who are seeking to get into, or back into work, including their potentially lower confidence levels, after potentially many years of not being in employment.
- 4.14 Research has shown that childcare provision that does exist often does not meet the needs of working parents⁵⁸:
- it may be insufficiently flexible, not covering the required hours to enable parents to take up employment opportunities;
 - it may not cover all holiday/break periods adequately;
 - due to its high-cost relative to wages, it may be too expensive;
 - parents may simply be unaware of suitable childcare that does exist, and the support that they could get to help access it, such as tax credits and childcare vouchers; and
 - quality of provision was also noted as an issue, impacting not only on the child, but also on the parent's willingness

⁵⁶ Employers for Childcare (2023) [Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2023](#), p. 48, 53.

⁵⁷ Employers for Childcare (2023) [Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2023](#), p. 50

⁵⁸ McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), ECNI.

and confidence to use childcare and thus to take up employment.

- 4.15 The current model of provision, largely from 8am to 5 or 6pm does not fit well with a growing number of people's working lives, for instance, those with shift patterns⁵⁹, whether fixed or flexible.
- 4.16 Additionally, the current funded pre-school education provision of 2.5 or 4.5 hours per day in term-time does not facilitate a parent to return to substantial or full-time employment if they have no other support.
- 4.17 2023 DE research found that there is particularly high demand for childcare and early-years support compared with available spaces for pre-school aged children⁶⁰. This has led to difficulties for parents of young children in finding childcare.
- 4.18 The Commission considers that innovative use of community infrastructure, community halls, and in particular schools (including through the extended schools initiative⁶¹) could facilitate potential improvements alongside efforts to promote sustainability and quality.
- 4.19 It is important that childcare and early-years support is of a high-quality, and is accessible. 2023 research commissioned by DE⁶² suggests that there is a lack of provision of breakfast clubs and after-school clubs in the special school sector.
- 4.20 Further, the DE supported research⁶³ suggested many parents struggle to find information on childcare, particularly those who speak English as an additional language. Migrant communities may also find it difficult to find out what financial support is available for childcare.

⁵⁹ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp. 37-38.

⁶⁰ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, p. 32.

⁶¹ Extended schools provide for a range of services or activities outside of the normal school day to help meet the needs of nursery, primary, secondary and special school children, their parents, families and local community. These include activities, classes and support for learning <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/extended-schools>

⁶² RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, p. 53.

⁶³ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp. 21, 56-58

Maximise quality and sustainability of childcare and early learning services.

- 4.21 We recommend actions to ensure the sustainability of provision, including childcare services in disadvantaged and rural areas. Reflecting the key role of childcare and early learning in children’s development, the work of providers, predominantly women, should be properly valued and remunerated, with appropriate workforce development opportunities.
- 4.22 Government should review the revenue streams and costs of childcare and early learning provision, and explore innovative ways of developing and supporting providers to maximise the quality and sustainability of provision, including during times of fluctuating or lower demand, and for children with specific needs.
- 4.23 Government should be mindful of the different types of childcare and early learning provision in Northern Ireland, including childminders and Approved Home Child-carers, day nurseries, playgroups and out-of-school care.
- 4.24 Consideration should be given to lessons learned from other jurisdictions in relation to ensuring the sustainability of services.

Supporting rationale

- 4.25 When developing and implementing actions to ensure childcare and early learning provision is appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable, consideration should be given to the impact on providers.
- 4.26 Best practice and lessons learned from other jurisdictions should inform decision making, for example some schemes in other jurisdictions have attracted concern that they do not cover the full costs for providers, affecting their sustainability⁶⁴.

⁶⁴ House of Commons Education Committee (2023) [Support for childcare and the early years](#), Fifth Report of Session 2022–23, HC 969, paras 25-30.

Meeting the needs of specific equality groups

- 4.27 To maximise the benefits of childcare and early learning, it is important services are of a high-quality, and meet the needs of specific equality groups. For example, we note that the ‘Fair Start’ Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland recommended that the Continuous Professional Development Framework for the Early Years sector should include meeting the needs of Roma, Traveller, Newcomer, and looked after children⁶⁵.
- 4.28 Excellent services have an enduring positive effect on educational performances, particularly for disadvantaged children, but lower quality services have more limited impact⁶⁶.
- 4.29 The Commission⁶⁷ has previously identified sustainability for providers as a potential barrier to uptake. Quality of provision was also noted as an issue, impacting not only on the child, but also on the parent’s willingness and confidence to use childcare.

Sustainability of Provision

- 4.30 At March 2023, there were 3,397 individuals/ facilities registered as day care provision for children aged 12 and under in Northern Ireland, which provided 57, 482 registered places for day care⁶⁸. This represents a loss of over 5000 places in five years when compared to March 2018 when there were 4 277 individuals/ facilities registered, which provided 62 638 places⁶⁹.
- 4.31 DE research⁷⁰ has also found that there is falling demand for childcare *for school-age children* since the COVID-19 pandemic. This may affect some providers’ income, due to less demand for after-school clubs etc. This differential demand / capacity appears also to be reflected in the Employers for Childcare survey⁷¹, which found that providers responding were

⁶⁵ Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland (2021) [A Fair Start: Final Report and Action Plan](#), p. 3.

⁶⁶ Independent Review of Education (2023) [Investing in a Better Future: The Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland Volume 2](#), para 1.34.

⁶⁷ McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), ECNI

⁶⁸ DoH/ NISRA (2023) [Children’s Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland](#), pp. 47-49.

⁶⁹ DoH/ NISRA (2018) [Children’s Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2017/18](#), pp. 45-47.

⁷⁰ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, p. 32.

⁷¹ Employers for Childcare (2023) [Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2023](#), p 85.

more likely to have spare capacity for older children, and most likely to be at capacity for younger children, those under age 5.

- 4.32 Recent research has found many providers are facing difficult financial outlooks, raising concerns about the sustainability of the sector^{72 73}.
- 4.33 Evidence also suggests there are significant extra costs for providers of services for children with English as an additional language, and disabled children⁷⁴. Providers have also highlighted that more regular opportunities to access targeted funding would help them better accommodate specific needs⁷⁵.
- 4.34 Different settings and providers, such as childminders, private day nurseries and statutory pre-schools, are likely to have differing needs and pressures. These differences should be considered by decision-makers when assessing how to ensure sustainability of settings.

Workforce sustainability

- 4.35 Ongoing recruitment and retention issues have been identified by many providers, stemming from relatively low salaries which they feel do not reflect the working hours, level of qualification and responsibilities required from childcare and early learning staff when compared to other sectors, e.g. primary education or retail⁷⁶. Providers have also highlighted concern around the length of time to complete vetting processes⁷⁷.
- 4.36 Workforce development actions to improve the status and qualifications of those delivering childcare and early learning would likely have benefits for those providing / working in childcare; as well as those using the service, both children and parents.

⁷² Employers for Childcare (2023) [Northern Ireland Childcare Survey 2023](#), p. 77.

⁷³ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp. 97-100.

⁷⁴ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp. 58-61.

⁷⁵ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, p. 61.

⁷⁶ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp. 82-89, 91-95.

⁷⁷ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, p.88.

5 Overcoming barriers to employment

Tackle gender stereotypes concerning childcare and early learning roles.

- 5.1 The Commission recommends coordinated, comprehensive and coherent measures to tackle gender-based stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes from an early age and across all areas of life.
- 5.2 This should include challenging gender stereotypes in relation to women's and men's caring roles – both in the home and in employment. When considering gender stereotypes in relation to childcare, consideration should be given to the diverse range of family types in Northern Ireland.
- 5.3 There is need for acceptance and recognition of a greater emphasis on both women and men taking childcare responsibility (including parental leave) and building appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare and early-years provision around this.
- 5.4 There is a need also to address the lack of diversity of those working in childcare and early education, particularly the low numbers of males in this profession.

Supporting rationale

- 5.5 Responsibility for childcare continues to fall disproportionately on women⁷⁸. Gender stereotyping and social attitudes regarding a mother's role in parenting and work undoubtedly impacts on the numbers of women in work, and the number of men working in childcare and early learning.
- 5.6 Family policy both reflects and perpetuates this division of labour⁷⁹, with leave entitlements after the birth of a child that have historically been weighted towards mothers taking more time out of the labour market to care for children than fathers.

⁷⁸ RSM (2023) [Review of Childcare Services in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by DE, pp 137-138.

⁷⁹ McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), ECNI.

We note that, despite the introduction of shared parental leave in 2015, uptake remains low in the UK⁸⁰.

- 5.7 There is significant lack of diversity in those working in childcare and early learning, particularly in relation to the low numbers of males in this profession. The Department of Education reported⁸¹ that in 2022-23, 100% of nursery school teachers in grant-aided schools were female. A more diverse workforce could both improve the availability of childcare for children and address some of the gender stereotyping around caring roles and responsibilities⁸².
- 5.8 Gender stereotyping and prejudicial attitudes affect women and men throughout their lives, limits the options that are open to them and the choices that they can make in public, economic, social and family life.
- 5.9 The CEDAW Committee concluded in 2018, that there was a failure in Northern Ireland to combat stereotypes depicting women primarily as mothers, exacerbating discrimination against women, and in violation of CEDAW⁸³. Subsequent legislation⁸⁴ has placed a duty on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to adopt a strategy to combat gender-based stereotypes regarding women's primary role as mothers, but to date this remains undelivered.
- 5.10 The CEDAW Committee has also recommended⁸⁵ action to provide further incentives to encourage men to take parental leave, such as non-transferrable leave, and encourage men to participate equally in childcare responsibilities.
- 5.11 Evidence suggests that the involvement of fathers in childcare assists with children's development, including school readiness⁸⁶.

⁸⁰ PWC (2023) [Women in Work 2023 – Closing the Gender Pay Gap for good: A focus on the motherhood penalty](#), pp. 25-26.

⁸¹ DE (2023) [Teacher workforce statistics in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland](#), Section 2.

⁸² McQuaid, R., Graham, H. and Shapira, M (2013) [Child care: Maximising the economic participation of women](#), ECNI, section 4.2.2

⁸³ CEDAW (2018) [Inquiry Report](#), CEDAW/C/OP.8/GBR/1, paras 73-74.

⁸⁴ [Section 9](#) of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019.

⁸⁵ CEDAW (2019) [Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8, para 46.

⁸⁶ ESRI (2023) [Early childhood education and care in Ireland and Northern Ireland](#), p. 19.

- 5.12 Northern Ireland has many diverse family types, and when implementing measures to tackle gender stereotyping, the needs of families including lone parents (who are primarily women⁸⁷), same-sex couples, adoptive and foster parents and kinship carers should be considered.

Support and encourage employers to develop parent / carer friendly policy and practices, including maximising flexibility.

- 5.13 Employers and training providers should be supported and encouraged to develop carer friendly policy and practices.
- 5.14 Actions should include the promotion of flexible working practices and the equal sharing of family roles / responsibilities between women and men.
- 5.15 Provision should take account of the conditions that would facilitate parents and those providing care – to enter, remain in, progress in and return to work or training.

Supporting rationale

- 5.16 Parents need employers who can be supportive, not just of the ongoing need for flexibility in trying to reconcile work and childcare, but also of the unpredictable absences that children may necessitate. This is particularly the case with lone parents, who are predominantly women, as the need for flexibility and emergency time off for the lone partner cannot be shared with a partner, and thus between two employers.
- 5.17 There is a need to maximise the flexibility offered by employers and to improve understanding of the position of parents, particularly mothers in the labour market and the role of childcare in this (including parents who are in work, seeking work and not-seeking work).

⁸⁷ NISRA (2023) [Census 2021 – Table MS-A26 Household Composition – Households](#), The 2021 census found that there were 62 344 households with a lone female parent in Northern Ireland, compared with 4372 lone male parent families (excluding households where all children are non-dependent).

- 5.18 Actions by employers to develop parent friendly policy and practices, including through the promotion of flexible working practices, and to support parents to remain in work, can bring considerable benefits to parents themselves, employers and the wider economy⁸⁸.

6 Wider Education Recommendations

- 6.1 The Commission has identified a number of areas where targeted action could serve to address key inequalities, and advance equality of opportunity and good relations in education.
- 6.2 Recommendations that are of most relevance to childcare and early learning provision include:

- **Address inequalities in attainment and access experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children:**

The Department of Education should put in place measures to support the education of Traveller and Roma children, particularly in relation to: data collection and analysis; admissions and registration processes; planning transitions; and examining segregated provision. The Department of Education should assist schools in making effective use of dual language resources to help Newcomer learners access the curriculum.

- **Tackle Prejudice-Based Bullying and Challenge Stereotypes:**

High-level leadership is essential to ensure the consistent and robust implementation of policies and practices designed to address bullying, including bullying experienced by Section 75 groups.

Coordinated, comprehensive and coherent measures are needed to counter gender-based stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes from an early age and across all areas of life, including in all stages of education⁸⁹. It is

⁸⁸ Department of Health (2013) [Supporting Working Carers](#) The Benefits to Families, Business and the Economy, Final Report of the Carers in Employment Task and Finish Group

⁸⁹ ECNI (2016) [Gender Equality - Policy Priorities and Recommendations](#)

essential to challenge gender stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes from an early age, as gender-based stereotyping can begin in childhood and continue throughout life stages⁹⁰.

- **Engage with parents / families / carers and the wider communities of key equality groups:**

The Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014⁹¹ highlighted the benefits of broader family / community involvement in education noting: *"It is clear that schools alone cannot break the cycle of low outcomes; there is a need for greater coherence and connection between the learners, their families, their communities, their schools and the wide range of agencies and health support service providers that play a significant part in their lives."* These linkages were also among the common factors identified in the Executive Office's 2017 IliAD⁹² research as contributing to the enhancement of educational achievement across the seven wards included in the study. Lack of parental engagement has also been linked to poorer educational outcomes for those entitled to free school meals, particularly boys, including Protestant working class boys⁹³.

- **Government should ensure the quality of educational experiences received by children with special educational needs (SEN) in Northern Ireland:**

Students with SEN or a disability have lower attainment levels than students without any SEN or disability and are less likely to go on to higher education⁹⁴. Key barriers found to the attainment of children with SEN include insufficient precision with Statements. Adequate provision made in an effective manner is

⁹⁰ NI Executive (2013) [Together: Building a United Community Strategy](#) which notes: "We recognise that the early years in a child's life are the most formative and it is at this early stage that children can establish opinions, mindsets and attitudes that shape their behaviours for the rest of their lives"

⁹¹ The Education and Training Inspectorate (2013) An Evaluation of Extended Schools - Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014, p26

⁹² TEO (2017) [Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation \(ILiAD\)](#)

⁹³ PUP (2015) Firm Foundations, Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class Education: Getting it right for every child

⁹⁴ ECNI (2017) Statement on Key Inequalities in Education

essential to ensuring children with SEN are able to meet their full potential.

- **The Departments of Education and Health should provide tailored support to ensure the effective participation in education of every looked after child:**

Evidence shows that looked after children have poorer educational achievements when compared to their peers. The Department of Education and the Department of Health should work together to provide a co-ordinated and consistent approach, including via their duty within the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015⁹⁵, to ensure the effective participation in education of every looked after child.

- **Comprehensive action should be taken by the Department of Education, schools and other education providers to embed equality of opportunity and good relations within learning:**

The importance of embedding equality of opportunity and good relations within the school curriculum has long been recognised by the Commission. Our consideration further above highlights the importance of the curriculum in tackling prejudice-based bullying and stereotyping. For example, while girls out-perform boys, stereotyping and subject choice contribute to boys being more likely than girls to study Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects in higher education.

- **Mainstream equality and good relations issues into the education, training and continuous professional development of early years / childcare providers:**

The Commission has consistently called for equality and good relations to be embedded in training, both initial and continuing. In light of the diversity of life experiences and educational needs, we consider it essential that providers are equipped to ensure the particular requirements of children across the equality grounds are understood and met. Training and

⁹⁵ [Children's Services Co-operation Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#)

continuing professional development (CPD) are key methods of achieving this.

- **Move to a system of education which routinely teaches children together via a shared curriculum in shared classes, in support of better advancing a shared society:**

We consider that sharing across the education system could better provide learners with shared awareness, understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds in Northern Ireland; while also enabling learners from different cultures/communities to experience a shared society⁹⁶.

6.3 For further information on our policy priorities recommendations relating to education, please see www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy

7 Cross-cutting Recommendations

7.1 There is also a need for action to address a number of recommendations that the Commission considers important to see implemented across a range of Government strategies, programmes and plans.

- Targeting Interventions, Tracking Impacts: All key measures of Government should not only be tracked in aggregate but also for the impact on individuals from across the full range of equality grounds. Providing comprehensive equality metrics for all key measures will assist equality considerations to be a core component of public policy design and delivery, facilitating the fuller targeting and delivery of interventions, including for the full range of equality groups.
- Equality Data: There is a need for Government and Public Authorities to collect and share comprehensive equality data to underpin the targeting of interventions and tracking of equality impacts. Key Government datasets should contain comprehensive equality data to facilitate

⁹⁶ ECNI (2015) [Summary policy positions on sharing in education](#)

full equality analysis. There is also a need to address gaps in the equality data held within key government datasets and to make this information accessible to a wide range of decision makers and stakeholders.

- Leadership: There is a need for leadership at all levels on equality issues. Leadership must promote positive attitudes, challenge stereotypes and discrimination and ensure that options to advance equality are considered at the earliest point, and across the lifecycle, of all policy development and delivery.
- Stakeholder Involvement: There is a need for full and routine stakeholder involvement and co-design. Government and Departments must fully and routinely involve key stakeholders in the design, delivery and review of law and public policy, so as to benefit from their expertise and experience.
- Resources: There is a need for SMART, time-bound and resourced action plans as a basis for effective, on-time and prioritised delivery. Stakeholder organisations and the Equality Commission must also be properly resourced to support individuals, organisations, and Government / Departments to better shape and assist delivery of the Programme for Government towards advancing equality of opportunity and good relations.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 There are considerable opportunities to further equality of opportunity through improving childcare and early learning provision in Northern Ireland.
- 8.2 High quality early-years provision can have significant beneficial impacts for children, including those from particular equality groups.
- 8.3 The Commission considers that alongside providing for the child, childcare and early-years provision should also seek to promote equality of opportunity for parents and carers, to the benefit of families, wider society and the economy.
- 8.4 We recommend action to:
- Provide appropriate, accessible, flexible and affordable childcare and early-years provision to meet the diverse needs of all children.
 - Promote equality of opportunity for parents / carers, including overcoming barriers to parental employment.
 - Maximise the quality and sustainability of childcare and early learning services.
 - Tackle gender stereotypes concerning childcare and early learning roles.
 - Support and encourage employers to develop carer friendly policy and practices, including maximising flexibility.
- 8.5 Early intervention must also play an important role in addressing wider inequalities in education – including attainment for Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children; those with Special Educational Needs, and who are Looked After Children. We also highlight the importance of challenging inappropriate stereotypes and prejudice-based bullying at an early age; of supporting parental engagement; and of embedding equality of opportunity and good relations within learning, and within the training of early-years / childcare providers.

- 8.6 Action is also required with regards to better targeting interventions and tracking impacts; collecting and using equality data to inform decision making; in leadership and stakeholder involvement; and in ensuring appropriate investment and resourcing.
- 8.7 We have, and will continue to, proactively engage with a wide range of key stakeholders to call for change to advance equality of opportunity.
- 8.8 In support of securing change, we would welcome any steps you could take to raise awareness of these recommendations and their supporting evidence base. We encourage you to engage with elected representatives, key government officials and other decision makers to call for the adoption of these proposals.
- 8.9 For further information, please visit www.equalityni.org/childcare or contact publicpolicy@equalityni.org