

# CHILD CARE

Maximising the Economic  
Participation of Women





**An expert paper on the type, extent and delivery of childcare provision  
necessary to maximise the economic participation of  
women within Northern Ireland**

**FINAL REPORT  
to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1.	Introduction and context	1
1.2.	Objectives of the research	2
1.3.	Methodology	3
1.4.	Background to childcare in Northern Ireland	4
1.5.	The remainder of this report	6
<b>2.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
2.1.	The role of childcare within a wider decision-making framework	9
2.1.1.	The return to work decision	9
2.1.2.	Work, childcare and disadvantage	17
2.1.3.	Summary	19
2.2.	International policies and practices in childcare	20
2.2.1.	Family policies and female labour force participation	21
2.2.2.	Childcare policies and the cost of childcare for families	22
2.2.3.	Summary	26
<b>3.</b>	<b>THE MAPPING OF CHILDCARE PROVISION IN NORTHERN IRELAND</b>	
3.1.	Mapping childcare services	31
3.1.1.	Formal childcare	31
3.1.2.	Informal childcare	36
3.2.	Issues with childcare in Northern Ireland	37
3.2.1.	Availability; is there enough of the right types of provision?	37
3.2.2.	Flexibility; does it cover the right times of day, week and year?	39
3.2.3.	Affordability; what are the costs of care relative to earnings and is there enough financial support?	39
3.2.4.	Quality; what is quality and where does it fall short?	41
3.2.5.	Specific issues facing families with particular needs	42
3.2.6.	The funding and organisation of childcare	45
3.3.	Summary	46



<b>4.</b>	<b>STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDCARE IN NORTHERN IRELAND</b>	
<b>4.1.</b>	Availability and affordability	49
<b>4.1.1.</b>	From the parents' perspectives; accessing and affording the right childcare	49
<b>4.1.2.</b>	From the providers' perspectives; sustainability and funding	55
<b>4.2.</b>	Quality and staffing	56
<b>4.2.1.</b>	Quality standards	56
<b>4.2.2.</b>	Workforce development	56
<b>4.3.</b>	Organisation and accountability	56
<b>4.4.</b>	Policy inertia	57
<b>4.5.</b>	The wider picture	58
<b>4.5.1.</b>	Employability	58
<b>4.5.2.</b>	Gender roles and attitudes	60
<b>4.5.3.</b>	The economic situation and welfare reform	60
<b>4.6.</b>	Summary	61
<b>5.</b>	<b>OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
<b>5.1.</b>	Areas for the attention of policymakers in Northern Ireland	65
<b>5.2.</b>	Policy Options	68
<b>5.3.</b>	Conclusions	88
	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	90
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	91
	<b>APPENDIX A:</b> Summary of childcare policies in European countries	100
	<b>APPENDIX B:</b> Childcare policies in five non-european oecd countries	108
	<b>APPENDIX C:</b> Changes to maternity and paternity rights in the uk	119
	<b>APPENDIX D:</b> List of stakeholders consulted	120

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has identified women's caring responsibilities as a barrier to equality in employment (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 2008). **The aim of this paper is to inform the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's position on the type, extent and delivery of childcare provision necessary to maximise the economic participation of women within Northern Ireland.** It sets out recommendations on how the Government can improve childcare provision so as to better help mothers find, maintain and progress in employment.

### RESEARCH METHODS

The research involved synthesising existing information about childcare provision in Northern Ireland, and the wider literature on its links with maternal employment, with stakeholder interviews that highlight the key issues facing working families and those providing and co-ordinating childcare in Northern Ireland.

#### *Literature review*

A literature review was conducted in order to gather existing research around two main issues: the barriers to female employment, and the role of childcare within this; and policy approaches to childcare taken by other countries.

#### *Mapping*

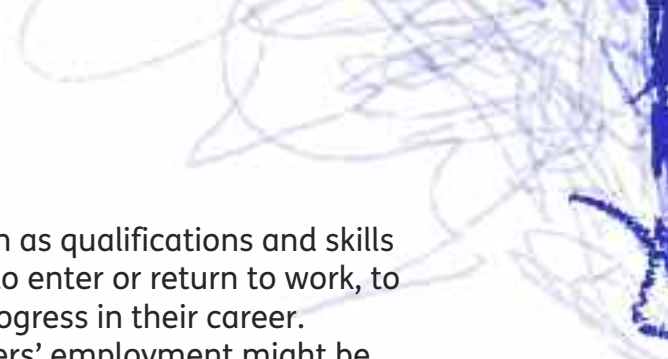
Existing literature and statistics were used to provide an overview of current childcare provision in Northern Ireland, and evaluate its availability, accessibility, flexibility and affordability.

#### *Stakeholder interviews*

Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, in order to gain greater insight into the disparity between need and provision of childcare, the impact of this disparity on mothers' economic opportunities, and specifically how these issues operate in the Northern Ireland context.

### BACKGROUND

The research was motivated by concerns that level of childcare provision in Northern Ireland appears to be lower than the rest of the United Kingdom. Despite an increase in the number of places available since 1996, Northern Ireland has one of the lowest levels of childcare within the UK (Employers for Childcare, 2010). Northern Ireland, and indeed the other regions of the UK, fails to meet the Barcelona targets of 90% childcare coverage between age three and starting school, and 33% of under-threes. Furthermore, in Northern Ireland, a child is classified as being in childcare even if they are attending sessions of just 2.5 hours per day; this is not sufficient to facilitate employment.



Childcare, alongside wider employability issues such as qualifications and skills and labour demand, is crucial to mothers' abilities to enter or return to work, to stay in work, to work the hours they want and to progress in their career. Therefore, the question was raised as to how mothers' employment might be encouraged by improving the childcare provision available to them.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

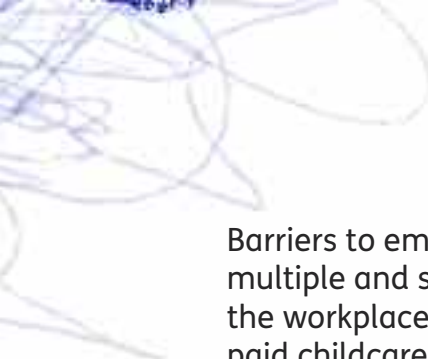
### *Childcare and mothers' employment*

The literature from the UK and beyond shows that the decision of whether and when to return to work after having children is based on a number of factors at the individual, household and societal levels. At the individual level, key to a mother's employment prospects after she has children is her employment history before the birth; paid work immediately before the childbirth is a good predictor of a mother's employment thereafter, and furthermore, as are high levels of education and pre-birth employment in a high status occupation. Attitudes to work and mothering also play an important role in return-to-work decision after childbirth. These attitudes vary between different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Mothers also make employment decisions in the context of their household situation and local employment prospects. Their family circumstances, and for partnered mothers the employment characteristics of their partners, are important predictors of their labour market participation. Employment is encouraged when the types and conditions of jobs are consistent with household needs, such as working hours, childcare arrangements and the desire to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance. The ability to return to work also depends on the opportunities in the local and regional labour markets. Whether a woman returns, and to what they return (in terms of hours, grade etc.), depends on what the labour market can offer them, and how this relates to what they are looking for.

The inter-relation between different sources of childcare support is important for the return to work decision. A supportive family together with supportive workplace arrangements are important for the employment of women with children. Furthermore, state support is crucial; if it supports a dual-earner family model through the length of paid parental leave for both parents, through public provision of childcare, and through statutory flexible work arrangements for parents, then mothers have higher chance of full-time or part-time employment.

Among the factors that discourage mothers to look for paid work, poor access to childcare is a crucial factor; childcare should be both affordable and geographically accessible to facilitate employment. If a significant portion of female-generated income, especially in the short term, is being spent on childcare, then work may be financially unviable.



Barriers to employment for mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds are multiple and structural. They may lack the qualifications and confidence to enter the workplace, while low-skilled and low-paid jobs do not allow them to afford paid childcare and may offer low levels of flexibility to accommodate their caring responsibilities. Furthermore, long-term benefit dependency, and the complexity of the transition from one type of benefit to another while starting training or a paid job, often leaves these mothers without the means to meet childcare and other costs, and therefore discourages them from engaging in paid work. Support programmes could be developed to address the specific problems of transition from benefits into employment for mothers from disadvantaged background.

#### *International approaches to childcare and family policy*

There are differences across European countries in the supply of childcare, childcare costs, and attitudes towards collective childcare. In the majority of countries, care for children who are very young (less than 12 months) is considered to be the private responsibility of families. Provision for children between one and two years of age varies, with supply almost everywhere being lower than the demand (perhaps with the exclusion of some Scandinavian countries). The need for care is partially met through cash benefits to compensate mothers for their withdrawal from the labour market. However, childcare coverage is better for children between age three and the start of compulsory education.

Northern Ireland sits within the UK's 'residual' approach to childcare of heavily targeting support at the most disadvantaged families, and offering limited universal entitlements; the free part-time nursery provision for three and four year olds does little to facilitate employment due to its limited hours. Thus, current arrangements are far from what might be considered best practice by European standards. It can be concluded from the literature that the most effective combination of family and childcare policies for encouraging female labour market participation is one that offers a combination of well-compensated maternity and parental leaves for the period immediately following birth, and then in the following years offers flexible job arrangements (including part-time jobs, flexible working hours, and job-sharing) and an adequate coverage of affordable childcare facilities (Del Boca et al., 2006). Such a combination is largely provided in some countries (such as Denmark, Sweden, France, Belgium and Norway), where mothers' labour market participation rates are high, and the negative effects of the presence of children on women's career and income perspectives also seem to be relatively low.

## **MAPPING OF CHILDCARE PROVISION IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

This paper sets out the major types of childcare provision currently in existence in Northern Ireland. Much of what might be described as childcare (e.g. playgroups, Sure Start centres) is not intended to facilitate employment, and its short, sessional format does not cover the hours that working parents require.

For working parents, seeking extensive hours of care, the available childcare takes the form of:

- for 0-2 year olds, childminders and private day care, subsidised by tax credits dependent on income;
- for 3-4 year olds, free part-time nursery places are available, but additional care may also need to be purchased from a childminder or private day care facility, and must be paid for in the same way as 0-2 year olds;
- for school age children; childminding remains an option, and breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday schemes are available, some fully or partially funded by the Government, but some private and fee-charging.

However, research has suggested that this provision is not always available or affordable for parents. These concerns are reviewed, and childcare provision evaluated on its availability, flexibility, affordability, and quality, as well as outlining specific barriers to accessibility faced by certain types of family. This exercise suggested that availability is patchy, insufficiently flexible, and not always of high quality, but prices are high, especially when compared with average family wages. Some types of family may also face additional barriers to accessing childcare, such as rural families or parents with disabled children or parents with more than one and/or very young children. This present situation seems partly to be linked with a relatively low priority and underinvestment in childcare.

## **STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

Issues of childcare provision and employment were explored through consultation with stakeholders representing parents, providers and official bodies responsible for childcare and employability services. This provided a picture of current issues with childcare provision in Northern Ireland, and how it, among other things, needs to be improved in order to encourage more mothers into employment.

Parents face a number of difficulties in accessing and affording suitable childcare to enable them to enter and maintain employment. Day care for the 0-2 age group, and out of school provision were found to be particularly lacking. Other major factors contributing to poor access to childcare were inflexible opening hours, the high price of childcare, and insufficient information about the provision that exists and the help that is available to pay for it.



Some families have additional issues in accessing childcare. Childcare provision for disabled children was identified as very deficient, with not enough suitable facilities for them. Childcare in rural areas was also identified as severely lacking, made difficult by poor transport links and problems with sustaining providers. Lone parents experience more acutely many of the issues faced by couple parents, and have their own additional practical and psychological barriers to using childcare and finding and maintaining employment. Parents with more than one child, and those with young children also face high childcare costs and difficulties in balancing work and childcare. Finally, migrant, minority ethnic and Traveller families have additional requirements from childcare services that are not necessarily being fully met at present. Some face cultural and language barriers, services are not inclusive and aware enough, and as often a lower income group the average cost of childcare is a big issue.

There is an issue of sustainability for providers of childcare, which needs to be considered, especially for low-income parents and this would require more (but not necessarily complete or unconditional) Government funding. Leaving provision to be led by demand creates a vicious circle of low employment, low demand, low supply and thus low employment. The Government has a role to play in breaking this cycle, although providers need to be entrepreneurial and parents need to be prepared to contribute where they can.

Some issues with quality were identified, which not only mean that children are not getting the best possible care, but also that parents may be discouraged from using childcare and thus from employment. Childcare quality standards need to continue to be improved. In general the workforce needs to be more highly skilled, and the profession needs to be more valued and recruit more men and older workers.

In order to improve childcare provision in Northern Ireland, it has to have better, more joined up, organisation, with clear, accountable leadership. The way in which government departments work in silos and have competing objectives means that departments do not at present effectively work in partnership to improve childcare, and especially childcare that seeks to meet the needs of parents seeking or sustaining employment (in addition to its other educational and welfare objectives). The childcare strategy needs to take a cross-cutting perspective but one that takes employment for parents, and especially mothers, seriously and consistently.

The issue of childcare needs to become a higher priority for policymakers, and the indispensable role of childcare in getting parents into employment needs greater acknowledgement. At the societal level, attitudes are changing with respect to parenting and the extent to which men might be expected to take on these responsibilities as well, but parenting currently remains an issue that disproportionately affects women. Cultural change, at all levels, is thus crucial for addressing the impact that children have on women's labour market participation.

Childcare may be a necessary condition for greater employment of mothers, but it is not sufficient. Crucial also are individuals' employability issues, employer attitudes to parents, the types of contracts available in the labour market (e.g. in terms of hours and pay), gender attitudes, and the impact of the prevailing economic context and welfare reform. Mainstream employment programmes do not always address the skills needs of mothers trying to get into, or back into, employment or to sustain their employment or longer term careers. They fail to help the lowest skilled, or to effectively address the employment barriers that are created by the time out of the labour market that mothers take. Confidence is key in getting low skilled women into the labour market, but in also getting higher skilled women to return after a period of time out, and employment programmes need to address this to help mothers.

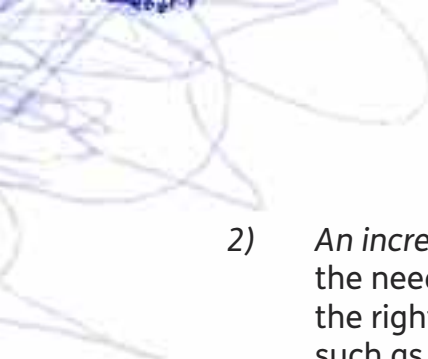
The economic downturn has had a profound effect on the availability of jobs, and the demand for childcare. This affects the ability of childcare to help women into employment, and the sustainability of childcare providers themselves. The Government also needs to be aware of the disincentives for mothers to work under the present and proposed welfare system.

## **OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Improvements to childcare provision in Northern Ireland are central to equality, economic prosperity, poverty reduction and other government aims. In recommending options for policy change, we have set out a vision for childcare provision in Northern Ireland that might help contribute to the economic participation of mothers. We have identified minimum changes in light of deficiencies identified, and recommend that these are considered for implementation as a first step. However, the aspiration is to move towards a stronger vision of childcare provision that adequately supports parents seeking employment or progression in employment in a way that also meets the wider family needs and promotes gender equality. Strategic action for this is also presented.

Policy recommendations are presented under the five main areas for potential reform that were identified from our analysis of the literature, data and stakeholder perspectives on childcare.


- 1) *The need for a childcare strategy.* A strong message coming out of the research was that childcare policy lacks centralised strategic direction and integration, and leadership. Northern Ireland needs a childcare strategy that sets out what requires to be achieved, and assigns some responsibility for ensuring its implementation.

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- 2) *An increase in the supply of childcare.* There is insufficient childcare to meet the needs of working parents; it is not sufficiently flexible (e.g. not covering the right hours to enable parents to take up employment opportunities, such as during holiday periods or illness); and especially due to its high cost relative to wages, may be too expensive.
  - 3) *Greater equality of access to childcare.* Access to childcare is particularly limited for: rural families; parents with disabled children; families with more than two children; Traveller, migrant and minority ethnic families; those on low-incomes; and single parent families.
  - 4) *Addressing barriers to employment.* Childcare issues related to employment should not be considered in isolation, but viewed as a part of a wider package that includes co-ordinated and holistic employment and employability support, welfare and family policies and institutional support for families in terms of childcare subsidies and flexible statutory work arrangements that support family-work balance. Employers also have a part to play in accommodating working parents' greater need for flexibility and understanding.
  - 5) *Changes in attitudes towards childcare and mothers' employment.* Attitudes towards mothers' roles as carers are crucial to why more mothers are not in work. The slowly changing division of paid work and care in the household is often gendered, with mothers assuming greater responsibility for care work and fathers for earning. There is also a lack of diversity and inequality in terms of low numbers of men working in childcare.

## CONCLUSIONS

In reviewing the literature, data and stakeholder opinion in the course of preparing this report, it was found that there is a need for a strategic approach to childcare, which allocates responsibilities among government departments, and other key actors, but also has some central accountability for ensuring that overall strategic aims, implementation and monitoring are achieved. There are a number of issues around the supply of childcare that need to be addressed in order to make it suitably available, accessible, affordable and high quality for working parents. In addition, crucially, a number of other employment and employability barriers to employment need to be addressed alongside the inadequacies of childcare provision. Finally, the changes that need to occur are not only financial and practical, but attitudinal, in the sense that the issue needs to be prioritised, and cultural attitudes towards working motherhood should be examined and challenged.





In considering options for change, the report looked within and beyond Northern Ireland for examples of good practice in childcare and maternal employment. It would seem that the most effective combination of family and childcare policies for encouraging female labour market participation is one that offers a combination of paid parental (maternity and paternity) leaves and flexible job arrangements (including part-time jobs, flexible working hours, and job-sharing), alongside an adequate coverage of affordable childcare facilities. The Government should consider the current effects of such policies, or limitations of them, in Northern Ireland.

In recommending options for policy change, we have set out a vision for childcare provision in Northern Ireland that might help maximise the economic participation of mothers. We have identified minimum changes in light of deficiencies identified, and we recommend that these are all consider for implementation as a first step. However, the aspiration is to move towards the vision of childcare provision, through the strategic action presented here. Improvements to childcare provision in Northern Ireland are long overdue, and central to economic prosperity, poverty reduction and other Government aims, and should be treated as such. The further the Government can progress along the recommended direction of change, the closer they will be to achieving the more equitable labour market participation of mothers.



## Introduction

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1.1	Introduction and context	1
1.2	Objectives of the research	2
1.3	Methodology	3
1.4	Background to childcare in Northern Ireland	4
1.5	The remainder of this report	6

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction and context

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has identified women's caring responsibilities as a barrier to equality in employment (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 2008). **The aim of this paper is to inform the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's position on the type, extent and delivery of childcare provision necessary to maximise the economic participation of women within Northern Ireland.** The availability of affordable and appropriate childcare is a fundamental part of the process of mothers entering, remaining in, progressing in, or returning to work and hence of employment equality. Of course, childcare should not be viewed in isolation in this context, but is part of a wider set of employability issues such as skills, confidence, the welfare system and labour demand.

A lack of good quality, affordable childcare has been cited as a barrier to employment, especially low-income families (Smeaton and Marsh, 2006; Scottish Executive, 2007; Daycare Trust, 2010; Waldfogel and Garnham, 2008) and can trap parents in a low-pay/no-pay cycle (McQuaid et al., 2010). Accessible childcare has been highlighted in the Northern Ireland Child Poverty Strategy as a key factor in addressing child poverty, by assisting parents to access training and employment (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011). Those with multiple inequalities or disadvantages (such as having low qualifications, a disability, more than one or two children, etc.) are particularly affected.

Childcare is crucial to mothers' abilities to: enter or return to work, to stay in work, to work the hours they want and to progress in their career. Childcare is also only part of a wider range of factors influencing a parent's employment. These include: job opportunities; working hours and wage rates; employer attitudes, for example towards flexibility for time off when a child is ill; wider welfare provision such as Working and Child Tax Credits; and the parent's own employability, including skills (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). So childcare may be a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for employment.

The level of childcare provision in Northern Ireland appears to be lower than the rest of the United Kingdom. Despite an increase in the number of places available since 1996, Northern Ireland has one of the lowest levels of childcare within the UK (Employers for Childcare, 2010). Northern Ireland, and indeed the other regions of the UK, fails to meet the Barcelona targets of 90% childcare coverage between age three and starting school, and 33% of under-threes. Furthermore, in Northern Ireland, a child is classified as being in childcare even if they are attending sessions of just 2.5 hours per day; this is not sufficient to facilitate

employment. The level, cost and type of childcare provision is driven by a range of factors including demand from parents, factors influencing childcare supply, public policies, employers and wider cultural factors. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is currently carrying out work on the costs and supply of childcare in Northern Ireland, which will be important to inform discussions on these issues. Informal childcare – provided outside the system funded and regulated by the state, usually by relatives, friends or neighbours – is very important<sup>1</sup>, but this paper primarily focuses upon formal childcare.

Childcare primarily affects the employment of mothers and primary carers, but also of others providing care such as grandparents, relatives or friends. It directly affects the ability of those with childcare responsibilities to enter or re-enter employment, to stay in work, their career paths, and their ability to undertake education or training. Childcare also affects workers in the sector, employers and wider society, as well as the children; but this paper concentrates upon issues related to the employment of parents.

## 1.2 Objectives of the research

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland intends to highlight the role of affordable childcare in facilitating economic participation, and addressing gender inequalities in paid work and care, and is looking to formulate their position on this issue.

The specific objectives are:

1. *Provide a brief overview of current childcare in Northern Ireland regarding provision (type, extent and delivery) and utility – the availability, quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability of various types of childcare.*
2. *Consider the extent to which working parents in general, and women in particular, may be constrained in their ability to access various types of work for reasons associated with existing childcare provision.*
3. *Evaluate, with reference to literature and best practice, a range of policy options regarding type, extent and delivery of childcare provision necessary to maximise the economic participation of women within Northern Ireland.*
4. *Set out a clear recommendation regarding the type, extent and delivery of childcare in Northern Ireland which would maximise the economic participation of women, alongside being in the best interests of the child; other members of the family; and the Northern Ireland economy.*

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1 Section 3 presents the limited information that is available about parents' usage of this type of childcare.

### 1.3 Methodology

The research involved synthesising existing information about childcare provision in Northern Ireland, and the wider literature on its links with maternal employment, with stakeholder interviews that highlight the key issues facing working families and those providing and co-ordinating childcare in Northern Ireland.

#### *Literature review*

A literature review was conducted in order to gather existing research around two main issues: the barriers to female employment, and the role of childcare within this; and policy approaches to childcare taken by other countries. Work in this area has come from a number of sources, including academia, think tanks and pressure groups, and supranational organisations such as the European Union (EU) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The issues identified underpinned the subsequent empirical work.

#### *Mapping of existing childcare*

This paper attempts to provide an overview of current childcare provision in Northern Ireland, based on existing literature and statistics. It is not intended to be a comprehensive quantification of the totality of supply of, and demand for, childcare as the OFMDFM is currently carrying out related research. The mapping exercise here simply gives an indication of the nature of existing provision, and issues that have been identified with it. It draws to some extent on an earlier overview prepared as part of the Policy and Economic Appraisal prepared as the first stage of the childcare strategy (OFMDFM, 2010), along with quantitative and qualitative publications from those working in this sector.

#### *Stakeholder consultation*

Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, in order to gain greater insight into the disparity between need and provision of childcare, the impact of this disparity on mothers' economic opportunities, and specifically how these issues operate in the Northern Ireland context. Perspectives were sought from three types of organisation: those representing childcare users; those involved in the provision of childcare; and government departments or other organisations with responsibility for employability and/or childcare issues.

A focus group was held initially with representatives from the first of these groups. Thereafter, a total of twenty-one individual interviews were conducted with representatives across the three groups. A full list of stakeholders consulted is given in Appendix D.

## 1.4 Background to childcare in Northern Ireland

### Demographic Factors

Data from the 2011 Census (obtained via the website of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency<sup>2</sup>) suggests that the proportion of households in Northern Ireland with dependent children has been falling over the last decade, from 39% in 2001 to 34% in 2011, and the proportion of the population under 14 has also fallen over this period from 22.0% to 19.6%. However, the fertility rate has increased over the same period, from 1.80 to 2.06; this will affect future childcare needs.

The age of mothers is also an important demographic factor, as the impact of childbearing on employment will depend on how long the mother has been in the labour market. For example, a young mother aged eighteen may have greater problems in affording childcare and remaining in work than a mother in her thirties who may have a higher paid job.<sup>3</sup> The average age at first birth in Northern Ireland is 27.8, which is very similar to the UK average of 27.6, and Northern Ireland shares the UK's trend towards an increasing proportion of babies born to mothers over 30, although the majority of this increase has not occurred in the last decade, but happened in the 1980s and 1990s (NISRA, 2011).

The challenge of providing accessible, affordable childcare is even greater in rural areas, due to the dispersed population and limited infrastructure (Rural Childcare Stakeholders Group, 2008). Just over a third (36.4%) of the population of Northern Ireland live in rural areas (Pateman 2011). This is similar to Wales (33.9%) but considerably higher than England and Scotland (both around 18%), although Scotland has relatively more remote rural areas.

The additional challenges to childcare provision posed by the relative numbers of migration and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) populations, such as issues of language and integration (McGovern et al., 2011), are smaller in Northern Ireland than in GB. Net international migration in the UK in the year to December 2010 was 252,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2012), while in Northern Ireland it was just 592 in the year to Jun 2010 (NISRA Migration Statistics, 2011<sup>4</sup>). In England and Wales in 2011, a quarter of births were to mothers born outside the UK, whereas in Northern Ireland this proportion is just 1 in 10 (NISRA Migration Statistics, 2011). Therefore, although BME mothers have additional barriers to accessing childcare and employment, this needs to be taken in the context of this very low and slow growing minority population.

2 Available at: <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/Census.html>

3 There is also a danger that should be guarded against that some employers may discriminate against women in their 30s if they suspect that they may have children in the new future.

4 Available at: [http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/All\\_Mig0910.xls](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/All_Mig0910.xls)



## Skills

A major finding of the national evaluation of the £50m Scottish Government's Working for Families Fund to improve the employability of disadvantaged parents through better childcare and related support, was the crucial importance of employability support *in addition to* childcare; in other words that childcare cannot be seen in isolation when considering mothers' employment (McQuaid et al., 2009). Skills are a particular issue in Northern Ireland – 21% of adults have no qualifications; to compare this with the rest of the UK, the next highest region is the West Midlands at 14%.<sup>5</sup> Therefore any attempt to increase women's employment needs to consider the skills deficiencies that might be affecting women's employment as well as their childcare responsibilities.

## Cultural and other factors

Uptake of formal childcare services also occurs within a context of prevailing cultural attitudes around parenting and childcare, and the impact of childcare services on maternal employment will depend upon the extent to which maternal employment is culturally as well as institutionally supported (Budig et al., 2012). Parents may also prefer informal types of care, for non-monetary as well as financial reasons, such as trust, shared values and flexibility, particularly in supplying care outside of normal working hours (Rutter and Evans, 2012). There is also a limit to the extent to which care services can be bought or provided externally; at some point, parents must be able to have the time they need to organise and perform the care tasks that only they can do (Lewis, 2006).

The extent to which childcare is seen as women's responsibility will act as a barrier to them taking on a greater economic role in the family. However, attitudes seem to be changing and are in line with the rest of the UK on this issue. In 2008, the British Social Attitudes Survey and the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey asked respondents in Great Britain and Northern Ireland respectively; *Do you agree with the statement "A husband's job is to earn money, a wife's is to look after the family"?* In Great Britain, 17% agreed and 56% disagreed, while in Northern Ireland, 19% agreed and 62% disagreed. It suggests that only a minority of people in Northern Ireland see parenting roles as set in stone with regard to gender; that the situation is more pragmatically resolved than simply by reference to gender, and that both men and women have earning and caring roles to play. It is important that families with children can take the earning and caring decisions that are best for them, but they need access to childcare to be able to do this.

### **Childcare and the welfare system**

Childcare is a key aspect of a package of support available to families that also encompasses wider welfare provision, economic conditions, job opportunities and contracts (e.g. working hours and wage rates) and employer attitudes (e.g. towards flexibility for time off when a child is ill). Different elements of this environment can exert opposing influences on families. In trying to get more women into work, it is important to consider the way in which current welfare reforms may work against this. The proposed system of Universal Credit disincentivises labour market participation for single parents and second earners, due to the rate at which benefits are withdrawn as earnings increase, and because support for childcare costs is less generous (Save the Children, 2012).

The issue of welfare reform affects a considerable number of families in Northern Ireland. Although Northern Ireland has lower proportion of families with children in poverty than Great Britain – 26%, which is 4 percentage points below the UK average – children are more likely to experience poverty at some time in their childhood, and more likely to be in persistent poverty than in the rest of Great Britain (Horgan and Monteith, 2009). Regardless of whether Northern Ireland is doing better or worse than Great Britain in this respect, the fact that just over a quarter of families are below the poverty line shows the high pertinence of welfare reform to families in Northern Ireland.

### **1.5 The remainder of this report**

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 – Literature review
- Section 3 – Mapping of childcare in Northern Ireland
- Section 4 – Results of stakeholder interviews
- Section 5 – Recommendation

Some appendices with additional information are also included:

- Appendix A – Summary of childcare policies in European countries
- Appendix B – Childcare policies in non-European OECD countries
- Appendix C – Changes to maternity and paternity rights in the UK
- Appendix D – List of stakeholders consulted during the research



**“ There needs to be better, more joined up, organisation of childcare, with clear and accountable leadership. ”**



## Literature Review

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<b>2.1</b>	The role of childcare within a wider decision-making framework	9
<b>2.1.1</b>	The return to work decision	9
<b>2.1.2</b>	Work, childcare and disadvantage	17
<b>2.1.3</b>	Summary	19
<b>2.2</b>	International policies and practices in childcare	20
<b>2.2.1</b>	Family policies and female labour force participation	21
<b>2.2.2</b>	Childcare policies and the cost of childcare for families	22
<b>2.2.3</b>	Summary	26

## 2. Literature Review

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This literature review will consider the role of childcare in the complex return to work decisions facing mothers, and the particular difficulties faced by the most disadvantaged families in finding childcare and employment. It will then go on to consider the cross-national evidence on the impact of childcare provision on maternal employment, drawing on examples from a range of European and non-European countries, and considering the place of childcare within the family policy systems of these countries.

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### 2.1 The role of childcare within a wider decision-making framework

The decision of whether and when to return to work after having children is based on a number of factors at the individual, household and societal level, of which formal childcare is just one. This section reviews the empirical literature around these different levels of influence; the individual level characteristics that make a mother more or less likely to be in employment, and how this operates at the household, social network, community, workplace and societal level.

#### 2.1.1 The return to work decision

Key to a mother's employment prospects after she has children are her skill levels, her employment history before the birth, her family circumstances, and, for partnered mothers, the employment characteristics of her partner. This section reviews the evidence around each of these.

There is an important relationship between employment before childbirth, the length of the maternity leave, and the long-term chances of employment. Employment continuity promotes further continuity, while non-employment reduces the likelihood of subsequent integration into employment. Being employed before and during pregnancy are significant predictors of female labour force participation after childbirth (Crosby and Hawkes, 2007). Furthermore, Fagan and Norman (2012) show that returning to employment within nine months after childbirth is a pivotal factor supporting a continuous employment profile for at least the next three years. Mothers who had quit or lost their jobs, or had not been employed before and during pregnancy, were more likely to have remained non-employed three years after the birth. Ben-Galim (2011) finds that wages before the birth of the child are a good predictor of wages after re-entry;

mothers who had a high hourly gross pay before the birth of their child tend to earn a high hourly rate after re-entry into employment, regardless of the weekly number of working hours.

### **Maternity leave and returning to work**

There is a socio-economic divide in the UK in mothers' return to work, with the most qualified and those in the higher status jobs having the strongest labour force attachment. The length of maternity leave taken is also found to be an important predictor of further labour force participation. According to the *Maternity and Paternity Rights Survey and Women Returners Survey 2009/10*, commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (Chanfreau et al., 2011), duration of maternity leave varies among different groups. Those mothers who work for small private firms tend to have the shortest leave, while those who work for larger private sector companies take a longer leave. Longer maternity leaves are more common in: the public sector; workplaces with a trade union presence; workplaces with a higher number of family-friendly arrangements<sup>6</sup>; and workplaces with an even gender composition. However, the survey also found that differences in length of maternity leave between sectors and employer sizes decreased between 2006 and 2009, and attribute the decrease to the changes in maternity and paternity rights and benefits introduced in 2007 (see Table 2.1 in Appendix C).

Qualifications and occupational levels were also found to be related to the length of maternity leave. Chanfreau et al. (2011) find the percentage of mothers taking longer maternity leave (defined as beyond 39 weeks) was lowest among skilled, process and elementary occupations, and highest among professionals. There are differences even among highly skilled mothers in the length of maternity leave taken; 18% of mothers who are 'managers and senior officials' take 26 weeks of leave or less, compared with 11% of mothers in the 'professional' occupational category.

This research also shows that although a transition into employment soon (within a year) after childbirth is an important predictor of a subsequent employment of a mother, this early transition does not guarantee continuous long-term employment, which is strongly related to women's occupational status. Women that resumed their work within the first nine months after childbirth are more likely to be in employment three years after if they held managerial or professional positions than those who had resumed employment at a lower occupational position. This implies that women in different occupational positions have different opportunities to balance their work and family responsibilities and to retain their employment.

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6 These arrangements include statutory arrangements such as flexible working hours and a right to parental leave, and non-statutory arrangements such as childcare support.

### Family circumstances and the return to work decision

Family circumstances are important for the length of maternity leave taken, and for the decision to re-enter employment, as mothers make these employment decisions in the context of their household situation. The types and conditions of jobs should be consistent with household needs, such as working hours, childcare arrangements, and the desire to achieve a satisfactory work–life balance. The lack of suitable jobs and employers’ lack of flexibility and perceived discrimination towards those with childcare responsibilities are among the main factors that prevent mothers from re-entering paid work after childbirth (McQuaid et al., 2010).

Where there are two parents in the household, the father’s employment characteristics such as occupational group, income, the number of family-friendly arrangements available to him at his workplace, and his attitudes to the division of work and care may play a role in whether and when mothers return to work. Chanfreau et al. (2011) find that there is an association between the amount of time that fathers take off work for parental leave and the chances of mothers re-entering employment. The number of days taken off by fathers for childcare varies significantly by employer size and sector, with fathers working in medium-sized or large private firms most likely to take the longest parental leave, followed by fathers working in the public sector. Family-friendly arrangements available to the father are positively associated with the lengths of paternal leave, while father’s earnings are negatively associated with the likelihood and the lengths of paternal leave. Occupational group also had a significant association with the length of the childcare-related time off taken by fathers, with professionals and managers most likely to take two weeks off, and fathers in elementary occupations least likely to take any time off (Ibid).

Indeed, research shows that partner’s support is an important factor that enables mothers’ employment. Abendroth et al. (2012) find that employed mothers who receive a lot of help with childcare from their partner work 6 hours more on average than employed mothers without this help. However, research also shows that those mothers who work and have good earning power receive more help from their partner. UK time use data (UKTUS)<sup>7</sup> suggests that the household division of time spent on paid work and childcare activities depends on the relative wages in the household (Kalenoski et al., 2008). This study used time-diary data for the UK to calculate the effects of own and partner’s wages on the time mothers and fathers spend in childcare and paid employment. Women increase their paid working hours when their wages increase, both on weekdays and at weekends. However, this does not mean that they decrease their childcare hours. Men’s weekday paid work time is relatively insensitive to both their own and their partners’ wages. The study found that with respect to child-care time,

<sup>7</sup> UKTUS is a national, household-based study with multiple questionnaire and time-diary (2000–2001). Each household in the study completed one questionnaire that provided information on household specific characteristics such as income and family composition. Each household member then completed another questionnaire providing information on personal characteristics such as education, employment status, and earnings. Finally, time diaries were collected for each individual age 8 and older; these identified the primary or secondary nature of activities, the location of each activity, and who else was present during each activity for every 10-min interval during two 24-hr periods: one weekday and one weekend day. In sum, the UKTUS obtained 20,981 time diaries from 11,664 people living in 6,414 households (Kalenoski et al., 2008, p. 402). This study has a number of restrictions: first, it includes only working age (16–60/64) adults with complete diaries (diaries that had not more than an hour of information missing), excludes those who are still at school, exclude the population of Northern Ireland; furthermore it includes only married and cohabitating individuals. However these restrictions do not affect the quality of the data and allow conduction inferential statistical analysis for Great Britain.



women whose partners have higher potential wages spend significantly more time on primary childcare on all days, regardless of their own wages. Men whose partners have higher potential wages spend significantly less time on paid work at weekends, and more time on childcare, but on secondary rather than primary childcare activities.<sup>8</sup>

These findings raise the issue of the complex relationship between a mothers' earning potential and the time that they, and their partner, devote to paid work and childcare. There is a considerable body of literature on this issue from across Europe and the United States (e.g. Pailhe and Solaz, 2008; Wang and Bianchi, 2009; Kitterod and Petersen, 2006; Bittman et al., 2003; Evertsson and Nermo, 2007). These studies show a broad positive relationship between the relative earning power of couples and the egalitarianism of the division of paid work and care; both longitudinally, as women have increased their relative earning power over time, and cross-sectionally, between households at a given point in time. However, although earning power is becoming more balanced, the division of household work has not equalised to a corresponding extent. Women with a high earning potential may not work if they have a high earning partner, or may not swap with their partner to take on a 'breadwinner' role in the family, even if they have a higher potential wage than their partner. Gender still plays a role in the division of tasks in the household, although the extent to which this is due to choice or constraint is unclear. However, this complex way in which mothers respond to changes in potential earnings needs to be taken into account when estimating the impact of any policy changes on mothers' labour market participation.

It is not just the mother's partner, but also her wider family network that determines the time she spends caring for children, and hence the time that she can devote to paid work. Leira et al. (2005) show that grandparents who take over childcare responsibilities play a particularly important role in mothers' employment in Italy and Spain, and Knijn et al. (2005) suggest that in the late 1990s, German and Dutch working mothers relied extensively on their families for help. An important finding from the study of Abendroth et al. (2012) is that the relationship between different sources of support with childcare is almost always complementary. In particular, household and childcare help from the partner and wider family are the most efficient and beneficial for female employment if supported with workplace family-friendly arrangements.

The studies discussed here show that among those who return to work, better qualified partnered mothers with professional and managerial occupations tend to have a longer maternity leave, while low qualified mothers return to work quicker. However, among all mothers the odds of returning to work following birth are found to be significantly higher among mothers who:

8 'Primary childcare' is activities that involve direct interaction with the child – activities such as feeding, changing, playing and talking – whilst secondary childcare activities are more passive situations in which the parent is looking after the child without directly interacting with them.

- are partnered;
- have higher qualifications;
- work in the public sector;
- were longer in their job prior to childbirth;
- received higher maternity pay;
- hold professional and managerial occupations;
- have higher per-hour pay.

McQuaid et al. (2009) find that other characteristics are also associated with a successful move into employment after childbirth. These characteristics include: being 19 to 45 years old; having fewer children; not having a disabled child or being disabled themselves; and having fewer self-perceived barriers, such as lack of confidence or experience.

From the above it is apparent that mothers who have the highest potential reward from work are most likely to re-enter employment after childbirth. Similarly, those mothers who have the highest earning potential are more likely to work full-time than other working mothers (Kanji, 2011). Thus, full-time employment for mothers with a pre-school child is associated primarily with managerial and professional jobs while mothers with other occupations are more likely to be found in part-time jobs. There is some downward mobility in this situation as well; those mothers who held managerial or professional positions before childbirth may have to downgrade to a lower occupational level if they want or need to secure part-time working arrangements in order to reconcile employment with raising young children (Fagan and Norman, 2012).

### **Attitudes, motivations and returning to work**

The decision to work is based on more than financial concerns; attitudes to work and mothering play a key role as well. Not all mothers want paid work, and a woman's social and cultural environment will strongly influence her desire to work (Moseley and Darby, 1978). Some women prefer the role of full-time mother, especially when young children are present. Duncan et al. (2002) propose the idea of 'gendered moral rationalities'; that mothers first and foremost do what they feel is best for their children's care needs, even if it is not financially optimal – this is their rationality. They find that these attitudes vary by socio-economic status, with women in skilled, process and elementary occupations who are most likely to express a preference for caring for their children over doing paid work than women in professional and managerial occupations.

Attitudes to work and care do not vary only among socio-economic groups. Doorewaard et al. (2004) find that mothers who return to work of all groups have the kind of intrinsic motivations one might expect; they are more job-orientated, money-orientated and people-orientated than those who do not return to work. Nor can attitudes be considered fixed and endogenous; studies examining the relationship between parenting attitudes and behaviours find these to be a complex interaction of attitudes, ideals, preferences and behaviours (Steiber and Haas, 2009; Fortin, 2005; Berrington et al., 2008; Schober and Scott, 2012; Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004). This research suggests that attitudes change

either in response to childbearing or to the employment changes associated with childbearing, which in turn shape activity – therefore these phenomena cannot be understood statically, but as a dynamic response to ever changing situation.

Most of the research on women's labour market participation has placed the main emphasis on personal and household characteristics as the determinants of their re-entry into paid employment. Less attention has been paid to macro-level determinants of the labour market participation such as the opportunity structure of local and regional labour markets in which women (and especially mothers) are seeking work (Van Ham and Buchel, 2006). Whether women return, and to what they return, depend on what the labour market can offer them, and on what women are looking for. If they are looking for a part-time position then this will limit their opportunities and potential salary, as such positions tend to be concentrated in particular sectors, and not as well paid as full-time positions (Tomlinson et al., 2008). Therefore, an availability of jobs in particular sectors of employment which allow family-friendly job arrangements such as job-sharing, part-time jobs, flexible working hours, are a crucial precondition for employment of mothers. Not all women desire paid work, but it may be the case that some women who state that they do not seek employment do so because they are discouraged in their job search and consider the probability of finding a suitable job low, given the opportunity structure of the local or regional labour markets. Many non-employed mothers would like to have a paid work, but encounter too many barriers on their path to employment (e.g. Van Ham et al., 2001). Research finds that women living in regions with high female rates of unemployment are less likely to be willing to work and when they do want to work they are less likely to find employment (Van Ham and Buchel, 2006); also women who live far away from clusters of concentration of job opportunities are less likely to want to work because commuting is not an option for them (Madden 1981; Buchel and Van Ham, 2003).

The issue of job availability is particularly relevant to the Northern Ireland context, where 39% of the population live in areas classed as 'less accessible'<sup>9</sup>; the job density<sup>10</sup> in these areas is 0.66, compared with 0.81 in the 'more accessible' areas (Pateman, 2011). In addition to a lack of local employment opportunities, parents in rural areas seeking to use telecommuting arrangements in order to work from home may also be constrained in their ability to do so by poor broadband coverage. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment estimates that there are between 80,000 and 100,000 households in Northern Ireland, mostly in rural areas, who cannot be supplied with a broadband service of at least 2 megabits per second using existing technologies (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 2012).

Among the factors that discourage mothers from looking for paid work, poor access to childcare is a crucial factor. Childcare should be both affordable and accessible to facilitate employment. Research on the relationship between the cost of childcare and mothers' labour force participation shows that if a

9 A distinction is drawn in Northern Ireland for statistical purposes between the 'more accessible' regions – essentially Belfast and the surrounding areas – and the rest of Northern Ireland, which constitutes the 'less accessible' regions (see Pateman, 2011).

10 'Job density' is the number of jobs per resident of working age (16-64).



significant portion of female-generated income is being spent on childcare, paid work is not worthwhile (Connely, 1991, 1992; Berger and Black, 1992; Blau and Hagy, 1998). Furthermore, for many mothers, good geographic access to childcare facilities is a precondition for access to job opportunities (Gilbert, 1998; Kwan, 1999). Van Ham and Buchel (2006) find that although mothers with young children do not state that they do not want to work more often than other women, they are less successful in finding a suitably paid job, and the reason for this is the lack of suitable childcare in their local area. A lack of childcare in rural areas in Northern Ireland was a recurring theme in the research conducted for this paper, and will be explored further in Sections 3 and 4.

### ***The interrelation between different sources of childcare support and returning to work***

The literature discussed above has emphasised the relationship between the availability of suitable childcare and the return-to-work decision. Indeed childcare accessibility and its affordability are extremely important because access to employment is reliant on childcare accessibility, and high costs of the latter decrease the likelihood of maternal employment (Barrow 1999). However, the association between the costs of childcare and maternal employment is not simple. A cross-national European study by Abendroth et al. (2012) points to the importance of complementarity between different sources of support for maternal employment. In their study they consider the interrelationship between support from partners, extended family networks support and state support, and find a reinforcing relationship between supportive family role models and supportive workplace arrangements. A possible explanation for this is that women with supportive family role models feel that they are allowed to use these workplace arrangements.

Abendroth et al. (2012) also find that state support is important for mothers' employment, but there is a need to distinguish between different kinds of state support. If policy facilitates the traditional male breadwinner family through child benefits, this has a negative impact on female labour market participation and working hours. A policy that supports mothers in a secondary earner role (say, by incentivising part-time participation) does increase the chances of mothers' labour force participation, but does not encourage mothers to work longer hours (16 or more). On the other hand, policies that support a dual-earner family (through the length of effective parental leave that mothers can take and through the availability of publicly-funded childcare) do increase both the chances of labour market participation of mothers and their working hours. However, publicly funded childcare is only beneficial when supportive workplace arrangements are available and vice-versa. A possible explanation is that opening hours of childcare facilities often don't match starting and finishing times of workplaces (Ibid. p. 590).

Therefore low costs of childcare, or even free childcare, are not sufficient if mothers cannot adjust their working hours in a way that allows them to carry out their caring responsibilities. This conclusion is re-enforced further by Brewer and Paull (2008) who find that, despite representing a significant amount of free childcare, starting school is not the huge turning point in mothers' employment that one might expect, due to its limited coverage of the day and year. Similarly, Bashir et al. (2011) find that it not just about free childcare, but about finding a job that will fit around the hours that childcare exists. Deen and Shah (2002) show that there are many instances when working mothers are happy to accept lower pay in return for flexible working hours that accommodate their childcare responsibilities (for example their need to pick up children from school at particular times, etc.) and when having an understanding and accommodating boss is cited as more important than pay. These flexible working arrangements are often a subject to interpersonal relationships between a working mother and her line manager, and sometimes they also contradict the general working culture of the employer (Ibid.). Therefore many mothers mention that they feel insecure and fear that with a change of the line manager they would not be able to negotiate these flexible working conditions, and eventually would be replaced by employers who do not have caring responsibilities. There is some evidence that childcare and 'work-life balance' initiatives by employers may inadvertently fuel class inequalities (Ibid.), as more skilled mothers benefit more from family-friendly working arrangements than mothers who perform less qualified jobs. Some businesses are more inclined to invest in childcare arrangements, career breaks and parental leave for more highly paid and trained 'core' staff than for lower paid and relatively unskilled 'peripheral' staff. Therefore, Dean (2002) concludes, employers should be regulated directly and uniformly in this.

A cultural context supportive of work-family policies and maternal employment (Budig et al., 2012) is also very important. To analyse the relationship between public policy, mother's employment and cultural support for employed mothers, Budig et al. (2012) analysed data from twenty-two countries. They find that cultural context mediates the relationship between family policy and mothers' employment. Thus, mothers living in cultural contexts supportive of maternal employment appear to benefit most from policy that that supports a dual-earner family through parental leave and publicly funded childcare. The earnings of mothers in these egalitarian cultural contexts are most strongly supported by moderate-length parental leaves and higher enrolments of very young children in publicly supported care. Family policies are also associated with higher maternal earnings in cultural contexts that offered moderate support for maternal employment, but to a substantively lower degree than in egalitarian cultural contexts.

### 2.1.2 Work, childcare and disadvantage

The literature reviewed above suggests that women from more disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to be in employment than those who have a managerial, professional or semi-professional occupation. Additional disadvantages could arise if mothers belong to a group that already experiences labour market disadvantage, such as an ethnic minority group. This initial labour market disadvantage, coupled with additional barriers that mothers face in the labour market, creates a situation of double, and hence a particularly profound, disadvantage.

This may be the case in Northern Ireland, in the way that childcare responsibilities interact with existing divisions along community background or religious lines. It is complex to account for differences between Catholic and Protestant mothers in Northern Ireland regarding unemployment or occupational attainment, because the explanatory factors include, in addition to historical background and political factors: spatial differences between Catholic and Protestant populations and the implications of this for the accessibility of jobs; age structure; differences between the groups in qualifications; different migratory patterns; and the traditional higher fertility of Catholic women (Li and O'Leary, 2007). Bryson et al. (2005) used the 2001 Census data and found that the rate of female unemployment in Northern Ireland was markedly lower than the rate of male unemployment, suggesting that greater emphasis should be placed on 'in-work' indicators such as wage rates or career progression. Catholic women appear almost as likely as all other women to be unemployed, but more likely to be inactive. The number of dependent children is significant in explaining labour market outcomes. According to this report, women from any community background with dependent children are more likely to be unemployed and inactive. The effects of a lack of adequate childcare may lead to an interruption, or reduction, or even an ending of a women's career – casting a shadow over their future income and job progression (McIntosh et al., 2012).

#### *Childcare as a barrier to employment for disadvantaged women*

Qualitative studies of parents from disadvantaged backgrounds give some idea of the particular difficulties that this group may face in accessing childcare and finding and maintaining employment. Formal childcare is expensive, even with some relief through the tax credit system, and low-income families remain reliant on informal care (Dean and Shah, 2002). Even when publicly funded childcare is available (e.g. for school-age children), working mothers may need to find childcare beyond the hours that this is available. Family strategies differ, with some providing their own childcare, while others are dependent on neighbours, friends and relatives. Dean and Shah (2002) find that reliance on friends and neighbours is less common than that on relatives or kin (parents, siblings). In these cases childcare is usually free but often implies reciprocity. Some families could afford child-minders, part-time nurseries and after school clubs or a mixture of these. Yet, this and other research find that for low-income families in Britain the most important source of childcare are relatives and kin or, more rarely, friends or neighbours who are not registered child-minders (cf. Ford, 1996; Ford and Millar, 1998).

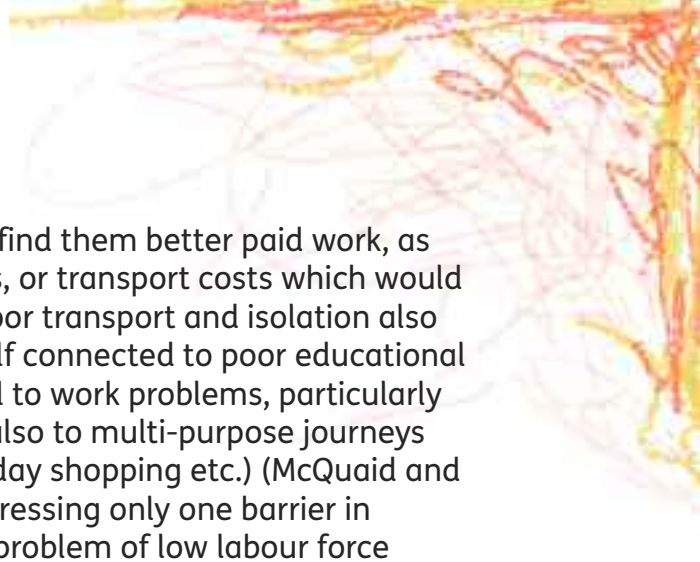
However, affordability is only one component. Families from different socio-economic backgrounds interact differently with the childcare market itself, in terms of what they perceive as the best form of care for their child, what they feel is accessible to them, and how formal provision fits into their system of informal support (Vincent et al., 2008). Families from different socio-economic backgrounds use different formal childcare providers, with more affluent families interacting mainly with a private childcare market, while families from more disadvantaged background are more likely to use state or voluntary sector provision. Vincent et al. (2008) find that mothers from more disadvantaged backgrounds put more trust into nurseries and are more reluctant to leave their babies in care of “stranger” child-minders. On the other hand, mothers from more affluent backgrounds are sometimes uneasy with the idea of group day-care for babies and toddlers in nurseries, emphasising the importance of small care-spaces for their young children, and are more relaxed with using nannies and child-minders. One suggestion is that middle class mothers are more compliant with the ideology and policy of the post-war period, which have accorded normative status to care in the home by the mother, and they believe that emotional and psychological needs of very young children could be best met in one-child-one-carer situation. Therefore they see nannies and child-minders as mother’s substitute for their babies while the mothers themselves are engaged in paid work (c.f. Dahlberg et al., 1999; Gregson and Lowe, 1994). Mothers from poorer socio-economic backgrounds value collective forms of childcare because they often compare nursery settings with their home settings and find that nurseries cater better for the developmental needs of their children, such as learning and social communication (Vincent et al., 2008).

### ***Other barriers to employment for mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds***

Although poorer families often struggle to find childcare, this is one barrier among many to finding decently paid, long-term employment; the limited jobs available to those with the least education may be poorly paid, insecure and impossible to fit around childcare commitments (McQuaid et al., 2010). Research conducted with disadvantaged mothers in Northern Ireland found lack of childcare to be a key barrier to work, but highlighted a number of other factors, including low wages that make work not worthwhile, a lack of suitable transport, a lack of qualifications and skills (and difficulty accessing the training and education to obtain them), a lack of confidence, gendered career pathways, and health issues (McLaughlin, 2009). They argue that these barriers are structural and linked to each other; women ‘choose’ lower-status, lower-paid jobs than their male counterparts, and this makes them more prone to poverty.

Women living in poverty have a greater risk of educational underachievement, and a lack of qualifications creates a lack of confidence to enter the workplace. The low-skilled and low-paid jobs that are available for women with a low level of qualifications do not allow them to afford paid childcare, and tend to be associated with low levels of flexibility, which makes them difficult to combine successfully with caring responsibilities. To further compound the disadvantage, childcare responsibilities have a direct impact on women’s opportunities to





engage in the education and training that might find them better paid work, as poverty prevents women from paying course fees, or transport costs which would enable them to access education and training. Poor transport and isolation also impacts on women's mental health, which is itself connected to poor educational and labour market outcomes. Mothers face travel to work problems, particularly linked to low-incomes from part time work, and also to multi-purpose journeys (e.g. combining travel to childcare, work to everyday shopping etc.) (McQuaid and Chen, 2012). These interactions suggest that addressing only one barrier in isolation is unlikely to lead to the solution of the problem of low labour force participation of mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The balancing of work and care commitments is particularly precarious for those on low-incomes. It is complex for any family, throwing up emergencies and tensions such as a sick child or broken down transport; these require potentially expensive short-term fixes, but the poorest families may not have the resources to provide these (Innes and Scott 2003). Employment becomes a risky situation to enter into, rather than a source of security and stability. Research finds that women who depend on benefits are unsure that work-based income would exceed their benefit-based income, and therefore often cannot see that engaging in paid work would make them better off financially. To many women from disadvantaged backgrounds, benefits offer more long-term security while moving into work is associated with front-loaded costs (e.g. childcare, work clothes, transport) and with financial risks, such as a potential loss of housing benefits (McLaughlin, 2009). Some programmes which were designed to assist women from disadvantaged backgrounds with education and training saw a very high dropout rates because many participants were left without any income for a period of two to three weeks during a transition period from one type of benefit to another, while other participants could not meet childcare or travel costs. This situation is known as a “benefit trap”. Many of these issues can be addressed with free, preferably onsite childcare, and financial support for upfront costs.

### 2.1.3 Summary

The decision of whether and when to return to work after having children is based on a number of factors at the individual, household and societal levels. At the individual level, key to a mother's employment prospects after she has children is her employment history before the birth; paid work immediately before the childbirth is a good predictor of a mother's employment thereafter. More highly educated and highly skilled mothers with a higher level of earning before childbirth are also more likely to re-enter full-time employment after childbirth. Attitudes to work and mothering also play an important role in return-to-work decision after childbirth. These attitudes vary between different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Mothers make employment decisions in the context of their household situation. Their family circumstances, and for partnered mothers the employment characteristics of their partners, are important predictors of their labour market participation. The types and conditions of jobs should be consistent with household needs, such as working hours, childcare arrangements and the desire to achieve a satisfactory work–life balance.

The ability to return to work depends on the opportunities in the local and regional labour markets. Whether women return, and to what they return (in terms of hours, grade etc.), depend on what the labour market can offer them, and on what they are looking for.

Among the factors that discourage mothers to look for paid work, poor access to childcare is a crucial factor; childcare should be both affordable and accessible to facilitate employment. If a significant portion of female-generated income, especially in the short term, is being spent on childcare, then work may be financially unviable. Good geographic access to childcare facilities is also important for access to employment. The inter-relation between different sources of childcare support is important for the return to work decision. A supportive family together with supportive workplace arrangements are important for the employment of women with children. Furthermore, state support is crucial; if it supports a dual-earner family model through the length of paid parental leave for both parents, through public provision of childcare, and through statutory flexible work arrangements for parents, then mothers have higher chance of full-time or part-time employment.

Barriers to employment for mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds are multiple and structural. They may lack the qualifications and confidence to enter the workplace, while low-skilled and low-paid jobs do not allow them to afford paid childcare and may offer low levels of flexibility to accommodate their caring responsibilities. Furthermore, long-term benefit dependency, and the complexity of the transition from one type of benefit to another while starting training or paid job, often leaves these mothers without the means to meet childcare and other costs, and therefore discourages them from engaging in paid work. Support programmes could be developed to address these specific problems of transition from benefits into employment for mothers from disadvantaged background.

## **2.2 International policies and practices in childcare**

This section provides an overview of childcare provision, and the wider family policy environment in which this sits, in a number of European countries. Detailed information about the policy provision in each country is given in Appendix A. Here we present a summary of the nature of these policies, their key features and how they vary between countries, and evidence on the association between the policy environment and female employment. Further information about family policy in selected non-European countries is also provided in Appendix B.

### 2.2.1 Family policies and female labour force participation

A need for female participation in the labour market is an explicit political objective across most EU countries. This goal could be reached, along with other measures, by improving the provision of childcare facilities. Childcare services play a major role in supporting women's employment; the more satisfactory the provision of childcare services is, and the more affordable is the cost, the more likely women are to engage in paid work after childbirth (European Commission, 2002; Plantenga and Remery, 2009; Jaumotte, 2003; OECD, 2007). International research carried out by Plantenga and Remery (2009) on behalf of the European Commission finds convincingly that affordable childcare increases labour force participation among mothers. In Germany, Buchel and Spies (2002a, 2002b, quoted in Plantenga and Remery, 2009) show that extensive childcare possibilities intensify the labour market participation rate of mothers, particularly in the former West Germany. In Greece, the availability of public childcare services contributes to the activation of important numbers of non-employed women (Data RC, 2006, quoted in Plantenga and Remery, 2009). For the Netherlands, Euwals et al. (2007) show that between 1992 and 2004, participation of women in the labour market has become less reliant on the presence of children. In Austria, a positive correlation was revealed between the labour-market participation of mothers and the availability of adequate childcare services (Neuwirth and Wernhart, 2007, quoted in Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

In facilitating female labour market participation, childcare promotes greater gender equality (European Council, 2002). Higher rates of female employment, and measures to protect the employment rights of working mothers (through job security, flexibility, quality, equal pay, and adequate childcare facilities), have paramount importance in the struggle against child poverty (Esping-Andersen, 2002), reduce benefit dependency of single mothers and low-income parents, and promote better social inclusion. Additionally, childcare facilities contribute to child cognitive and emotional development and socio-economic integration, help mothers reconcile work and family life, and may provide an answer to declining fertility rates (Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

At the Barcelona Summit in 2002, some explicit targets were defined with regard to the provision of childcare services, which included providing childcare by 2010 to at least 90 % of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age, and at least 33 % of children under 3 years of age.<sup>11</sup> However, by 2009 many Member States were still far from reaching that target (ibid. p. 7). The availability and affordability of childcare varies between European countries. National models of family policy and childcare systems are the result of the interaction between different social policy measures and pre-existing social and institutional features. Childcare policies in European countries vary according to:

11 Information about the Barcelona targets, and the measurement of progress towards them, can be found at [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-08-592\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-08-592_en.htm)

- the type of childcare arrangements used (i.e. formal vs. family/child-minders, etc.);
- time coverage, i.e. part-time versus full-time;
- the quantity and quality of the supply of care services;
- the affordability of care services for families;
- employment regulation regarding entitlements to, and compensation for, parental leaves;
- financial support for families towards the cost of children;
- equality between genders in the access to social benefits and social opportunities;
- quality of employment in the care sector (Plantenga and Remery, 2009; Da Roit and Sabatinelli, 2007).

### 2.2.2 Childcare policies and the cost of childcare for families

Childcare costs for families could be divided into direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include childcare, while indirect costs include loss of income due to drop out or reduction of employment. Therefore, childcare policies should target both direct and indirect types of cost, for example through providing publicly funded childcare, alongside labour market regulations and employment protection. This section considers the range of forms that family policies might take.

#### *Maternity and parental leaves*

Maternity leave is paid statutory leave granted to employed mothers immediately before and after childbirth. In addition to maternity leave for mothers, most EU countries have introduced parental leaves that are available to fathers as well. There is wide variation among European countries in the duration of leave entitlements, the extent to which wages are replaced during leaves, and the legal enforcement of leave policies. Scandinavian countries provide the most generous leave systems, whereas liberal welfare systems such as the United Kingdom and Mediterranean countries such as Italy tend to be the least generous.

Research finds that the international evidence on the relationship between maternity leave provision and women's labour participation is a complex one. In countries with high levels of provision of childcare support and services, paid leaves may strengthen the attachment of women to the labour market, providing an alternative to exiting the labour market completely and thus playing a positive role in respect to mother's re-entry. Nevertheless, long parental leaves may also reinforce the role of women as carers (Rubery et al., 1999; Council of Europe 2005, p.36).

In addition to statutory maternity leave, many countries offer additional parental leave for employed parents of either gender. Until recently, childcare leave in the UK was reserved almost exclusively for mothers, with leave entitlements extended asymmetrically; such that, by 2007, mothers were entitled to a year's leave but fathers to just two weeks (Chanfreau et al 2011). This has since changed; from 2011, fathers have been entitled to take up to six months of leave if the mother has returned to work, and plans are in place to make the year's

12 "Flexible parental leave to give mothers 'real choice' over work-life balance", BBC News 13/11/12, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-20295439>.



leave almost completely flexible (save an initial two weeks for the mother) by 2015.<sup>12</sup> Research from the Nordic countries, where such policies are well-established, has suggested that leave sharing plays a key role in challenging the gendered division of work and care that restricts women's labour market opportunities; however, it is not guaranteed that fathers will take up the opportunity to share leave, and they may need to be incentivised to do so, for example by reserving a non-transferable portion of leave for fathers that they will forfeit if they do not take (Haas and Rostgaard, 2011).

Table A1 in Appendix A outlines the leave arrangements available to parents in a selection of European countries. It is very difficult to make direct comparisons between the provision in different countries, as there is considerable variation in the length, compensation and eligibility criteria of these leave packages. However, leave in the UK seems particularly poorly compensated compared with most of the countries in the table. Mothers receive 90% of earnings for just 6 weeks, before statutory compensation drops to a flat rate of £135 per week; as average earnings in the UK are currently £444 per week<sup>13</sup>, this payment represents a small fraction of most mothers' former earnings (although some employers may supplement this). By comparison, the other countries in the table all offer qualifying mothers at least 70% of earnings for at least four months, with some considerably more generous than this. Leave in the UK is also highly concentrated within the first year of the child's life, with only a small amount of unpaid leave available beyond this, while other countries extend entitlements into the child's first three or even eight years.

### **Childcare related cash and tax benefits**

Childcare related cash benefits and tax relief exists in most countries. These benefits may or may not be income-related, tend to be dependent on family size, and represent the bulk of resources devoted to family and childcare policies. Countries use a different mix of cash and tax benefits in supporting families (D'Addio and D'Ercole, 2005; Bradshaw and Finch, 2002). Bradshaw and Finch (2002) proposed a four approximate group ranking of generosity, based on a systematic comparison of child benefits for predefined family types:

- Most generous: Austria, Luxembourg, Finland.
- Second tier: France, Sweden, Germany, UK, Belgium, Denmark (and outside Europe Union: Norway and Australia).
- Third tier: Italy, Ireland (and Israel, Canada, USA outside the EU).
- Least generous: Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Greece (and New Zealand and Japan outside the EU).

### **Childcare provision**

Childcare provision – which includes both its availability and affordability, and the extent to which states provide and/or subsidise care – has a direct effect on childcare costs for families. For children under three years of age, in many countries childcare provision combines formal and informal arrangements

13 Office for National Statistics Labour Market Statistics, November 2012, [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778\\_284362.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_284362.pdf)

(e.g. the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and the UK, see Table A3 in Appendix A), with informal care being more common in countries where childcare coverage is not satisfactory or the costs of formal childcare are high. The use of formal arrangements for 0-2 year olds is particularly high in Denmark, and is also high in the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium and Spain; is about the average in Iceland, Portugal, UK, Norway and France; and is lower in other countries, with particularly low rates (below 10 %) in eastern European countries such as Hungary and the Czech Republic (Da Roit and Sabatinelli, 2007). It is worth noting that many countries where combined rates of enrolment of very young children in formal and informal childcare are relatively low (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Hungary, Germany) are characterised with longer parental leave with more generous levels of earning replacement (see Table A1 in Appendix A).

Access to childcare for children aged 3 to 5 mostly occurs through public services and is either highly subsidised or free of charge. Formal childcare arrangements cover a very high percentage of three to five year-olds in these countries (see Table A2 in Appendix A). This coverage varies from the highest levels of over 90% in Spain, Sweden, France, Iceland, Denmark and Belgium, to moderate levels of the coverage (87- 90%) in Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, the UK and Italy, to the relative low levels of coverage (76-80%) in Portugal, Finland and Norway.

Countries that rely more on private childcare provision may achieve wide access but at relatively high costs for households. Here, public cash transfers (as in the Netherlands) paid to families (often according to their income, family type, age or number of children in childcare) allow families to purchase care services on the market.

There is also sub-national variation in the availability of childcare services, with regional disparities particularly large in Portugal, Hungary, Italy (North vs. South), Norway, and Germany, where the main variations are between the childcare availability in the former East and West Germany (see Expert reports quoted in Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

### ***Supply of, and demand for, childcare facilities***

There are wide variations in childcare supply and demand across different European countries (Table A4 in Appendix A). The main variations are in the supply for younger children compared with children between the ages of three and the start of the compulsory education, with the demand for the latter generally than the childcare demand for younger children. However, in some countries the childcare provision for the youngest children is very satisfactory. For example, in Denmark and Finland, childcare is a legal right and municipal childcare facilities are available to every child, and in Iceland and Sweden the childcare services for younger children also fully meet demand. In other countries, although there is a high demand for childcare for younger children, the supply still does not meet the demand (Germany, Belgium, Spain, France, Hungary, Portugal, UK, Norway, and Netherlands). For children from three years of age the coverage is rather good almost everywhere, with the exception of Portugal, however, there are variations in the number of hours covered by

childcare for this age group. For example, in the UK childcare free childcare for 3-4 year-olds is only part-time (see Expert reports quoted in Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

The level, cost and type of childcare provision are partly driven by demand from parents. However, the association between maternal employment and childcare provision flows in both directions; the level and quality of provision itself has an impact on whether mothers work in the UK (Viitanen, 2005; Parera-Nicolau and Mumford, 2005). Cross-national evidence looking at childcare (as part of a supportive institutional context for work-family reconciliation) suggests that countries with more institutional support for maternal employment have higher rates of maternal employment (Del Boca et al., 2008), although the evidence is mixed on the strength and significance of any correlation, especially after controlling for individual level characteristics (Havnes and Mogstad, 2011).

### ***The restrictions on the size of group and staff-children ratio***

There are differences between countries in the size of groups and staff to child ratios for childcare services. Some countries (e.g. Hungary, Norway, Netherlands, Denmark) have universal restriction for all types of childcare and specify the permitted group size according to the age group, with the group size being smaller and the staff ratios smaller for younger age-groups. Other countries (e.g. Portugal, UK, Iceland, France) have different regulations for different types of childcare and therefore the group size and the staff ratio in such countries are different for child-minders, crèches, day-care centres and leisure activity centres (see Expert reports quoted in Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

### ***Childcare costs***

There are large cross-country variations in the price of childcare. First of all, there are variations between the costs of public and private childcare. Private childcare tends to be expensive (e.g. Spain, UK and Hungary), while public childcare is often subsidised (e.g. Italy, Hungary, Iceland, Portugal, UK and Netherlands). In some countries, childcare fees are income-related, and childcare may be free for parents on low-incomes (e.g. Belgium, Denmark and France). In Norway, fees are charged not only on the basis of parental income but also the family size. In Germany, childcare fees are also income-related and vary between communities and regions. Income-related fees often mean that childcare is a relatively cheaper option for families with a higher income, which pay a lower share of their net income for childcare (e.g. UK, Germany). In France, for example, income related fees for public childcare mean that for families with a relatively high income, a child-minder might be a cheaper option than public childcare.

Subsidies provided by governments for childcare vary from funding free childcare provision, to paying direct subsidies to childcare providers (as is the case with income related fees), to assistance with free childcare for low-income families, to tax relief, such as the child-care element in tax credits, or childcare vouchers that allow the cost of childcare to be paid before tax (see Expert reports quoted in Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

### **Attitudes towards collective childcare**

Finally, there are differences across the European countries in attitudes towards collective childcare. In some countries, collective childcare from an early age is widely acceptable or has even become a norm (Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland). In other countries, collective childcare is perceived as acceptable for older children (Portugal, Hungary, Sweden and Norway). In such countries as the Netherlands and the UK the attitudes towards the collective childcare are mixed, although it is starting to be seen as more widely acceptable option for children aged 3-4 (see Expert reports quoted in Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

### **2.2.3 Summary**

To summarise, there are differences across European countries in the supply of childcare, childcare costs, and attitudes towards collective childcare. In the majority of countries, care for children who are very young (less than 12 months) is considered to be the private responsibility of families. Provision for children between one and two years of age varies, with supply almost everywhere being lower than the demand (perhaps with the exclusion of some Scandinavian countries). The need for care is partially met through cash benefits to compensate mothers for their withdrawal from the labour market. However, childcare coverage is better for children between age three and the start of compulsory education.

From the literature on childcare and family policies it is possible to distinguish between five main approaches to the childcare policies in their relation to female labour market participation.

### **The Nordic model**

The first is the universal approach to childcare for children under six years of age that is found in the Nordic countries; Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland and, to a lesser extent, Norway (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996). Childcare in these countries reflects the societal emphasis on individual entitlements and citizenship rights available to all, and hence children are considered as having, among other rights, a right to childcare (Millar and Warman, 1996). As a result, these countries have much higher levels of early (under age three) childcare provision than the European average, and it is mostly either publicly provided or heavily subsidised. There is strong state support for gender equality and a dual career/dual carer family model, and female labour force participation is high. It should be noted that the number of children that a carer can care for is generally higher in Nordic countries than in the UK, which may lead to higher pay, training and qualifications and good care and high productivity (rather than necessarily simply leading to lower quality care). The Nordic countries have the highest qualifications for childcare workers in the EU, with staff often trained in both education (e.g. teacher) and social care (e.g. childminder, nursery nurse) (Eurofound, 2006). Although it should be noted that regulations allow staff/child ratios (which are difficult to consistently measure) to be higher than some other countries. So the effects of changes in regulations need to be considered carefully.



### ***The Continental model***

In continental Europe, more obligations are delegated to the nuclear family, and these countries do not share the individualism of the Nordic countries (Roit and Sabatinelli, 2007). Therefore, childcare is the concern of families. However, within this there is a division between two different approaches to childcare in Continental Europe.

In countries such as Austria, Luxemburg, Germany and the Netherlands, emphasis is on the family's responsibility for the care of their children. Subsidiarity between the state and the family is mainly translated into important monetary support for families (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996). The provision is not always sufficiently high to give women the opportunity to easily combine employment and family responsibilities. Families often need to meet their childcare needs through the private market, with only limited help from the state. In particular, the provision of services for children under two is not very high, although an adequate coverage for 3-5 year olds is provided through nursery schools and kindergartens.

In France and Belgium, the state seems to support the traditional family model with women as the main caregivers, but at the same time, female participation in the labour market is supported through prolonged paid parental leave and the availability of full-time childcare services. These policies do not necessarily encourage women to participate in the labour market, but women are being compensated by the state for the time invested in childcare (Gauthier, 1996). The coverage for 3-5 year olds is almost universal, and the system of care for the 0-2 age range is well developed, publicly provided or financed and controlled, and provides a significant level of coverage. As a result, women's employment levels are relatively high in these countries (Plantenga and Remery, 2009).

### ***The Residual model***

The next approach is means-tested model which is found in the UK – including Northern Ireland – where traditionally, public early years services for children under three years of age have been reserved for children in economically and socially deprived households (e.g. Letablier and Hantrais, 1996). Publicly funded childcare only starts at the age of three, with free nursery places available to all, but only on a part-time basis. As a result, higher income working families rely on private sector care, for which they can claim some state subsidy, although this is means tested. Overall, state support is low and existing childcare arrangements do not support female labour market participation, and result in women moving in and out of the labour market, and working short hours, to meet their childcare needs.



### ***The Southern European model***

Finally, Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece) represent a traditional childcare approach, which is based on the presumption that childcare is the primary role of the mother and the extended family. Service provision is better for the 3-5 age range (especially in Italy), but limited for the under twos, and care for young children remains mainly a family issue (e.g. Anttonen and Sipila, 1996). State childcare services do not have a primary goal of supporting female labour market participation. Women's participation in the labour market is low – particularly in some areas of the countries, such as Italy's southern regions – and the unequal share of family responsibilities between genders is more persistent than elsewhere in Europe, even when women are in paid work.

### ***What is best practice in encouraging mothers' labour market participation?***

It can be concluded from the literature that the most effective combination of family and childcare policies for encouraging female labour market participation is one that offers a combination of well-compensated maternity and parental leaves for the period immediately following birth, and then in the following years offers flexible job arrangements (including part-time jobs, flexible working hours, and job-sharing) and an adequate coverage of affordable childcare facilities (Del Boca et al., 2006). Such a combination is largely provided in some countries (such as Denmark, Sweden, France, Belgium and Norway), where mothers' labour market participation rates are high, and the negative effects of the presence of children on women's career and income perspectives also seem to be relatively low.

Northern Ireland sits within the UK's 'residual' approach to childcare of heavily targeting support at the most disadvantaged families, and offering limited universal entitlements; the free part-time nursery provision for three and four year olds does little to facilitate employment due to its limited hours. Thus, current arrangements are far from what might be considered best practice by European standards. The next section of this report outlines the childcare provision that currently exists in Northern Ireland, and some of the deficiencies that have been identified with it, particularly with respect to its ability to help mothers into paid employment.

**“ If it does not pay  
to be in work,  
because little is  
left of wages after  
childcare costs,  
then parents may  
choose not to work  
at all. ”**



## The Mapping of Childcare Provision in Northern Ireland

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<b>3.1</b>	Mapping childcare services	31
<b>3.1.1</b>	Formal childcare	31
<b>3.1.2</b>	Informal childcare	36
<b>3.2</b>	Issues with childcare in Northern Ireland	37
<b>3.2.1</b>	Availability; is there enough of the right types of provision?	37
<b>3.2.2</b>	Flexibility; does it cover the right times of day, week and year?	39
<b>3.2.3</b>	Affordability; what are the costs of care relative to earnings and is there enough financial support?	39
<b>3.2.4</b>	Quality; what is quality and where does it fall short?	41
<b>3.2.5</b>	Specific issues facing families with particular needs	42
<b>3.2.6</b>	The funding and organisation of childcare	45
<b>3.3</b>	Summary	46

# 3. The Mapping of Childcare Provision in Northern Ireland

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This section provides a brief summary of existing childcare provision in Northern Ireland, with respect to the amount available and its cost to parents. It will then consider key issues in childcare provision along a number of dimensions; availability, flexibility, affordability, and quality. Some attention is paid to particular issues facing certain types of family, such as lone parents or parents with disabled children. Finally, issues of cost, regulation and organisation are briefly discussed.

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## 3.1 Mapping childcare services

This paper does not attempt a full, detailed, quantitative report of childcare provision; this would be huge task, and work to this effect is ongoing at the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. What it provides is a brief overview of the existing information on the makeup of the childcare sector in Northern Ireland, and some idea of the extent of informal provision. It also outlines the mismatches that have been identified between demand for childcare services from parents, and what the sector is supplying.

The distinction between formal and informal care is not simply about whether parents pay for the service, as the following quote illustrates:

“‘Formal’ care can be regarded as care in a registered setting such as a nursery or playgroup, or with a registered childminder. ‘Informal childcare’ is unregistered and is usually provided by a friend or relative. Some ‘formal’ arrangements are free, since some families receive free places in playgroups or other settings, whilst some ‘informal’ arrangements, including occasionally those with grandparents, can be free or paid for.” (OFMDFM 2010:6)

Thus, formal care might be considered that which is within the scope of government to fund and regulate, while informal care is the arrangements that individuals make themselves with relatives and friends, outside the system funded and regulated by the state.

### 3.1.1. Formal childcare

Table 3.1 summarises the main types of formal childcare available in Northern Ireland, based on existing secondary sources. It considers the availability, cost and flexibility of each type, as well as a brief summary of their main advantages and disadvantages, in particular with respect to how well they facilitate employment.

**Table 3.1 - Provision of childcare in Northern Ireland**

Type	Who attends it?	How many places?	Who provides it?
<b>Pre-school</b>			
Day nursery /creche	From 6 weeks to starting school.	11,216	78% private, 10% voluntary, 12% other.
Playgroup	Ages 3-5.	10,476	8% private, 4% voluntary, 86% community, 2% trust.
Childminder	0-12 year olds.	5,761	Individual childminders in their own homes.
Women's centres	0-4 year olds in disadvantaged areas.	4,914	These are voluntary sector organisations.
Pre-school Education Expansion Programme	3-4 year olds; meeting the aim of providing free pre-school provision.	21,205	66% nursery schools, 34% private or voluntary.
<b>Extended school/wraparound</b>			
After school clubs	School aged children.	5,341	28% voluntary, 3% trust, 69% private and other.
Breakfast club	School aged children.	Exact numbers unclear; approx two fifths of primary schools	90% school, 4% partnership, 6% contracted out.
Summer scheme	School aged children.	Exact numbers unclear; approx. 15% of primary schools. No figures on the extent of private provision of Summer Schemes.	60% school, 21% partnership, 19% contracted out to private and other organisations.
2-3pm clubs	Children in P1-P3.	Exact numbers unclear; approx two fifths of primary schools	88% school, 3% partnership, 9% contracted out.

Sources: OFMDFM (2010); Dennison et al (2011); Lowndes and Dennison (2012); WCRP (2010)



How much does it cost parents per week?	What hours does it cover and how flexible?	Specific advantages and disadvantages
Private nursery costs £154 for under-2s, £153 over-2s.	Full day, year round, working hours (distinction is that day nurseries are long-term/ongoing while creches are flexible/short-term).	Reliable and covers holidays, but hours not flexible and available places not necessarily convenient for home/work. High cost relative to wage, especially for part-time employees.
A 2003 survey by Gray and Bruegel suggests £8.91 per week, or £10.87 in 2011 prices.	Sessional (4hr) term time.	Short, inflexible sessions. Not useful in helping parents to work.
£155	Sessions of 2 or more hours between 8am and 6pm.	More flexible but less reliable, especially in situations such as illness of child or childminder. High cost relative to wage.
Free, or where fees are charged they are at levels accessible for people on low incomes.	Sessional (2hr).	Too short to facilitate employment, but helps mothers access training, education and job interviews. May cover groups otherwise difficult to place (e.g. special needs). Centres take a holistic approach to meeting needs of disadvantaged families. Funding is complex and insecure.
Free.	Part-time' (2.5hrs per day) or 'full-time' (4 hrs per day), term time.	Free but short hours, does not facilitate employment.
£79	After school until 6pm, and holidays 8am-6pm.	Bridges a gap but still does not operate outside of conventional hours.
Private clubs cost £28 per week, but school-provided clubs are cheaper at around £7 per week.	Most open between 8 and 8.30, until school starts, term time.	Bridges a gap but still does not operate outside of conventional hours.
Private holiday schemes cost on average £120 per week/£24 per day. Schemes provided by schools are cheaper, with only 3% charging over £20 per day and almost half charging less than £10 per day.	School holidays, not necessarily 50 hours per week though.	Can be expensive - not accessible to all parents.
Roughly a quarter are free, a quarter cost less than £2 per day, and half cost more than £2 per day.	2-3pm term time (between the end of school for the youngest pupils and the start of most after schools clubs).	Bridges a small gap, but further afterschool provision may also be needed.

Provision for the under threes exists mostly in the form of day nurseries and childminders. The cost of these is very similar for full-time (i.e. 50 hours per week) care; around £150 per week on average. Day nurseries are usually open between the hours of 8am and 6pm, while childminding is flexible and subject to negotiation between the parent and the childminder. This flexibility is useful for working parents, but childminding is also less reliable than daycare, as it relies on the sole care provider being available; if they are not, due to holidays or illness, parents are left without care. Childminders are also limited in the number of children they can care for, and therefore this form of care can lack the interaction that children might experience in day care.

For children between the ages of three and starting school, pre-school places are available, although day nurseries may also cater for children up to school age. Parents can receive some pre-school care free of charge, but only up to four hours per day and only during term time. Thus, parents who work must find other forms of care to make up the other hours that they are in employment. If they are able to pay for this, they may use a childminder, who can pick children up from pre-school as well as provide additional hours of care. Some childcare facilities also offer pick up services<sup>14</sup>; indeed, discussions with stakeholders suggested that this may play a key role in the sustainability of rural childcare facilities. However, many parents rely on informal carers to transport children between facilities, where pick-up services are not available or affordable (see next section for a discussion of the role of informal care in the system of childcare provision in Northern Ireland).

When children start school, this provides parents with several hours a day of what is essentially free childcare. However, the hours that children are in school – particularly primary school – are insufficient to cover the hours of employment for a parent working full-time, who may require childcare before or after school hours, or during the holidays. Again, parents may fill this gap with informal childcare, but in some cases, ‘wraparound’ care (i.e. care outside of traditional school hours) may be available. This generally takes the form of breakfast, after school and holiday clubs; thus providing childcare for the major gaps between school provision and working hours. However, there is no guarantee that any extended hours will be available, or that holiday schemes will operate full days during all of the school holidays. The precise extent of this provision is not clear; statistics on this are currently being collected by Playboard, which acts as a membership organisation for after schools care providers among other things. Some indication is given by a survey of Primary schools by Employers for Childcare (Lowndes and Dennison, 2012), which suggested that 49% offered some kind of wraparound service. Thus, at least half of parents of primary school children need to seek private or informal provision of these services, and this assumes that there is sufficient provision in the schools that do offer them.

14 We are not aware of any existing analysis of the proportion of facilities that offer pick up services.

The cost to parents of out of school childcare depends on whether the provision is provided through the school – and therefore funded through the Extended Schools Programme – or privately run. To take the example of summer holiday schemes, private schemes can cost an average of £120 per week, but schemes provided by schools are unlikely to cost this much, with almost half charging less than £50 per week. This difference is particularly significant in light of the lack of school-based provision of these services. Such out of school care is also often lacking outside the summer holiday period, such as at Christmas, Easter or half-term holidays.

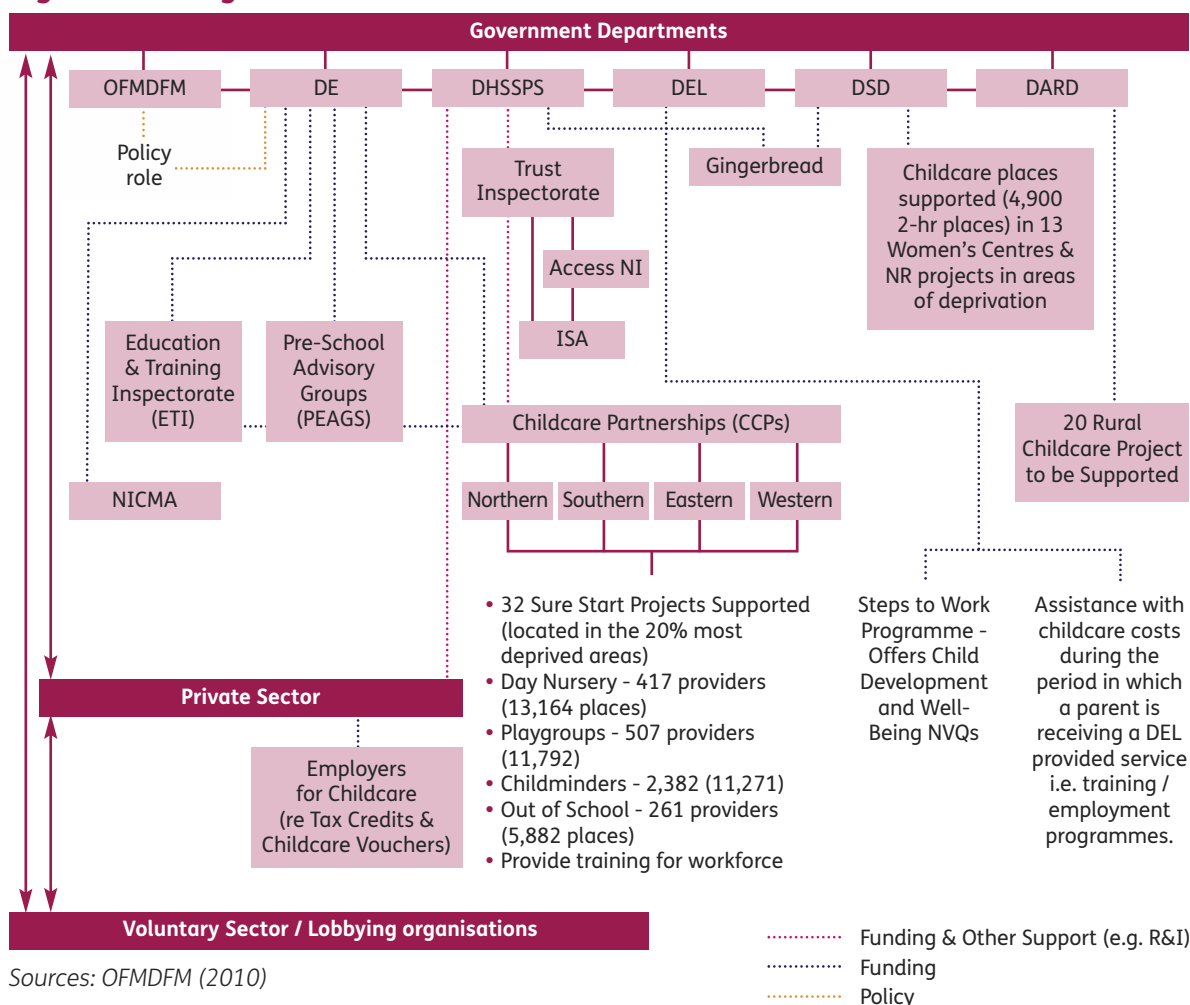
### **Funding, regulation and responsibility**

The arrangements by which childcare is regulated and supported financially, and the different departmental responsibilities regarding childcare, are highly complex. Indeed, this complexity was identified by stakeholders as one of the problems with childcare in Northern Ireland, as Section 4 (Stakeholder Perspectives) discusses. A thorough and in-depth overview of current and historic funding and responsibilities is provided in OFMDFM (2010), and is therefore not replicated in this report, but a brief summary is given here. Figure 3.1 shows the organisation of the sector and indicates the main departmental responsibilities.

Funding for childcare comes from a mixture of sources. Parental fees make up a large proportion of providers' income, particularly for the under-threes; many over-threes are in free (Department of Education funded) pre-school places for at least part of the week, but daycare outside of this must be paid for by parents. However, parental contributions may come in part from the Government through the childcare element of the Child Tax Credit, which provides support for up to 70% of childcare costs to families depending on their working hours and household income. Parents may also receive help with childcare costs from the Department for Employment and Learning if they are undergoing full-time education, training or employment programmes. Some daycare providers receive Government funding directly, usually those in disadvantaged areas through the Department for Social Development's Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme. Funding for out of schools provision is also available through the Department of Education's Extended Schools Programme, although not all schools are in receipt of this funding.

All childcare settings must be inspected and registered by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, through the Health and Social Care Trusts. Each Trust has an Early Years team responsible for this inspection and registration process, and also for co-ordinating a Childcare Partnership; a group of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors who have a role in providing, funding, regulating or advocating for childcare. These Partnerships try to work together to match provision to local need. Pre-school settings fall under the remit of the Department of Education. Out of schools settings fall somewhere between the two, being both on educational premises and in a care setting; again this was highlighted as a potential barrier to effectively providing these services.

**Figure 3.1 - Organisation of the Childcare Sector**



### 3.1.2 Informal childcare

Some information is available on the use of informal childcare in Northern Ireland. Extrapolating from information in the Family Resources Survey suggests that, of the 198,334 families that use childcare in Northern Ireland, 73% use an unregistered form of some kind and 55% use a registered form (OFMDFM, 2010). Thus, the use of informal care is more common than the use of formal care.

However, informal care is often used as an additional source of care, often to fill a gap in formal provision. For example, if a daycare facility does not open early enough to enable a parent to get to work, they may ask a relative or friend to take the child to daycare in the mornings. Or, a school aged child may not have access to after school care, and a parent may need someone to pick the child up and look after them until they finish work. The short hours of free nursery places – in many cases just 2.5 hours per day – may also mean that even a parent working part time needs to top this up with other sources of childcare; if they cannot afford to purchase private care, then they will rely on informal care in this situation as well. Informal care may also be important in unexpected or ‘emergency’ situations such as when the child is sick or when a school unexpectedly closes. Usage of relatives and friends as this kind of stopgap is widespread. The Childcare Costs Survey 2012 (Dennison and Smith, 2012) reported that, among parents who are in work and using some kind of formal childcare, 35% used grandparents, 10% other family members and 4% friends as an additional source of childcare.



Use of informal care is particularly high among lone parents, with over 60% using grandparents as an additional source and a third relying on friends. The limited research available on why this might be suggests that this is often due to the cost of childcare, which lone parents find particularly difficult to meet on a single income, but also that low-income single parents may be intimidated by formal childcare settings, or fail to appreciate their advantages (Gray and Carragher, 2008).

### **3.2 Issues with childcare in Northern Ireland**

Existing research has provided some idea of how well childcare in Northern Ireland is performing with respect to availability, flexibility and quality, often highlighting specific issues and potential improvements that could be made.

The interaction of supply and demand for childcare is complicated; although there is in general an undersupply of childcare places, the sector is characterised by a complex situation of waiting lists in some places but spare capacity in others. In their analysis of supply and demand for childcare in Northern Ireland, Gray and Bruegel (2003) find that this is caused by ‘mismatches’ in the market for childcare. What this means is that the nature of the childcare that is being offered does not match the needs of the parents who might use it. It may be the wrong type (e.g. nurseries when parents would prefer childminders), or fail to cover the hours that parents would need in order to work, or the right childcare might be out there but inadequate information networks mean that they are not aware of it.

The nature of the childcare that is on offer has to be in some way compatible with the employment opportunities that parents have, otherwise parents will neither work nor use the childcare. This creates a rather stark “all or nothing” situation for parents (McColgan et al., 2006), who may want and need to work and use childcare, but end up being able to use neither because they are both incompatible and rigid. Rutter and Evans (2012) give some pertinent examples of such situations from their research, which was not conducted in Northern Ireland but illustrates the problem. One is of a mother offered employment three days per week, but because the available nursery place had to be taken on a five day per week basis, which she could not afford, she was unable to avail of either the childcare or the offer of employment. Another mother found herself unable to take a job that ended at 5.30pm because she had to pick up her daughter from the after school club, which she would have been able to do if the job ended at 5.15pm; for the sake of 15 minutes, she had lost out on a full-time job. These rigidities have to be addressed if parents are to be able to get into employment.

#### **3.2.1 Availability; is there enough of the right types of provision?**

Between 2002 and 2012, day care provision expanded for most types of day care and overall provision increased by 14% (Table 3.2). The number of day nursery places has seen a huge increase, almost doubling from its 2002 level. The number of places in out of school clubs also increased by 34%. The number of places in playgroups decreased by a fifth over this period; although, as indicated in Table 3.1, these tend to be short sessions that are less useful for working parents.



**Table 3.2 – Change in number of day care places by type of care**

Type of childcare	Number of places in 2002	Number of places in 2012	Change 2002-2012
Day nursery	7,156	13,613	+90%
Childminder (registered)	20,464	21,315	+4%
Playgroup	15,032	11,885	-21%
Out of school clubs	4,518	6,075	+34%
Other <sup>15</sup>	1,803	3,026	+67%
<b>Total day care places</b>	<b>48,973</b>	<b>55,914</b>	<b>+14%</b>

Sources: DHSSPS (2002); DHSSPS (2012)

However, although provision has clearly expanded over the last decade, 55,914 places still represents less than one place for every six of Northern Ireland's 354,703 children aged fourteen and under.<sup>16</sup> It is unsurprising, in light of this ratio, that parents report a lack of availability of childcare places, and in particular a lack of a place that would allow them to return to work. A small Ipsos MORI poll for the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA, 2008) found that, among parents who had looked for childcare in the previous three years, 13% found it fairly difficult and 17% found it very difficult. A larger but less geographically representative survey by McColgan et al. (2006) had similar findings; 34% of the sample reported difficulty at some point in the past year in finding inappropriate childcare. One thing that this survey highlighted was that finding childcare is not necessarily a one-off event; changes in work commitments or the illness of a child or childcare provider can suddenly present problems. Finding childcare is therefore an ongoing process that needs to respond to changes in circumstances, sometimes very quickly. Research among low-income parents in Scotland (Innes and Scott, 2003) found that they may struggle particularly to make such emergency arrangements.

Despite a substantial minority of parents reporting difficulty in finding childcare, this is only part of the difficulty that mothers seeking work may encounter. The Childcare Costs Survey 2011 found that only 11% of respondents said that a lack of available childcare in their area had prevented them from entering work, training or education. However, as this is a sample of childcare users, it by definition excludes those who did not find suitable childcare; this, in addition to its low response rate by single parents, means that this figure is likely to be an underestimate. Indeed, a 2003 survey found that two thirds of mothers not in work cited childcare as a barrier (Gray and Bruegel, 2003). However, the same survey also highlighted a number of other reasons; almost a third cited lack of qualifications, and just over a fifth blamed a lack of jobs in the area, especially part-time positions.

15 'Other' childcare provision includes crèches, summer schemes, etc. – information is not provided by DHSSPS on the individual breakdown of places for these types for the year 2011/12.

16 Source: 2011 Census.

One theme that emerges from the research is that provision for school-age children is particularly lacking. In the Childcare Costs Survey 2012 the most commonly cited form of childcare perceived as lacking is after school clubs, with 47% saying this form of childcare is the most lacking (Dennison and Smith, 2012). This corresponds quite closely with the actual provision of these services, with only half of primary schools offering 'wraparound' services such as after school clubs (Lowndes and Dennison, 2012). Funding for this type of care, such as the Extended Schools programme, has been very variable; it increased to £10m in 2006 but was then cut to around half this level two years later (Hinds, 2011). These changes were paralleled by a rise and fall in the number of places, which in 2007 was 40% higher than it was in 2002, but by 2009 was just 18% higher than the 2002 baseline, although the Department of Education deny that these phenomena are linked (Hinds 2011). However, Employers for Childcare found that, of the primary schools that do not offer wraparound care, 65% cite a lack of funding as the reason (Lowndes and Dennison 2012). This suggests that a lack of funding is a major barrier to the provision of wraparound care. Where funding is not available, provision seems to simply cease to exist.

### 3.2.2 Flexibility; does it cover the right times of day, week and year?

It is important not just that there are the 'right' numbers of places, but whether they offer sufficient flexibility to allow parents to work their designated hours, which may not conform to the conventional paradigm of working 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Atypical work hours are not unusual. The Labour Force Survey suggests that a substantial minority of employees in the UK undertake some form of atypical working; 36% work overtime, 17% do shift work, 29% usually work on Saturdays and 20% usually work on Sundays<sup>17</sup> (Rutter and Evans, 2012).

The problem of inflexibility of childcare places is a recurring theme in surveys of parents. In the Childcare Costs Survey 2012, 37% of the sample found it 'difficult' to access flexible childcare and 17% found it 'very difficult', with just 12% stating that it was 'easy' or 'very easy' (Dennison and Smith, 2012). McColgan et al. (2006) found that their survey and focus group respondents complained of starting times being too late to enable them to get to work, and finish times too early for them to pick children up. A survey of parents who use informal childcare by the Daycare Trust found a high proportion of these parents are atypical workers who cannot find suitable formal childcare to meet their needs (Rutter and Evans, 2012).

### 3.2.3 Affordability; what are the costs of care relative to earnings and is there enough financial support?

Perhaps the most objective indicator of affordability is the price of childcare relative to earnings. In Northern Ireland this is extremely high; according to one study parents spend an average of 44% of one parent's net salary on childcare costs for one child (Dennison and Smith, 2012). To put this in international context, UK parents pay a higher proportion of their income in childcare costs than any other OECD country. The OECD's simulations estimate an average of 33% of family income is spent on childcare in the UK, compared with an EU

17 Rutter and Evans (2012) do not break these figures down by UK region; we are not aware of any up to date work that does.

average of 12% and an OECD average of 13% (OECD, 2011).<sup>18</sup> These are just average costs; for the lowest earners, the cost of childcare may equal or exceed their net income. This is especially true for mothers who work part-time, as many do; the lower number of hours they work, in combination with the lower average wage for part-time work, means that the cost of childcare is very high relative to their earnings (OFMDFM, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, many parents perceive this cost as unreasonably high. In the Childcare Costs Survey 2012, Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents said they struggled to meet their childcare costs, and 39% said they sometimes struggled (Dennison and Smith, 2012). Crucially for the impact of childcare on employment, 46% said that the cost of childcare had influenced the hours they worked, and the survey found this burden to be gendered, with twice the proportion of women reporting that they had compromised their working hours (Dennison and Smith, 2012). Open responses around this insight give some qualitative insight into how cost affects working hours. It may take the form of working compressed hours on a shorter number of days, allowing a lower number of days per week of childcare to be purchased. Mothers working part-time may also switch to full-time work in order to meet childcare costs. However, not all employees will have the opportunity to vary their work patterns in this way, and the current economic situation may make it difficult to find full-time work; childcare needs to be affordable for these employees as well.

Affordability of childcare could be improved with the financial support available from the Government, but only 13% of families in Northern Ireland claim any kind of assistance with childcare costs, either through the childcare element of the child tax credit, or childcare vouchers (Employers for Childcare, 2011). Although not all families are entitled to this assistance<sup>19</sup>, this figure shows that the majority of families are taking on the full costs of childcare outlined above with no help. Limited take-up of assistance may be due in part to the complexity of the system of support, and the lack of information available on entitlements (OFMDFM, 2010; Gray and Bruegel, 2003). Parents simply do not understand or are not aware of the support available to them in many cases. 39% of parents in the Childcare Costs Survey 2012 reported finding it difficult to access information about financial help with childcare costs (Dennison and Smith, 2012), and some parents have reported never having heard of childcare vouchers, which may in part explain their low take-up (Dennison et al., 2011). However, we are not aware of any research to date that investigates in-depth the reasons for the low take up of financial assistance with childcare in Northern Ireland; this is perhaps an avenue for future enquiry.

18 Further information on other countries' approaches to childcare can be found in the literature review of this report, and in the appendices.

19 HMRC produces statistics on take-up among eligible families, but because those not using childcare, or single earner families, are ineligible by definition, these figures do not give any indication of extent to which childcare use is predicated upon a lack of support.

### 3.2.4 Quality; what is quality and where does it fall short?

Most formal childcare provision is subject to regulation and inspection to ensure minimum standards of quality in care. The inspection of pre-school provision comes under the remit of the Education and Training Inspectorate, who rated just over four fifths of pre-school settings as good or outstanding (ETI 2010). Registered day care facilities and childminders have minimum quality standards and are inspected by the relevant Health and Social Care Trust, but similar aggregate statistics are not published. Consultation with stakeholders during this research raised a number of concerns around quality standards and the workforce; this is discussed in Section 4.2 of this report.

Surveys of parents have found that the majority of childcare users are satisfied with the formal care that they use, although there may be some selection bias here, as those unsatisfied with a provider are likely to stop using it. Dennison and Smith (2012) find that satisfaction with the quality of provision is over 97% for day nurseries, registered childminders, out of school care and specialist childcare. The only type of provision for which parents reported slightly lower satisfaction was unregistered childminders, and even so, satisfaction with provision was at 91% for this type of care.

McColgan et al. (2006) identified some regional variations in satisfaction; Table 3.3 summarises their findings for satisfaction with nursery schools.

**Table 3.3 – Proportion of parents who report being ‘very satisfied’ with their child’s nursery school**

Area %	‘very satisfied’
Derry/Londonderry	97.8
Limavady	92.9
Strabane	80.0
Omagh	93.1
Enniskillen	96.0

Source: McColgan et al. (2006)

This survey did not cover the whole of Northern Ireland<sup>20</sup>, and the small sample size of the survey in some regions urges caution in interpreting these results. However, they suggest some evidence of regional variation in satisfaction.

20 We are unaware of any current survey that does; the Childcare Cost Survey does not break down satisfaction ratings by region.



### 3.2.5 Specific issues facing families with particular needs

Some families will face additional issues in accessing suitable, affordable childcare provision. The barrier may be related to low-income and resources, it may be a spatial issue that creates additional logistical barriers, or it may be a child who has specific additional needs in a childcare setting.

The first such group is those lacking income or resources; low-income families, and lone parents, who may not necessarily be poor but still face an additional burden in reconciling their work and care responsibilities by virtue of their situation as sole earner and carer. As noted above, average childcare costs in Northern Ireland constitute 44% of an average income; for those on low-incomes, it may eliminate the financial benefits of employment. The recent reduction in the proportion of childcare costs that can be claimed through the tax credit system, from 80% to 70%, has made childcare even less affordable for low-income families (Save the Children and Daycare Trust, 2011).

Many lone parents in particular, reliant on a single income, perceive that, even with the assistance currently available, childcare is not affordable for them (Gray and Carragher, 2008). For lone parents, undertaking further education may be a crucial step towards securing a job with a sufficient income to support their family and meet childcare costs; however, two aspects of welfare reform have compromised their ability to do so (Gingerbread, 2012). The first is that single parents on Income Support are no longer entitled to fee remissions or free childcare when accessing further education, and must pay for these themselves, which they are unlikely to be able to do whilst on the income provided by Income Support. The second is the transfer of single parents with children aged five and six from Income Support onto Jobseekers Allowance. Although fee remissions are available to those on Jobseekers' Allowance, recipients must accept work if it is offered to them, potentially forcing them to abandon any educational programme they are undertaking. This transfer has also occurred very rapidly; previously they would have been given 12 months' notice – potentially enough time to undertake a further education course – but this has now been reduced to eight weeks. These reforms may compromise the ability of lone parents to increase their earning power, and thus to secure employment that will help them to meet childcare costs. The 2008 Welfare reforms sought, among other things, to increase lone parents' involvement in the labour market partly by the reducing the age at which their youngest child meant that they did not have to participate in activation policies (such as moving on to Job Seekers' Allowance). However, Haux (2012) argues that the level of multiple-disadvantage among lone parents with older children suggests that many will not be able to move into employment.

The second type of difficulty a family may experience in accessing childcare is spatial. When childcare availability is low and there is little choice, parents may have to use a childcare facility that is some distance from home or work. This makes the journey between home, work and childcare longer and more complicated. The problem is compounded if a family have more than one child, as there may not be enough choice of providers to be able to use the same provider



for both, or even providers that are near each other. Availability is particularly poor in rural areas, with rural parents reporting much more difficulty in finding childcare; in the NICMA survey referred to above, 43% described their search as difficult or unsuccessful, compared with 28% in urban areas (NICMA, 2008). The survey did not explore the reasons for this additional difficulty; one can assume that it is related to issues of low availability in these areas, and indeed this was reflected in discussions with stakeholders.

A further complication is posed by the lack of full day care places, with parents needing to piece together a full day of childcare from a number of facilities, and potentially supplemented by help from family and friends as referred to above. The survey of western regions by McColgan et al. (2006) found that some areas do not have a single provider that offers full day childcare places; parents who wish to work full-time have to use two providers offering half day places, with the additional logistical burden that this entails. Thus, with multiple children using multiple sources of childcare, it can be difficult – or even impossible – to reconcile work and childcare, within the constraints of opening hours of childcare facilities and the hours that employers expect parents to be at work.

The reconciliation of work and childcare is easier where families have access to suitable transport, but this may not be the case. The Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group identified a number of transport issues facing families in rural areas (RCSG, 2008), which further complicate the organisation of the morning and evening commute. For example, only 20% of households are within 13 minutes of a bus stop, and the bus services that exist may only do so at limited hours, making car ownership necessary to access childcare services. There is a self-perpetuating relationship between a lack of childcare facilities and poor transport, as lack of transport means that children cannot use the services, which limits the extent to which the services themselves are provided.

The third problem a family may face in finding suitable childcare is if their child has specific care needs beyond those required by the majority of children. These may arise if a child has special educational needs or disabilities that require additional support, and families with these children may face particular issues in accessing services. Parents face a double bind of higher costs and lower income as additional care needs make it harder to work (CDSA, 2012). Suitable childcare is difficult to find, and a number of surveys of parents with disabled children have established some key barriers they face to finding suitable childcare, and finding and sustaining employment (Lowndes and Smith, 2011; Dillenburg and McKerr, 2011; McColgan et al., 2006).

These studies suggest a lack of provision for disabled children, with parents unable to find care that meets their children's needs. They may not be able to find a childcare setting that is willing and able to take on their child, and that has sufficient understanding of the child's condition and the ability to manage it where necessary. For example a child may have behavioural issues that require a particular response, or have a condition that requires the administration of

medication throughout the day. There are simply fewer places with suitably adapted facilities and trained staff, than there are disabled children. Almost half of working parents with disabled children do not use childcare at all, formal or informal; in these cases, care is shared between parents, who adjust their work patterns so that one parent is always available. In the absence of both parents being able to find suitable jobs to manage this balancing act, they will not be able to work at all. Childcare responsibilities are cited by most, although not all, parents with disabled children as the main barrier to employment for them. Many of those not in work would like opportunities to work and train, but feel that there is no service suitably tailored to their family's needs that would facilitate this. Not only are care needs of disabled children greater, they are also potentially very unpredictable, which limits their employability.

Families with children may face additional hurdles in accessing the support that is available to them. Isolation may be an issue. Some report that their child's condition makes it difficult for them to socialise and form networks with neighbours and other friends – key sources of information for parents – and the availability of specialist networks depends on the type of disability that the child has, with some better catered for than others. Instead, they may be reliant on a professional, such as a social worker or community nurse, to help them access services. While there is high awareness of key benefits such as Disability Living Allowance and Child Benefit, there is lower awareness and uptake of other support such as the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, childcare vouchers, and Direct Payments.

Another group of families that may have specific childcare needs are those from a minority linguistic or cultural background. There is not a huge amount of data on such families, because they constitute such a small proportion of the Northern Ireland population, but specialist studies can give qualitative insights into the barriers they face in accessing childcare. The main needs they seem to have are cultural awareness on the part of staff, translation services, and more employment of members of minority ethnic groups within the childcare sector (Gray and Bruegel, 2003). As with other public services, the Traveller community is suspicious of childcare professionals, which needs to be taken into account when trying to meet their children's needs (McColgan et al., 2006). The debate around mainstream versus specialised provision also arises here – i.e. whether Traveller children should be integrated into the same facilities as non-Traveller children, or provided with Traveller-only services – and whether the latter is stigmatising or realistic. Research on the education of Traveller children in Northern Ireland (Hamilton et al., 2012) has suggested that pursuing strategies of either assimilation or cultural relativism is not a successful way to produce satisfactory educational outcomes. Rather, it is a question of making Traveller children feel safe, and their cultural identity valued, within the integrated settings that can help them achieve educational success and address issues of social exclusion<sup>21</sup>.

21 Human rights issues regarding choice are raised in *Oršuš and Others v Croatia* (No. 15766/03, Grand Chamber judgment 6th March 2010) [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx#{\"dmdocnumber\":\[\"864619\"\],\"itemid\":\[\"001-97689\"\]}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx#{\)

### 3.2.6 The funding and organisation of childcare

The issues around the funding and organisation of childcare provision were discussed at length in the stakeholder interviews, and Section 4 of this report elaborates on them. These discussions were informed by the (limited) existing literature that deals with these issues, which is presented here.

Two issues emerged as potentially important issues in the funding of childcare in Northern Ireland. The first was the problem of adequately meeting the costs of providing childcare, and the disparity between these costs and what parents are able and willing to pay for childcare (OFMDFM 2010). It would seem that, in order for childcare to exist, this gap between cost to providers and revenue from parents must be filled somehow – but Government funding at its present level does not, and childcare providers are unable to continue operating. This has a severe impact on the supply of childcare.

The second funding issue raised is the low level of investment in childcare in Northern Ireland compared with the other UK areas. Save the Children analysed public spending in 2007/08 on children's services, using information given in HM Treasury's spending breakdowns (Save the Children, 2009). Table 3.4 reports their findings on two key childcare related areas – early years (pre-school) education, and Sure Start. It identifies some stark disparities.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 3.4 – Government expenditure per child in 2007/08 on early years education and Sure Start, by UK region**

Region	Early years education	Sure Start
N. Ireland	£230	£80
England	£1300	£600
Wales	£1300	£270-350
Scotland	£1000	£380

Source: Save the Children (2009)

These spending data need to be taken with a couple of caveats. The first is that children start school earlier in Northern Ireland, and therefore spend only a year in pre-school rather than two. However, this does not explain why early years education expenditure in Northern Ireland is less than a fifth of the level in England and Wales. For Sure Start, it should also be noted that the programme was introduced later in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK, although it has been running since 2001.

<sup>22</sup> It could be the case that these substantial spending differentials are compensated for by higher spending elsewhere. However, we have not encountered any evidence of areas of childcare provision in which Northern Ireland spend five times as much as England. Perhaps a more comprehensive overview of provision, beyond the scope of this analysis, could identify such areas.

On the organisational side, the key issue that has been highlighted is the way in which Northern Ireland lags behind the other UK areas in strategic terms. England, Wales and Scotland have all reviewed and updated their childcare strategies, while Northern Ireland is yet to go through the same process (Employers for Childcare, 2010). There is also a statutory duty in the other UK regions, discharged through local authorities, to provide pre-school places for all three and four year olds. Northern Ireland does not have the same local authority structure, and thus could not directly adopt the same policy. However, it is argued that a lack of such strong accountability for childcare provision is in no small part responsible for many of the deficiencies in childcare provision in Northern Ireland (Hinds, 2011).

### 3.3 Summary

This section has made reference to a number of existing reports on the issues with childcare provision in Northern Ireland. These have raised a number of ways in which the various dimensions of childcare might be described as lacking. Availability is patchy, insufficiently flexible, and not always of high quality, but prices are high, especially when compared with average family wages. Some types of family may also face additional barriers to accessing childcare, such as rural families or parents with disabled children or parents with more than one and/or very young children. This present situation seems partly to be linked with a relatively low priority and underinvestment in childcare. These issues were all explored in the stakeholder interviews, which the next section reports.

**“ ‘...parents may struggle to find a facility that opens early enough or closes late enough to allow for commuting time’ ”**





## Stakeholder Perspectives on Childcare in Northern Ireland

<b>4.1.</b>	Availability and affordability	49
	<b>4.1.1</b> From the parents' perspectives; accessing and affording the right childcare	49
	<b>4.1.2</b> From the providers' perspectives; sustainability and funding	55
<b>4.2.</b>	Quality and staffing	56
	<b>4.2.1</b> Quality standards	56
	<b>4.2.2</b> Workforce development	56
<b>4.3.</b>	Organisation and accountability	56
<b>4.4.</b>	Policy inertia	57
<b>4.5.</b>	The wider picture	58
	<b>4.5.1</b> Employability	58
	<b>4.5.2</b> Gender roles and attitudes	60
	<b>4.5.3</b> The economic situation and welfare reform	60
<b>4.6.</b>	Summary	61

## 4. Stakeholder Perspectives on Childcare in Northern Ireland

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The process of consulting with stakeholders during the course of this research gave valuable insight into understanding what are considered to be the most important issues around childcare in the Northern Ireland context. This section identifies the most pertinent issues that were raised by stakeholders during these interviews. Appendix D lists the stakeholders interviewed.

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### 4.1 Availability and affordability

#### 4.1.1 From the parents' perspectives; accessing and affording the right childcare

Stakeholders were asked about the extent to which suitable childcare is available and affordable for parents in Northern Ireland.<sup>23</sup> Some families in particular find it difficult to access childcare, and these are considered in the next section. However, the issue of availability and affordability is not confined to specific groups, but is a widespread problem. Although provision was not really considered to be entirely satisfactory for any age group, two stood out in particular; day care for 0-2s, and out of school provision for school-aged children.

#### *Availability and affordability in general*

- *Parents face a number of difficulties in accessing and affording suitable childcare to enable them to enter and maintain employment.*

The 0-2 age group was identified as one for which childcare provision is seriously lacking. Parents rely heavily on informal care for this age group, although this may be out of preference rather than necessity; it is difficult to say from the available information. Whatever the rationale, informal care puts a high burden on grandparents (or other relatives or friends), who are potentially themselves kept out of the labour market by childcare responsibilities, or if they are over retirement age may find that their health is compromised by having to care extensively for very young children. Daycare facilities report being oversubscribed

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that this resulting account of availability is based on what stakeholders have experienced in the course of their advocacy or provider activities. They noted that information on demand available to childcare partnerships was not comprehensive, and relied on anecdotal reports rather than systematically consulting with parents about what they need and want. Thus, it is difficult to fully answer questions of availability through these interviews. OFMDFM is currently working on this, including talking to parents who do not use childcare and establishing their reasons for not doing so.

for this age group; one provider already had three centres, and demand was so high they were planning to open another two. Some areas, particularly the most disadvantaged, have very little available provision, which is likely to be linked to the high cost of care for this age group, which is unaffordable for parents not in work. Also the lack of childcare itself may mean that parents are unable to work, thus creating a situation in which demand has to precede supply of childcare for it to exist, but childcare has to exist in order for employment to be possible. This dilemma is a recurring theme in childcare provision, and will be discussed further below.

The other major area in which provision is lacking is out of school provision for school-aged children. The extent of unmet demand is not currently known, and Playboard, the membership organisation for after school providers, is currently collecting statistics on this. Employers for Childcare surveyed primary schools and found that half offer wraparound care, and of those that did not, only a quarter cited lack of demand as a reason for not doing so; the main reasons were lack of funding, staff and facilities.<sup>24</sup> Section 3 (The Mapping of Childcare Provision in Northern Ireland) above suggested that a lack of public funding may have had an impact on the supply of after schools provision.

A further issue raised by stakeholders around funding was that it is made available to head teachers, who can spend it on any initiative that extends school provision, including initiatives such as extra-curricular activities, and will not necessarily use it to provide the kind of things that help parents, such as breakfast clubs and after school clubs. Out of school provision also sits slightly awkwardly between departments, in that it is an extension of schools, which is within the Department of Education's remit, but also a childcare setting, which requires registration with the Health and Social Care Trusts. It is bureaucratic to have to liaise with both, and the departments have different understandings of the objectives of the service, neither of which appear to prioritise the facilitation of employment of parents.

A commonly mentioned problem was the issue of getting between home, childcare and work; even in urban areas, which do not have the same transport problems as rural areas, parents may struggle to find a facility that opens early enough or closes late enough to allow for commuting time. The problem is exacerbated by the wish often to avoid facilities located in areas or attached to schools with a different community background. The extent to which this was perceived as a problem varied depending on the economic and political context and history of the particular area, but in general the issue does represent a barrier to accessing childcare services. Hence greater use of cross community childcare provision should improve access to those requiring it and help contribute to equality of employment.

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24 We are unaware of a similar survey of secondary schools.

A lack of flexibility around opening times makes the reconciliation of work and childcare difficult even for parents who work standard hours, but almost impossible for many working atypical hours. There seems to be a lack of forethought around the hours that childcare would need to be open in order to allow parents to work; facilities tend to have single objectives (such as education, or social care) which are individually understandable, but better alignment would enable them to broaden their usefulness and meet the needs of working parents.

It is difficult to separate the issue of availability from the issue of affordability. Some stakeholders did not perceive an unmet demand for childcare; they pointed out the existence of spare capacity of childcare places in some areas, and the existence of the tax credit system to help working parents afford childcare. However, others argued that these phenomena obscure the real problem of affordability. Parents may not demand childcare at existing prices – they are effectively priced out of the market – but this does not necessarily mean that they would not prefer to be using childcare. Recent changes to the tax credit system have reduced eligibility and the proportion of fees that are covered, making childcare less affordable for some of the lowest income families. Those who are not on very low-incomes are still affected by the dual squeeze of childcare costs that rise in real terms each year, while wages, which are already lower on average than other parts of the UK, stagnate or fall in real terms. If it does not pay to be in work, because little is left of wages after childcare costs, then parents may choose not to work at all.

For childcare to be accessible, parents need to have access to good, detailed and up-to-date, information about the places that are available in their area, and the support that they can get to pay for care. In Northern Ireland, this information system has some room for improvement. There is a website<sup>25</sup> that can provide contact details for local providers, but it does not give much information about the provider, does not indicate whether the listed providers have any availability, is not particularly user friendly and presumes that parents are able to use the Internet. Providers report that word of mouth is still an important way in which parents find their services. Parents may also be unaware of the financial support that they are entitled to, and confused or intimidated by the complex tax credit system. Stakeholders reported initiatives that they have run to try and improve this – for example, Employers for Childcare have Family Benefits Advisory Service, and Early Years are developing a mobile phone application. Further such information needs to be available when parents are making decisions concerning their future work and so could be provided as early as before the birth of their child. It was suggested that perhaps linking together these initiatives could help improve the information network.

25 Family Support NI ([www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)).

## *Problems facing specific types of family*

- *Some families have additional issues in accessing childcare; these need to be recognised in planning provision.*

Some families experience the above issues around accessibility and affordability in a particularly acute way, or have further unique issues in access to childcare. The two major groups that emerged from the stakeholder interviews as having the biggest problems were parents with disabled children and rural parents. Parents of more than one child, and those with young children, also face additional issues of affordability and availability (for example where children may be at different schools, or one may not yet be of school age, etc.), as do parents who are themselves are disabled.<sup>26</sup> The particular issues of lone parents, and minority ethnic and Traveller families were also explored below.

### *Parents with disabled children*

- *Childcare for disabled children was identified as deficient.*

The mapping exercise in Section 3 had raised the issue that parents had difficulty finding childcare for disabled children. This emerged from the consultation with the stakeholders – not just representing disability groups, but across the board, as important. Although the numbers are relatively small, as a group disabled children are poorly catered for by existing provision. There are not enough specially trained staff or suitably adapted facilities to provide childcare for all disabled children whose parents would like to use childcare, which limits the extent to which they can work. Employer tolerance is also key for parents of disabled children, but small businesses in particular find it hard to cope with the erratic absences that parents need, and perhaps need more support from the Government to be able to accommodate this.

This has emerged as a key equalities issue; disabled children are worse off than other children when it comes to accessing childcare. Investment is needed to build capacity, adapting facilities and training staff, but there are limits to this. Disability is such a diverse issue that staff cannot possibly be trained to deal effectively with any condition that arises.<sup>27</sup> There is also a sustainability issue; staff may train, use their skills for one child, but then that child leaves and there are no disabled children for a while after that, and they then need to re-train. However, it is important that parents are aware of suitable facilities or the scope for adapting (facilities or staff) to be able to take on disabled children.

<sup>26</sup> The effects of inequalities and employability on access to employment are not discussed in depth in this report as they are covered extensively by the Equality Commission NI's core activities.

<sup>27</sup> Specialist carers need not involve just the training of existing staff, but could involve secondments or sub-contracting from specialist agencies that focus on work with disabled children (e.g. PLUS in Stirling).



## Rural families

- *Childcare provision in rural areas was also identified as deficient.*

The other major gap in provision identified by stakeholders is the lack of childcare in rural areas. Sparse populations make centres difficult to sustain, and a lack of public transport makes it difficult or impossible to reconcile work and childcare. Living in a rural location also amplifies some of the issues that parents in urban areas face in accessing childcare. For example, the issue of opening hours that do not accommodate the commute between home, childcare and work is even more pertinent when families live more remotely and commutes are longer. After schools provision, already limited in urban areas, is even less likely in rural areas because the small size of schools limits their capacity to organise such activities. Extended schools funding goes through head teachers, but in rural schools the heads often have teaching duties as well, and have less time to plan activities and apply for funding.

The issue of rural childcare, as with out of school provision, is one that does not sit comfortably within a departmental remit. Poor access to childcare in urban areas often falls under a social development remit, and may receive neighbourhood renewal funding from the Department of Social Development. Areas of low provision in rural areas are not areas of high poverty density, but they have similar access issues. The Department for Agriculture and Rural Development made some investment in rural childcare in 2009 with the Rural Childcare Programme. However, the initiative was intended as an evidence gathering exercise about what works in rural childcare, rather than representing the department assuming the brief of improving rural childcare, as the department does not have the remit or the resourcing to do so. Other funding has been made available for childcare, such as the Childhood Fund of the EU Peace II programme, although often the focus of these was not on the employment of mothers.

Stakeholders identified some ways in which childcare provision is currently working to, or might work to, address some of these issues. In areas with low population density, childminding may be more suitable than centre-based provision, which may not have the numbers to sustain it within a sensible distance. The Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) used funding under the Rural Childcare Programme to set up a network for rural childminders, to provide support, reduce isolation, and give access to training and share resources. Where provision is centre based, centres may need help to increase not only their capacity in numbers of children they can accept, but also to expand the functionality of centres, as multi-purpose centres are more sustainable. Issues of transport might also be tackled by helping facilities to provide their own minibus, thereby increasing their catchment area, or by liaising with local taxi and bus firms to co-ordinate provision in a way that can facilitate parents' use of childcare services.

### *Lone parents*

- *It is hard enough for couple families to reconcile work and childcare, lone parents experience these more and may have additional issues as well.*

Lone parents experience amplified levels of the general barriers to childcare. Childcare is even less affordable on one income, and it was reported that the reduction in childcare element of tax credits has hit lone parents very hard. Similarly, the logistics of work and childcare are complicated enough with two parents, but when there is only one parent, who is unlikely to own a car and thus rely on walking and public transport, it is even harder to find an arrangement that works, especially with more than one child.

Lone parents also face certain psychological and emotional issues around childcare. There is a psychological barrier to using childcare when you have sole responsibility for a child, and perhaps have not had as much separation from them as in two parent families. Being alone impacts confidence, and lone parents are often dealing with the emotional fallout from relationship breakdown. The voluntary sector has a role to play in helping lone parents deal with these emotional and psychological barriers; they understand the issues, and can offer the right support.

### *Migrant, minority ethnic and Traveller families*

- *Migrant, minority ethnic and Traveller families have additional requirements from childcare services that are not necessarily being met at present.*

For migrants and minority ethnic families, a key issue is the language barrier, which prevents them from using services and from knowing about the available services and financial support in the first place. A particular issue is accessing childcare that is compatible with working atypical hours; they are quite likely to be either low-paid shift workers, or healthcare workers with long and erratic hours. For Traveller children, the main difficulty may be physically transporting them to childcare services. Providers are also reported to need to be able to deal with considerable fluctuation, with parents enrolling and removing their children at short notice, and additional behavioural issues.

There are some issues that are common to both groups. The first is cost of childcare, and the difficulty of affording this on a low-income. Travellers are a deprived group, and while not all ethnic minority families are poor, migrants and asylum seekers are more likely to be. The second issue is a cultural resistance to using childcare in Traveller and some minority ethnic cultures, which have little tradition of using formal care and/or female employment. To send children to day care and go out to work may therefore be alien to some and they may never embrace the idea, although some may if given the opportunity.

As with disabled children, the differential access of ethnic minority and Traveller children to childcare raises a significant equalities issue, although there is substantial disagreement about how best to address this. For example, the model

of provision developed by Early Years is to support Traveller families in using the same services as settled children, whereas the model followed by the Barnardos Tuar Ceatha<sup>28</sup> project is to integrate children into these services after a period of preparing them separately. However, both of these organisations argue for a need for a more inclusive mentality in service provision, and greater cultural awareness and sensitivity.

#### 4.1.2 From the providers' perspectives; sustainability and funding

- *The issue of sustainability for providers needs system changes to address, including more (but not necessarily complete or unconditional) Government funding.*

The difficulty that parents have in finding and paying for childcare is both a cause and a consequence of a huge issue of sustainability for childcare providers in Northern Ireland. This is the issue referred to above in that childcare has to exist for parents to be able to (work in order to) pay for it. However, demand for childcare fluctuates in the face of the prevailing economic situation, demographic shifts, migration trends and changing norms about using care and maternal employment. Providers also complain that giving parents all of the money to spend is not always a good idea, as parents may enrol a child in a facility to receive tax credits, only to pull the child out in order to keep receiving the benefit but not having to pay the fee. Providers are then left without a client. Providers receive little or no core funding in the majority of cases; external funding sources other than fees (which are subject to the uncertainties outlined above) are limited and piecemeal.

Given the failure of the market to sustain childcare in many cases the Government has a role to play, if it wishes a childcare market to exist, for instance in breaking the cycle of low employment and low childcare provision. However, it cannot be left solely to the Government to sustain the childcare sector. Providers have to be entrepreneurial, and funding has to come from a variety of sources including parents themselves. Providers need to review their fee structures and not expect to exist where there is no demand for their services. The social economy model as a way of providing childcare – as demonstrated by some of the stakeholders we spoke to, such as the Ashton Trust<sup>29</sup> – illustrates one potential approach that is both business minded but also responsive to social need and ability to pay, and able to draw on a variety of funding sources, including public sources.

However, given the current economic climate, it was argued by some that it is unrealistic to expect major increases in public funding for childcare subsidies. While this is largely a matter of Government priorities, it suggests the need to also improve the efficiency of the use of existing public resources in this area (see below).

28 The Barnardos Tuar Ceatha services offer parenting support, group work and play-based learning to Black, Minority Ethnic, Refugee and Traveller children and their families. More information can be found at <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/tuarceatha.htm>.

29 The Ashton Community Trust is a social enterprise organisation that aims to regenerate the local community around its North Belfast location. The services it offers include employability programmes and a daycare service, which is funded primarily by fees from parents but also receives external grant money, e.g. from the Department for Social Development's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme. More information about the work of the Ashton Trust can be found at <http://www.ashtoncentre.com/>.

## 4.2 Quality and staffing

### 4.2.1 Quality standards

- *The minimum standards that exist are basic, and we should aspire to more.*

The minimum standards for childcare providers, despite some recent reworking, do not guarantee good quality. From a child's perspective, this means that the care they are receiving will not necessarily stimulate and develop them, and parents cannot be encouraged to use childcare provision that has a negative impact on their child's well-being and development. Furthermore, low confidence in quality will discourage parents from using childcare in the first place, representing another barrier to the uptake of childcare and employment.

### 4.2.2 Workforce development

- *The workforce needs to be more highly skilled, and the profession needs to be more valued and recruit more men.*

Related to the idea of quality of provision were the concerns raised by stakeholders about the quality of the workforce. It was felt that there should be greater aspiration towards a more highly qualified workforce, who should be more highly valued and better paid. However, it should also be pointed out that a more highly qualified workforce will make childcare even more expensive to provide, and potentially to buy.

There are also equalities in employment issues, especially the lack of male and older workers. One criticism levelled at the childcare workforce was the lack of men. This was argued to be a problem for children, who lacked male role models, but also because it perpetuated the idea of childcare as a female endeavour. Greater representation of men in the workforce would help to break down this idea of childcare as women's role, which is part of a cultural change that needs to occur in order for childcare to be shared more equally and taken more seriously (these issues are discussed below). Also many of the workers tend to be young females, and so the age and gender structures of the workforce could be reviewed.

## 4.3 Organisation and accountability

- *There needs to be better, more joined up, organisation of childcare, with clear and accountable leadership.*

A common theme among stakeholders was the need for a childcare strategy to address the lack of joined up thinking with respect to childcare. Departments operate in policy 'silos' with respect to childcare, and their priority lies with meeting their own objectives rather than improving the childcare system as a whole. In addition, much of the support for childcare seems not to adequately take account of working parents (for instance some after school services closing at 5pm).

The Childcare Partnerships have tried to foster greater inter-departmental co-operation, and communication is improving, but co-operation can only go so far in the presence of competing objectives. The current lack of strategic thinking was cited as part of the reason why provision is poor; childcare needs to be a cross-cutting issue, not something that is divided up and left to individual departments. The lack of central oversight also makes it difficult for those who are working and lobbying in the sector to communicate issues with current provision that need to be addressed.

It was also stressed that it is not enough to have a childcare strategy; there has to be accountability for implementing the strategy. A single department needs to lead on this and have not just oversight, but also accountability for implementation and the power to do so. A statutory responsibility to provide childcare, as seen in the other regions of the UK, could potentially assist in the effective and efficient implementation of the strategy. Although it was noted that in Great Britain, responsibility is discharged through local authorities, which vary from the situation in Northern Ireland, and therefore the idea would have to be modified for the Northern Ireland context.

There was considerable disagreement over who should assume responsibility for implementing a childcare strategy. Although OFMDFM have a cross-cutting orientation, and a remit to address inequalities, they have less current operational involvement that might assist in the implementation of the strategy. They do not have the same stake in the practicalities of childcare provision as the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, or the Department of Education; but these departments have specific remits around childcare (broadly, education and well-being respectively), which do not substantially encompass employment objectives. The Department for Employment and Learning has an interest in the employment rationale for childcare, and indeed currently funds childcare for parents in education and training, but issues of how to deliver the best childcare for educational development and well-being are beyond this.

#### 4.4 Policy inertia

- *The issue of childcare is crucial for getting more parents into work and should be a priority among policy makers.*

Although for strategic reasons there is an argument that it may be better for one department to take on the prime responsibility for childcare, there was a perception among stakeholders that no department was keen to do so. Some argued that there was a feeling that policymakers see childcare as an expensive inconvenience. This is despite its central role in facilitating employment. Apart from higher employment, and the associated lower reliance on welfare and better macroeconomic outcomes, additional benefits could include a reduction in crime and antisocial behaviour (e.g. by providing more out of schools facilities), and better health and well-being of elderly people if they are not required to take on considerable amounts of childcare. However, the silo approach of government departments means that the system currently limits work towards such a wide ranging set of goals. There is a need for greater bringing together of



governmental (and other) funders of childcare to avoid duplication, improve joint provision and ensure that the employment of parents is given a high priority in the detailed design of the provision.

Stakeholders complained of a political culture in Northern Ireland that attaches very low importance to childcare. It is understood as an issue that disproportionately affects women, and is given low attention and low priority. The Assembly remains male dominated, and it was argued that until women are better represented, issues such as childcare will continue to be low on the political agenda. However, ironically, the lack of childcare is one of the major barriers to women's participation in public life, which is not organised around the assumption of childcare responsibilities.

## 4.5 The wider picture

- *Mothers' employment is not just about childcare; it is also necessary to address employability issues, gender attitudes, and the impact of the prevailing economic context and welfare reform.*

### 4.5.1 Employability

Childcare is not the only barrier to employment for mothers, and (where applicable) stakeholders were asked about their role in addressing other barriers to work, such as skills and confidence. Although the Department for Education and Learning funds employment programmes such as 'Steps to Work' (StW) and the 'Local Employment Intermediary Service' (LEMIS), there are a number of other initiatives, usually funded by European Social Fund or Big Lottery money, that might address some of the more specific issues facing mothers trying to find or return to employment. The stakeholders who administer these services were able to provide particular insight into these barriers.

#### Skills

- *Mainstream employment programmes do not always address the needs of mothers trying to get into, or back into, work.*

Lack of skills may represent a huge barrier to employment; some mothers are not even at a sufficiently high level to access mainstream employability programmes such as Steps to Work. The voluntary and community sector runs programmes, funded mainly through the European Social Fund and the Department for Social Development, to bridge this gap. Many such initiatives are located in Women's Centres, which can offer courses in basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, and crucially provide childcare whilst mothers are on the courses. Often this childcare is on site, which can be important in getting mothers to agree to participate. However, an issue may arise with childcare once the person moves on from a particular scheme to other initiatives, or especially, to employment.

At a slightly different point on the skills spectrum, lone parents can access a programme that takes them beyond what is offered by Steps to Work, which only funds them to gain qualifications up to NVQ level 2. This is a problem for lone parents because it is unlikely to give them access to a job with a sufficient wage on which to support their family on a single income. Thus, Gingerbread NI, the organisation for lone parents in Northern Ireland, uses European Social Funding to fund qualifications up to level 3. This addresses not just the issue of finding a job, but of finding sustainable employment that pays enough to cover both living costs and childcare expenses. This higher skill level may also give them greater choice in employment, which increases the probability that they can find a job that is sufficiently near to their childcare provider.

### Confidence

- *Confidence is a key issue in getting low skilled women into the labour market, but also getting women to return after a period of time out.*

In addition to skills such as literacy and numeracy, confidence plays an important role in finding and maintaining employment for women with childcare responsibilities. For low skilled women, a lack of confidence not only represents a major barrier to finding work, but may also be at the root of other issues such as their lack of qualifications. It is both a cause and a consequence of early school exit, early motherhood, and sporadic engagement with the labour market. Confidence is therefore something that needs to be tackled in helping mothers to find work, and the coaching and mentoring services provided through organisations such as Women's Tec and the Training for Women Network can help them to develop this and put them in a better position for finding work.

However, the issue of confidence is relevant to mothers at all skill levels. Time out of the labour market affects confidence, and makes mothers feel out of touch, even if they are highly skilled. Low confidence relates not just to the ability to effectively do a job, but to managing the work-life balance and having confidence in the available childcare. Women do not necessarily know what support is available to help them back into the labour market, and indeed there is not a huge amount of provision, but there are mentoring and networking opportunities aimed at them. These can support the transition back into employment, and get them closer to their previous career trajectories.

Childcare also greatly affects women in work, both in the short-term (e.g. the ability to deal with sickness of their child, which may be particularly common when the child is young) and with their long term career, which may be badly affected due to them not being able return to work at the level that their career would entail.

#### 4.5.2 Gender roles and attitudes

- *Attitudes are changing, both in the division of childcare and in employer attitudes to childcare responsibilities*

Gendered parenting roles – i.e. the assumption that a father's job is to earn and a mother's job is to look after children – constitute a cultural barrier to mothers' employment participation. There was general agreement among stakeholders that attitudes are changing in this respect, towards a greater tolerance and even expectation that men should share childcare responsibilities, but that childcare is still to a great extent considered particularly as an issue than disproportionately affects women rather than parents' one. Cultural change is needed to address this key equalities issue.

Parents need employers who can be tolerant 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, as the need for flexibility and emergency time off cannot be shared with a partner, and thus between two employers. There was a feeling among stakeholders that while the public sector and larger private sector employers are increasingly flexible, small businesses struggle to absorb the additional cost and need more support. There are also variations by sector, with male dominated sectors such as construction less tolerant, although there are always exceptions within sectors. The Equalities Commission needs to highlight these examples of good practice, and also to make sure employees are aware of their entitlements, as a considerable legal framework now exists.

#### 4.5.3 The economic situation and welfare reform

- *The economic downturn has had an effect on the availability of jobs, and the demand for childcare. This affects the ability of childcare to help women into employment, and the sustainability of childcare providers themselves. The Government also needs to be aware of the disincentives for mothers to work under the present and proposed welfare system.*

The recession has had an impact on the availability of employment. Particularly relevant to women is the impact on the public and retail sectors, which have traditionally been sources of the kind of flexible, part-time hours favoured by those with childcare responsibilities. However, the impact of the recession on male-dominated sectors such as construction is also important; as men have lost their jobs, women have to seek employment, but childcare does not cease to be 'their' problem within the family. Although men are being forced in some ways to take on a larger role in childcare by virtue of becoming unemployed, the current cultural system and lack of role models means that men taking primary child caring roles are still uncommon.

Another side effect of economic downturn and high unemployment is the ability of employers to depress wages and conditions in a tight labour market. There has been an increase in 'zero hours' contracts, in which employees are on call but not

guaranteed any minimum number of hours, making it a potentially very unstable source of income. It is difficult to pay for childcare in the face of this uncertainty, especially where childcare supply is inflexible. There may also be a reluctance to challenge such employment practices in the current economic situation. Thus, a poor economic climate does not facilitate the kind of security and flexibility that parents need in balancing work and care. In addition, there is the indirect impact of the recession on childcare provision. Rising unemployment has meant a reduced demand for childcare, which, as outlined above, may threaten the sustainability of some childcare providers.

Finally, substantial concerns were raised about the potential impact of welfare reform, and specifically the implications of Universal Credit when it is introduced, on family incomes and mothers' ability to work. The drive towards austerity has already seen a cut in tax credits; making childcare costs higher for parents, but this is contrary to encouraging mothers into employment. This tension is likely to intensify due to the substantial disincentives for second earners that will operate under Universal Credit, which is likely to particularly affect female employment. Welfare reform is not something that the Northern Ireland Government has any power to challenge, but they should be aware that it is contradictory to attempts to increase the employment rate for those with childcare responsibilities.

#### 4.6 Summary

The process of consulting with stakeholders provided a picture of current issues with childcare provision in Northern Ireland, and how it, among other things, needs to be improved in order to encourage more mothers into employment.

Parents face a number of difficulties in accessing and affording suitable childcare to enable them to enter and maintain employment. Day care for the 0-2 age group, and out of school provision were found to be particularly lacking. Other major factors contributing to poor access to childcare were inflexible opening hours, the high price of childcare, and insufficient information about the provision that exists and the help that is available to pay for it.

Some families have additional issues in accessing childcare. Childcare provision for disabled children was identified as very deficient, with not enough suitable facilities for them. Childcare in rural areas was also identified as severely lacking, made difficult by poor transport links and problems with sustaining providers. Lone parents experience more acutely many of the issues faced by couple parents, and have their own additional practical and psychological barriers to using childcare and finding and maintaining employment. Parents with more than one child, and those with young children also face high childcare costs and difficulties in balancing work and childcare. Finally, migrant, minority ethnic and Traveller families have additional requirements from childcare services that are not necessarily being fully met at present. Some face cultural and language barriers, services are not inclusive and aware enough, and as often a lower income group the average cost of childcare is a big issue.

There is an issue of sustainability for providers of childcare, which needs to be considered, especially for low-income parents and this would require more (but not necessarily complete or unconditional) Government funding. Leaving provision to be led by demand creates a vicious circle of low employment, low demand, low supply and thus low employment. The Government has a role to play in breaking this cycle, although providers need to be entrepreneurial and parents need to be prepared to contribute where they can.

Some issues with quality were identified, which not only mean that children are not getting the best possible care, but also that parents may be discouraged from using childcare and thus from employment. Childcare quality standards need to continue to be improved. In general the workforce needs to be more highly skilled, and the profession needs to be more valued and recruit more men and older workers.

In order to improve childcare provision in Northern Ireland, it has to have better, more joined up, organisation, with clear, accountable leadership. The way in which government departments work in silos and have competing objectives means that departments do not at present effectively work in partnership to improve childcare, and especially childcare that seeks to meet the needs of parents seeking or sustaining employment (in addition to its other educational and welfare objectives). The childcare strategy needs to take a cross-cutting perspective but one that takes employment for parents, and especially mothers, seriously and consistently.

The issue of childcare needs to become a higher priority for policymakers, and the indispensable role of childcare in getting parents into employment needs greater acknowledgement. At the societal level, attitudes are changing with respect to parenting and the extent to which men might be expected to take on these responsibilities as well, but parenting currently remains an issue that disproportionately affects women. Cultural change, at all levels, is thus crucial for addressing the impact that children have on women's labour market participation.

Childcare may be a necessary condition for greater employment of mothers, but it is not sufficient. Crucial also are individuals' employability issues, employer attitudes to parents, the types of contracts available in the labour market (e.g. in terms of hours and pay), gender attitudes, and the impact of the prevailing economic context and welfare reform. Mainstream employment programmes do not always address the skills needs of mothers trying to get into, or back into, employment or to sustain their employment or longer term careers. They fail to help the lowest skilled, or to effectively address the employment barriers that are created by the time out of the labour market that mothers take. Confidence is key in getting low skilled women into the labour market, but in also getting higher skilled women to return after a period of time out, and employment programmes need to address this to help mothers.

The economic downturn has had a profound effect on the availability of jobs, and the demand for childcare. This affects the ability of childcare to help women into employment, and the sustainability of childcare providers themselves. The Government also needs to be aware of the disincentives for mothers to work under the present and proposed welfare system.



**“ It is hard enough  
for couple families  
to reconcile work  
and childcare, lone  
parents experience  
these more and may  
have additional  
issues as well.”**



## Options and Recommendations

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<b>5.1</b>	Areas for the attention of policymakers in Northern Ireland	65
<b>5.2</b>	Policy Options	68
<b>5.3</b>	Conclusions	88

## 5. Options and Recommendations

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This section brings together the major issues identified in this report with respect to childcare provision in Northern Ireland, and the changes that need to take place in order to better support mothers in finding, maintaining and progressing in paid employment. It firstly outlines five main areas for potential reform that we have identified from our analysis of the literature, data and stakeholder perspectives on childcare: the need for a childcare strategy, the supply of childcare, equality of access to childcare, addressing barriers to employment and attitudes to childcare and mothers' employment. It then goes on to present more specific policy recommendations around these five areas.

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### 5.1 Areas for the attention of policymakers in Northern Ireland

The research conducted in the preparation of this report uncovered a range of issues around childcare provision in Northern Ireland, and the ability of this provision – along with other relevant services, and the attitudes of society, employers and parents – to facilitate the employment of mothers.

#### **The need for a childcare strategy**

An overwhelming message that came out of the research was the need for a childcare strategy that sets out what requires to be achieved, and assigns some responsibility for ensuring its implementation. Currently there is a lack of centralised strategic direction; elements of responsibility sit with different government departments, but no single department is responsible for ensuring that the totality of provision is adequate and meets the needs of working parents. Government support for childcare should have clear leadership and be strategically integrated across departments, agencies and other bodies and funding streams.

There is also a need to better align the different rationales for different kinds of childcare. If working parents are to be supported, it is necessary to consider the extent to which other kinds of childcare (e.g. that provided for educational reasons) might be used to meet aims such as enabling parental employment.

Childcare should receive greater priority because of its crucial role in helping parents to work, but it needs to be funded in a realistic and sustainable way that shares – between the Government, parents, childcare providers and employers – the burden of an adequately resourced childcare system that provides good outcomes for children. It is recognised that there are limited public sector resources in the current economic and budgetary environment; however, childcare resources need to be substantially increased, as well as efficiency and effectiveness improved, if significant progress in childcare provision is to be made in order to maximise female employment. Even within these constraints, childcare in Northern Ireland should be affordable, accessible and of high quality. However, it should also be stressed that improving childcare is not just about spending more; it is about being strategic, departments working together more effectively, and getting better value for money than the current system provides.

Although this paper is concerned with childcare as a way to facilitate employment, rather than its impact on children's educational and social outcomes, quality is still an important issue. Our research has suggested that the minimum standards that exist do not necessarily guarantee good quality care; and perception about quality may discourage some parents from using childcare and thus from employment. The continuous raising of the skills of the workforce in the childcare sector and the rigorous monitoring of provision and parent satisfaction could help to improve the quality of childcare.

### **The supply of childcare**

This research suggests that there is insufficient childcare, particularly for certain groups (see discussion of equity of access below), but also more generally for the youngest children (aged 0-2 years old) and out of schools provision for school-aged children. It is also problematic, as the current system does, to determine supply by considering mainly the apparent 'demand' for childcare, as low demand may itself result from low availability of childcare. If mothers know that there is no suitable childcare – accessible, affordable and of a desirable type and quality – they may not look for employment, and hence will not appear to demand childcare. Related to this is the problem of childcare supply that shrinks in a recession when employment – and therefore demand – is lower, but is then not in place in better times when working parents do need it.

The childcare that does exist often does not meet the needs of working parents. It may be insufficiently flexible (e.g. may not cover the right hours to enable parents to take up employment opportunities, may not cover all holiday/break/illness periods adequately); and due to its high cost relative to wages, may be too expensive. Furthermore, 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. The available sources of information may not be up-to-date, locally relevant or appropriately delivered. In the other direction, there is a lack of information about local demand and parental preferences, which makes it difficult to make adequate provision. These informational deficiencies are likely to make the reconciliation of supply and demand of childcare less efficient.

### Equality of access to childcare

There are key equalities issues around access to childcare, with some groups less likely to be able to access childcare to permit employment. As well as the child age groups mentioned above, access to childcare is particularly limited for: rural families; parents with disabled children; families with more than two children; Traveller, migrant and minority ethnic families; those on low-incomes; and single parent families. For some of these family types, the issue is one of availability; there is a lack of suitable facilities for disabled children, and provision is variable outside of urban areas. For others, it is more an issue of affordability, for example for single parent families, who struggle to pay high childcare costs on a single income. For Traveller and minority ethnic families, the main barrier may be one of accessibility, with language and cultural barriers limiting access to childcare services. Some families will face more than one of these issues, and thus multiple barriers to accessing childcare and taking up employment.

### Addressing barriers to employment

Childcare should be seen as one of a number of barriers to employment, both on the supply side (e.g. mothers being not suitably qualified or confident) and on the demand side (e.g. employers unwilling or unable to accommodate working parents).

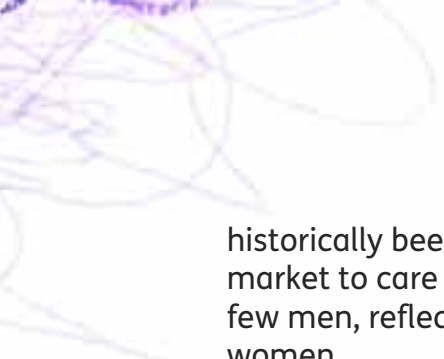
Childcare issues related to employment should not be considered in isolation, but viewed as a part of a wider package that includes employment and employability support, welfare and family policies and institutional support for families in terms of childcare subsidies and flexible statutory work arrangements that support family-work balance. Childcare alone is insufficient to support disadvantaged mothers into employment, and support to develop their skills and confidence is essential, so childcare and employment support should be provided in an holistic way to parents. Addressing only one barrier in isolation is unlikely to lead to significantly reduce the problem of low labour force participation of mothers, in particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Employers also have a part to play in accommodating working parents' greater need for flexibility and understanding. Employer attitudes are crucial in helping working parents balance paid work and care, but flexibility on the part of employers is not universal. Even when women negotiate suitable arrangements, they may still feel insecure if they feel that the understanding they have with their employer is based on good inter-personal relationships rather than institutionalised in their company and the workplace more widely.

### Attitudes to childcare and mothers' employment

Attitudes towards mothers' roles as carers are crucial to why more mothers are not in work. The division of paid work and care in the household is often gendered, with mothers assuming greater responsibility for care work and fathers for earning; this situation has seen some change in recent years (e.g. due to the older age of having children, after careers are more firmly established), but a stark asymmetry remains. Family policy both reflects and perpetuates this division of labour, 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. Even the childcare workforce itself, with few men, reflects a norm that caring roles in society, even paid ones, are for women.

## 5.2 Policy Options

Based upon the consultations and evidence review, the policy options are now set out in a way that makes the case for reform, and then recommends both immediate and more aspirational changes.

The first half of each table summarises the evidence from this report that has suggested the need for change. It sets out the rationale for change, evaluates the benefits and drawbacks of taking such an action, and makes reference to lessons that might be drawn from existing examples of good practice. The second half of the table presents some of the options for change. It begins by outlining a broad ‘vision’ – a scenario that would be part of a universal, rights-based model of access to childcare to help reduce gender inequalities in employment – where childcare provision adequately supports parents seeking employment or progression in employment in a way that also meets the wider family needs. It then gives a less ambitious option, which is suitable for immediate assessment and action on the part of the Northern Ireland Government; this can be thought of as a priority response to the deficiencies with childcare identified in the report, but only a first step in the change that should occur. The final row of the table outlines the broad strategic actions through which the Government might move from minimal action towards the vision.

## 1. STRATEGY AND REGULATION

### 1.1 Issue: Agreeing and implementing the proposed childcare strategy

#### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	The Government's proposed childcare strategy needs to fully take account of the implications for parental employment. To significantly reduce childcare as a barrier to employment and career progression, significantly greater emphasis needs to be placed upon childcare and a strategic approach is required.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	A more strategic approach would help childcare provision to better meet the needs of working parents, promote equality and provide better value for money.
<b>Challenges drawbacks:</b>	The challenge is to build the necessary consensus and co-operation, and to overcome the inertia that hinders change. Limited resources to implement a comprehensive strategy.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	The other regions of the UK have updated their childcare strategies, and introduced a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure that there is enough childcare for working parents (Employers for Childcare 2010).

#### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	A strategy that is based on a rights-based model of provision, committing the necessary co-ordination and resources to supply sufficient childcare to all working parents.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	A childcare strategy that: addresses full range of childcare need, explicitly links childcare and employment and assigns responsibilities across government and other relevant actors. Ensure that current equality obligations under s75 (especially in terms of gender and those with dependent children) are fully promoted.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	A statutory duty upon a nominated governmental body to promote, and seek to ensure that there is, adequate childcare.

## 1.2 Issue: Making childcare a higher priority for Government

### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Stakeholders highlighted an historic lack of interest in childcare as a key barrier to effective childcare provision.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	There are considerable potential economic benefits of increased employment of mothers (e.g. economic growth, poverty reduction, greater equality) and access to affordable and appropriate childcare is a crucial and necessary aspect for this.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Childcare provision is one of many governmental responsibilities, in a time of economic downturn and public expenditure cuts. A change of attitudes may be needed to move the issue further up the list of governmental priorities.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	The UK Government has a junior minister responsible for childcare <sup>30</sup> ; although this is not their only role, they have central accountability on the totality of childcare provision (this is currently lacking in the Northern Ireland context).

### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Childcare provision is a high priority of Government.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	A single department should be given responsibility for leading a childcare strategy, although all departments (and other bodies) must play a full role in its development and implementation.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	The creation of a Minister for childcare. The successful and continuous development and implementation of the childcare strategy.

<sup>30</sup> Currently Elizabeth Truss MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (education and childcare), Department for Education, <https://education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/departmentalinformation/ministerialteam/truss>

### 1.3 Issue: Improving inter-departmental co-operation

#### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Competing departmental objectives, narrow thinking about the rationale and funding of childcare, and lack of accountability means that childcare is often overlooked. Departments view childcare through their own lens regarding its rationale and funding, and act and spend accordingly; this does not create an effective, coherent system of provision that meets working parents' needs.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	Improved co-operation would provide a more coherent and effective and efficient childcare system and improved value for money of childcare expenditure.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Although stakeholders reported improved communication between departments in recent years around the issue of childcare, this is ultimately limited by departments' need to meet their own statutory responsibilities; this conflict is inherent in the current institutional arrangements.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	Co-operation between departments in other areas, such as employability, illustrate the advantages of improved collaborative working.

#### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Childcare is treated as a cross-cutting issue on which all (relevant) departments work together towards a coherent strategy.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Childcare should feature as part of the objectives of all relevant departments (with one department having central accountability).
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Addressing the institutionalised 'silo' thinking that characterises each department's approach to childcare.

## 1.4 Issue: Developing a realistic and sustainable funding model

### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	The high cost of providing childcare and the instability of providers' revenue means that there may be a role for public subsidy, but balanced against a solid business model of provision, and appropriate contributions from parents.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	By making the supply of childcare more stable, parents will have better confidence in suitable childcare being there when they get the opportunity to take up employment or training.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	The Northern Ireland Government is constrained in its capacity to make these legislative and funding decisions.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	The market-led system of provision in the UK is expensive, and can lead to provision for those who can afford to pay and the most disadvantaged, leaving many in the middle unable to access adequate childcare. Although funding at the level of the Nordic model of state provision is not necessarily realistic in the current economic circumstances, it may be possible within current constraints to organise a system to which parents contribute, but in which the Government plays a stronger role in addressing pockets of failure in the childcare market.

### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Funding models that better supports a sustainable and suitably sized childcare sector, even in the face of fluctuating demand and economic conditions.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Investigating and supporting the expansion of a variety of new and existing suppliers of childcare, including social economy models of provision.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Review demand-side funding policies (e.g. tax credits) and overall funding of childcare to improve stability and development of childcare provision, as well as choice for parents; consider some redistribution of expenditure towards provider subsidy.



## 1.5 Issue: Raising minimum standards of childcare provision

### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Current standards ensure basic safety, but not necessarily high quality.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	High quality is not only important for child outcomes, but also makes parents more likely to trust childcare and return to employment.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Maintaining and improving standards carry compliance, registration and inspection costs. There also needs to be recognition of the variation in what providers are capable of providing and also in what parents want from their childcare provider. There is a need to encourage both higher quality and higher productivity in the childcare sector, to encourage better and cheaper supply together with better wages and conditions for staff, possibly linked to higher quality of training etc.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	It is impossible to draw cross-national comparisons of childcare quality; the OECD <sup>31</sup> states that “there is no single indicator which adequately reflects the quality of service environment and the quality of interaction between staff and children”. Northern Ireland must set its own benchmarks.

### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Regulatory standards that ensure a high quality experience for every child. A sustainable childcare regulatory system which encourages highly skilled and productive staff with high quality of provision for the children.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Voluntary codes of good practice should be strengthened and expanded beyond the legal minimum.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Review legal requirements and standards to bring these up beyond current minimum standards.

31 OECD Family Database, last updated 01/07/2010, <http://www.oecd.org/els/familiesandchildren/37864559.pdf>

## 2. SUPPLY OF CHILDCARE

### 2.1 Issue: Increasing the supply of childcare

#### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	There is insufficient appropriate childcare currently available.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	Better meeting of the needs of working parents. Increasing the supply of childcare should give providers more incentive to lower prices and offer flexibility in accordance with demand.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	The existing childcare market is unlikely to expand by itself. There may need to be greater Government funding such an expansion or ways to improve productivity, so as to allow better wages, lower costs to parents and higher quality.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	The review of the literature in this report found that countries with a high supply of publicly provided or funded childcare have higher employment rates among mothers. Further research by OFMDFM could provide useful information on the costs and supply of childcare.

#### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Childcare demand is met for all working parents who want it for their children.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	A childcare strategy urgently needs to address gaps in the areas of little or no supply, particularly for the 0-2 age group, in some rural areas and for out of school care.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	The supply of childcare provision should be expanded for all age groups, with attention and resources focused on the high cost of care for younger children (under 2s) and the limited pre- and after-school facilities.

## 2.2 Issue: Better aligning childcare provision with the needs of working mothers

### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	The opening hours of childcare facilities are not always aligned with working hours, especially if their purpose is to provide educational or social care settings. Appropriate childcare during school breaks/holidays is often difficult to access.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	Current childcare provision could better meet the needs of working parents if it considered the need to fit around mothers' work, whilst still fully meeting educational or social aims.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Extending opening hours may require additional staff and facility costs, which must be met by providers, parents or the Government.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	It is not just the level of childcare provision that is important in the high-performing Nordic countries; it is the way in which childcare is understood as a key part of ensuring that mothers are not prevented from returning to work by their caring responsibilities.

### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Wrap-around care should be provided for those who require it, perhaps by extending the remit of schools such that they become community-based providers of care as well as educational establishments. This could sometimes be done through one school providing services across the whole community, helping to ensure equality between communities.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	It is recognised that some childcare is for particular educational and social reasons, and that the child should always be at the centre of childcare provision. However, in addition, explicit consideration should be taken of the likely impact of childcare provision policies and practices on the employment of mothers. For instance, the opening hours of existing provision may need to be extended, so that it starts early and finishes late enough to allow employment and commuting.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	The Government should co-ordinate and support a childcare sector that offers a range of affordable childcare options that cover the necessary hours that would enable all mothers to take up and sustain employment opportunities if they wish to do so.

## 2.3 Issue: Improving information on the supply of, and demand for, childcare

### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	There is currently insufficient information about local provision for parents, or information about parental demand and preferences for childcare, to supply parents with what they require.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	Better information would reduce inefficiencies in the childcare market, such as pockets of unmet demand, or duplication of effort.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Collecting information on demand for childcare is complex, in particular the consultation of parents who do not use childcare, as they are harder to reach than service users.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	Local authorities in England carry out Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, which establish demand for childcare and the extent to which supply meets this demand.

### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Information about demand is regularly collected, and information about supply is regularly disseminated in user-friendly ways to all potential users, in order to effectively meet demand for childcare.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	The current database of childcare providers should be better publicised and the interface simplified for use by parents as well as others. Relevant information on local childcare provision should be provided at an early stage (even before the child's birth) to support mothers in taking concrete decisions concerning their future employment options. It is important to ensure that mothers of all community backgrounds feel able to access all childcare.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	The Government, or a nominated body, should conduct on-going evaluation of the extent of demand for different types of childcare (e.g. nurseries, childminders, after school clubs, etc.) and how such demand can better be met.

## 2.4 Issue: Reconsidering the distribution of the costs of childcare

### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Some parents cannot afford the cost of childcare, especially those in low-paid jobs.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	Affordable childcare is key to facilitating mothers' return to employment.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Childcare is inherently expensive because of its labour intensity, and is difficult to meet and equitably divide the costs of such an expensive service, especially when all the relevant parties (parents, employers, providers and Government) have constrained income under current economic conditions.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	Parents in Northern Ireland pay a high proportion of their income in childcare costs relative to other European countries. For example, full-time daycare for a 2 year old in Germany costs 9% of the average wage, compared with 25% in the UK (OECD, 2011).

### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Providers charge 'reasonable' fees, and parents and employers make an affordable contribution, with Government providing a significant contribution towards any shortfall.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	More financial assistance from the Government for parents of 0-2 year olds to meet the particularly high costs of care for this age group, partly due to the high staff ratio. The Government should review the revenue streams and costs of childcare provision, and explore innovative ways of funding childcare, for example: the Government might agree to subsidise a provider in a time of low demand to avoid them closing, if the provider offers free or discounted places to disadvantaged families when revenues are higher <sup>32</sup> ; or parents could part pay for childcare through providing their own time to defray some costs.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Bring NI Government funding for childcare in line with funding in the other parts of the UK (see Table 3.4 of this report for a comparison of early years funding).

32 This was a suggestion that came out of stakeholder engagement in the preparation of this report.



### 3. EQUAL ACCESS FOR ALL

#### 3.1 Issue: Childcare for families in rural areas

##### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Parents in rural areas face additional difficulties in reconciling work and childcare arrangements, and rural providers find it more difficult to achieve sustainability.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	Childcare is crucial for the sustainability of rural communities, as families may relocate if they cannot secure employment and childcare locally.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Providing equality of service to rural families comes at an additional cost and requires flexibility on the part of all related services (e.g. education, transport, childcare) and employers.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	The Government should look to the lessons that can be learned from the pilots funded under its own Rural Childcare Programme, around the benefits of improved transportation, and successful models of funding and service provision (e.g. South Armagh Childcare Consortium).

##### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Adequate transport to facilitate the commute between home, childcare, work and other key activities. Childcare that is open long enough hours (and sufficiently flexible workplaces) to make this feasible.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Investments in remote rural childcare facilities to increase capacity, including number of places and ability to transport children. Ensuring local provision is, and is felt by parents to be, available and open to all groups.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Increase the supply of, and hours covered by, rural childcare facilities, perhaps through support of multi-functional community hubs that offer childcare along with other services <sup>33</sup> .

<sup>33</sup> This was a suggestion that came out of stakeholder engagement in the preparation of this report.

### 3.2 Issue: Supporting the employment of parents with disabled children

#### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Parents with disabled children face considerable barriers to employment, and there is insufficient suitable childcare provision at present.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	Suitable childcare would allow more parents with disabled children to work, addressing issues of poverty faced by many such families.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Cost of additional staff training and adjustments to facilities. Facilities may adjust or undertake additional training to accommodate a specific child, but have no use for this investment in subsequent years.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	The Yard <sup>34</sup> , a community centre for disabled children and young people in Edinburgh, passes on its expertise with training sessions for teachers and youth workers in issues such as inclusive play and autism awareness.

#### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Suitable childcare available for all children whose parents want to work, regardless of the child's disability.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Better co-ordination between the facilities that are available and the parents that need them. Ensure a more inclusive service provision for children suffering mental and physical disabilities.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Improve and upgrade facilities and ensure that staff undertake additional training where appropriate.

34 <http://www.theyardscotland.org.uk/>

### 3.3 Issue: Childcare for families with more than two children

#### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	The current tax credit subsidy system caters poorly for large families because of the upper limit on childcare costs that can be reclaimed.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	More support for childcare costs for large families would facilitate employment of parents.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	The remit for tax issues is largely for the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Government cannot change the tax credit system itself. Assistance would have to come in the form of a distinct subsidy, but this carries additional costs.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	Institutional arrangements in France are designed to support large families, by increasing support and reducing conditionality as the number of children increases, although they do so principally through long and well-compensated parental leaves (see Table A2 in Appendix A), which facilitate labour market attachment in the long-term but not the short-term.

#### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Number of children not to be a barrier to employment for mothers wishing to work.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Making the Approved Home Carer scheme less bureaucratic <sup>35</sup> ; this can potentially be a more cost-effective solution than daycare for larger families.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Greater childcare support for families with more than 2 children.

35 This type of childcare is similar to childminding, but in the family's own home rather than the childminder's (<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/home-childcarers>). The organisation Employers for Childcare have recently launched an intermediary service that employs carers on behalf of parents, making this type of care simpler to use ([www.approvedhomechildcare.com](http://www.approvedhomechildcare.com)). However, there are some concerns about costs and acceptability to parents (Working for Families – McQuaid et al., 2009)

### 3.4 Issue: Childcare for Traveller, migrant and minority ethnic families

#### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Traveller, migrant and minority ethnic families face considerable practical and cultural barriers to using childcare services.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	More inclusive awareness in childcare service provision would benefit the children in these families, and allow their parents to address other barriers to employment (e.g. language skills) should they wish to.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	The support needs of children in these families often have additional requirements from providers, and extra costs. The issue of childcare provision to these groups is a culturally and socially sensitive one that can lead to debates around the best way to provide services to these groups.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	The statutory duty on local authorities in England includes the explicit requirement to consider in its assessment of childcare sufficiency the needs of ethnic minority groups, refugees, asylum seekers, and other groups at risk of social exclusion (Childcare Act 2006, Section 6).

#### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Sufficient resources available for providers to offer the additional resources and flexibility required to accommodate Traveller and minority ethnic children and in a way to support their mothers getting or remaining in work.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	A more inclusive perspective on service provision is needed. Better dissemination of information about available places to those with language barriers to accessing information. Among providers, examples of good practice in providing childcare services to these groups should be shared.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	More funding for facilities to accommodate the additional needs of Traveller children and mothers. More broadly, efforts are needed to break down social or cultural barriers to using childcare services.

### 3.5 Issue: Childcare for low income and single parent families

#### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	High cost of childcare, low average earnings and recent and proposed cuts to tax credits and welfare make childcare less affordable for the lowest income parents.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	Affordable childcare can help low-income parents access work, training and education, thus addressing issues of poverty and deprivation.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Difficult for the Government to provide additional subsidy under current austerity conditions. Full implications for mothers of welfare reform of UK Government do not appear to be given sufficient importance (see in particular the earlier reference in this report to the impact of increased conditionality on lone parents' access to training and education).
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	In the UK, maternal employment is 52% and the child poverty rate is 12.5%; in Finland these figures are 70% and 5.4% respectively. <sup>36</sup> However, it should be noted that this low level of child poverty is achieved partially through high maternal employment, and partially through a generous system of family support.

#### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Parents pay childcare costs on a sliding scale to reflect their short- and longer-term incomes.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Consideration of additional subsidy to the poorest families to compensate for the proposed reduction in tax credit support for childcare.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Expand employment programmes to take participants beyond basic levels of qualifications, to facilitate career progression and the opportunity to earn an income that is sufficient to pay for childcare and support the family, even (and especially) in single parent households. Provision for emergency childcare (such contingency arrangements are often expensive and potentially unaffordable for low-income families).



## 4. OTHER EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

### 4.1 Issue: Promoting family- and child-friendly employer practices and policies

#### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Part of the difficulty in finding suitable childcare is matching available provision with employers' requirements. There often seems low awareness among employers of the link between their human resources policies and practices, and their employees' ability to access childcare.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	There is a strong business case for family-friendly provisions; such as allowing businesses to retain talent.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Family-friendly working practices have perceived impacts on workforce flexibility, productivity and competitiveness. The relevant legislation in this area is not a devolved issue, although regulation is not necessarily the only or even best way to achieve this aim.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	The review of the literature in this report found that cross-national studies demonstrate the importance of having family-friendly provisions at work for supporting working mothers, in addition to good childcare.

#### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Facilitation of an employment culture of employer support for families.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Employers should be encouraged to identify changes, such as job shares, flexible hours etc., that may make access childcare easier for staff. Examples of good practice in family-friendly workplaces should be rewarded and shared. The business case for improving childcare in order to attract, retain or progress the careers of mothers should be made by Government and business development agencies. If businesses feel that they are too small to offer in-house childcare facilities, there may be scope for them to link together to procure a joint childcare facility; the Government could support them in doing so. Business support agencies should review their support for employers, especially small ones, in supporting and ensuring childcare facilities for mothers.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	The public sector should lead by example in the operation of policies that help mothers to access and progress in childcare and employment. The Government needs to consider how a large scale changes in perceptions might be achieved, in working hours and in employers' attitudes to flexibility and alternative forms and patterns of working.

## 4.2 Issue: Focusing on employability as well as childcare

### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	A lack of childcare is not the only, or even the main, barrier to work for mothers; they may need to improve their skills and confidence before they are ready to work or to re-enter the labour market.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	Higher levels of qualification and earning potential are positively associated with the likelihood and speed of return to work for mothers and career advancement for all.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Providing mothers with the support they need to re-enter and progress in employment may require more extensive, and perhaps more expensive, assistance than currently provided by mainstream employment services.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	There are examples of successful schemes within Northern Ireland (such as those run by Gingerbread NI and Women's Tec), but these are currently small scale and reliant on external monies (e.g. from the European Union). The Working Families Fund in Scotland successfully supported improved employment among disadvantaged parents through combining childcare and employability support, using a key worker model where the support worker could assist with reducing all the relevant barriers to employment, although it had considerable public resources.

### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	A combination of childcare and tailored employability services means that motherhood does not represent a barrier to training, or entering and maintaining paid employment and career advancement.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	<p>Expansion of current good practice in tackling unemployed or under-employed mothers' skill deficiencies in a way that is sensitive to their childcare needs, confidence issues and other factors that may vary from those faced other unemployed people. Skills and career development for those in work should also fully take into account childcare.</p> <p>The range of support for women returners, who often have high skills, which may need to be refreshed, should be considered specifically, from a perspective of their life-time career progression as well as their short-term re-entry into work.</p>
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	There are differences between childcare support while in training or education and while in employment; the transition into employment would be smoother if mothers could expect some continuity in their childcare arrangements, at least for a temporary period.

#### 4.3 Issue: Improving holistic support to find, maintain and progress in employment

##### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Support for mothers to improve their employability, to get, remain in and progress in employment requires holistic support that covers a range of childcare, social and employment areas.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	A more holistic approach to tackling multiple and inter-related barriers to employment is a more efficient model of service provision.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	Restructuring or reform of existing services.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	Examples of good practice in this regard might be found with some of the stakeholders consulted in the course of this research, who represented facilities that link childcare services with employment and employability services (e.g. Ashton Trust, Windsor Women's Centre, Scotland's Working Families Fund).

##### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	All employability services look at the full range of requirements - including need for childcare, training needs, etc.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Share examples of good practice in providing employability services to parents that deal with the full range of issues facing parents (particularly those offering holistic types of service). Consider using 'key worker' support where mothers can liaise with one key worker who can link them to the various forms of support required.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Increase availability of initiatives offering holistic, childcare sensitive services (both in existing initiatives and new initiatives).

## 5. ATTITUDES

### 5.1 Issue: Challenging gender stereotyping in parenting and employment

#### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Current unbalanced and poorly compensated parental leave arrangements, together with gender stereotyping, can make it difficult for fathers to take on a sufficient caring role.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	A change in the options open to couples in dividing paid work and care, and a change in attitudes around how to divide them, would help women maintain their labour market attachment (as well as allowing fathers to take on greater caring roles).
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	A barrier to taking leave is the low rate at which it is compensated, but to increase this would be at considerable costs. Some relevant legislation is beyond the NI Assembly's remit. Attitudes are difficult to change.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	The lengthy, highly compensated leave found in Sweden is, it could be argued, perhaps not a realistic proposition for Northern Ireland in the current circumstances. However, the arrangements in Sweden are not just more generous; the idea of a shared caring role for parents is culturally embedded, and this attitudinal aspect is also important.

#### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	Well-compensated parental leaves of a suitable length, fully transferable between mothers and fathers.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Continue and increase efforts to tackle gender stereotypes concerning childcare roles, to promote greater employment equality. Monitor and improve understanding of the position of mothers in the labour market and the role of childcare in this (including mothers who are in work, seeking work and not-seeking work).
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Greater emphasis on both genders taking childcare responsibility (including parental leave) and building suitable childcare around this.

## 5.2 Issue: Increasing quality and diversity in the childcare workforce

### Synopsis of evidence:

<b>Rationale for change:</b>	Many employees in the childcare sector are young, female and low-paid. The lack of men in the childcare profession reinforces the care of children as a female activity. It also reduces opportunities for equitable employment for men among childcare staff.
<b>Benefits of change:</b>	A more highly qualified and diverse workforce would improve quality of care for children, and address some of the gender stereotyping around caring roles and responsibilities.
<b>Challenges and drawbacks:</b>	This is part of a difficult wider attitudinal shift of parents, employers and prospective employees.
<b>Lessons from elsewhere:</b>	A £250m 'Transformation Fund' was made available to childcare providers in England and Wales, as a one-off funding stream over a two year period, awarding grants to help pay for staff training and premiums to facilities employing highly qualified staff. <sup>37</sup>

### Policy options:

<b>Vision:</b>	A highly qualified, diverse and productive childcare workforce.
<b>Imperative for immediate action:</b>	Encourage more diversity, especially of men, in childcare employment. Monitor age and gender of staff. Encourage greater productivity in childcare and better paid childcare workers while raising standards of childcare. Move towards a virtuous circle of well trained staff who are productive and well paid (possibly with higher staff/child ratios which might help fund such an approach) and provide excellent childcare; rather than moving to a low paid, low productive staff.
<b>Strategic action to deliver vision:</b>	Greater professionalization of the childcare workforce, through investment and qualifications. Analysis of how to raise the productivity (including raising the quality) of childcare provision.

<sup>37</sup> Information about what was funded under the scheme is summarised at <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFES-0486-2006.pdf>



### 5.3 Conclusions

This section has sought to take forward the insights gained from the research discussed in this report about the issues with childcare for working parents in Northern Ireland, into suggestions about the direction in which policy should proceed in order to bring about improvements.

In reviewing the literature, data and stakeholder opinion in the course of preparing this report, it was found that there is a need for a strategic approach to childcare, which allocates responsibilities among government departments, and other key actors, but also has some central accountability for ensuring that overall strategic aims, implementation and monitoring are achieved. There are a number of issues around the supply of childcare that need to be addressed in order to make it suitably available, accessible, affordable and high quality for working parents. In addition, crucially, a number of other employment and employability barriers to employment need to be addressed alongside the inadequacies of childcare provision. Finally, the changes that need to occur is not only financial and practical, but attitudinal, in the sense that the issue needs to be prioritised, and cultural attitudes towards working motherhood should be examined and challenged.

In considering options for change, the report looked within and beyond Northern Ireland for examples of good practice in childcare and maternal employment. It would seem that the most effective combination of family and childcare policies for encouraging female labour market participation is one that offers a combination of paid parental (maternity and paternity) leave and flexible job arrangements (including part-time jobs, flexible working hours, and job-sharing), alongside an adequate coverage of affordable childcare facilities. The Government should consider the current effects of such policies, or limitations of them, in Northern Ireland.

The recommended options for policy change set out a realistic vision for childcare provision in Northern Ireland that might help maximise the economic participation of mothers. We have identified minimum changes in light of deficiencies identified, and we recommend that these are all assessed and considered for implemented as a first step. However, the aspiration is to move towards the vision of childcare provision, through the strategic action presented here. Improvements to childcare provision in Northern Ireland are long overdue, and central to economic prosperity, poverty reduction and other Government aims, and should be treated as a priority. The further the Government can progress along the recommended direction of change, the closer they will be to achieving the more equitable labour market participation of mothers.

**“ The issue of  
childcare is crucial  
for getting more  
parents into work  
and should be a  
priority among  
policy makers ”**



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# Appendices

## APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF CHILDCARE POLICIES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Table A1 - Parental leaves in six EU countries

	Entitlement/coverage	Duration	Replacement rate
France	<b>Maternity leave:</b> all mothers who are employees or self-employed.	16 weeks.	100% of earnings.
	<b>Paternity leave:</b> all fathers who are employees or self-employed.	11 days.	100% of earnings.
	<b>Parental leave:</b> all employees with 1 year continuous employment with same employer.	Both parents eligible for up to 3 years.	Either flat rate of €566 per month, reduced if parents work part time, for 6 months with 1 child, up to 3 years with 3 children OR €801 per month for a year for large families (qualifying length of service depends on number of children; 1 child = 2 years continuously, but 3 children = 2 years out of preceding 5).
Germany	<b>Maternity leave:</b> all mothers who are employees.	14 weeks. (8 weeks is compulsory, even for self-employed women who receive no benefit).	100% of earnings.
	<b>Parental leave:</b> all employed parents.	Family entitlement of up to 3 years (the last of which can be taken up to child's eighth birthday).	67% of earnings for 12 months (for those employed less than 30 hours per week).
Hungary	<b>Maternity leave:</b> all mothers.	24 weeks.	70% of earnings (if woman had been employed at least 1 year out of previous 2). Unpaid otherwise.
	<b>Paternity leave:</b> all employed fathers.	5 days.	100% of wage.
	<b>Parental leave:</b> all parents entitled to some leave; full entitlement is for parents employed 1 year out of previous 2.	Maximum is family entitlement of up to 3 years (first year may be reserved for mothers).	70% of earnings for qualifying parents, flat rate of €96 per month otherwise.
Italy	<b>Maternity leave:</b> All mothers (compulsory).	20 weeks. 12 weeks may be transferred to employed fathers only in certain circumstances (e.g. death or illness of mother).	80% of earnings (for mothers who are employees or self-employed and have social security membership). Unpaid otherwise.
	<b>Parental leave:</b> All parents who are employees (reduced entitlement for self-employed).	10 months, up to 6 months per parent, any time until child is eight.	30% of earnings if child under three, unpaid between three and eight.

	Entitlement/coverage	Duration	Replacement rate
Sweden	<b>Parental leave:</b> all parents.	480 days. 60 days per parent are not transferrable. Remaining 360 can be transferred, but allocated equally in first instance and must sign consent form to transfer share.	360 days at 80% of earnings, 90 days at a flat rate of €20 per day (if average earnings had been at least €20 per day). Parents not meeting earnings requirement receive flat rate of €20 per day for 480 days.
	<b>‘Paternity’ leave:</b> all employees, taken either by the father or another close person if father unknown.	10 days.	80% of earnings.
	<b>Maternity leave:</b> all women.	All women must take at least 2 weeks. Women with demanding jobs can take up to 50 days. Indefinite leave if job is risk to foetus and no alternative available.	2 weeks can be incorporated in parental leave benefit. 80% unconditionally in the case of extra leave for demanding job or health issues.
UK	<b>Statutory Maternity Leave:</b> all mothers who are employees.	52 weeks.	90% of pay for 6 weeks, £135 per week for 33 weeks (if average earnings had been at least £107 per week).
	<b>Statutory Paternity Leave:</b> fathers employed for 26 weeks for same employer by 15th week before expected date of childbirth.	to 2 weeks.	£135 per week (if average earnings had been at least £107 per week).
	<b>Additional Paternity Leave:</b> fathers employed for 26 weeks for same employer by 15th week before expected date of childbirth AND mother was entitled to maternity leave and has returned to work.	Transfer from mother’s maternity leave of up to 26 weeks.	Mother’s maternity pay (£135 per week up to week 39) transfers to father.
	<b>Parental leave:</b> all parents who are employees and have been with the same company for more than a year.	13 weeks per child, up to 4 weeks per year, per parent.	Unpaid.

Sources: Fagnani and Boyer (2012); Blum and Erler (2012); Korintus and Gyarmati (2012); Addabbo and Giovannini (2012); Haas et al (2012); O’Brien and Moss (2012).

**Table A2 - Childcare provision for 3-5 year olds in six EU countries.**

	France	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Sweden	UK
<b>Coverage</b>	100%	About 90%	86%	100%	90% for 4-5 year olds	95-100%
<b>Costs</b>	Free	Free or highly subsidised	free	free	Highly subsidised	Highly subsidised
<b>Sector</b>	Public	Mainly public in ex-West Germany Mainly non-profit in ex-East Germany	Public	Public	Mainly public	Mixed
<b>Hours of service</b>	Full-time	Mainly part-time in ex-West Germany, mainly full-time in ex-East Germany	Full-time	Full-time	Mainly full-time	High incidence of part-time
<b>Institutional level</b>	State	Municipal with federal regulations		State	Municipal	Sub-national or local
<b>Sub-national variability</b>	None	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Some between rural and large cities	Moderate

*Adapted from Da Roit and Sabatinelli (2007): The Cost of Childcare in EU Countries: Transversal Analysis. European Parliament.*



**Table A3. Use of childcare arrangements in 14 European countries**

	0-2 years of age		Age 3 to compulsory school age formal arrangements
	Formal arrangements	Other arrangements <sup>1</sup>	
Denmark	73%	1%	97%
Netherlands	45%	57%	89%
Sweden	44%	4%	92%
Belgium	40%	30%	98%
Spain	39%	27%	91%
Iceland	34%	22%	96%
Portugal	33%	47%	76%
UK	33%	39%	89%
Norway	33%	7%	80%
France	31%	29%	95%
Italy	27%	35%	90%
Finland	27%	5%	78%
Germany	18%	27%	87%
Hungary	8%	48%	88%

1. May be used in conjunction with formal arrangements.

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006, adapted from Da Roit and Sabatinelli (2007): *The Cost of Childcare in EU Countries: Transversal Analysis*. European Parliament.

**Table A4 - Fourteen European countries in terms of their childcare characteristics**

	Supply and demand of childcare facilities	Regional disparities
Belgium	Limited supply of (and demand for) childcare services for the youngest children.	Large disparities – oversupply in small towns and villages and undersupply in large cities.
Denmark	Childcare is a legal right; since 2006 all municipalities have had to offer a childcare guarantee when the child is 6 months old.	
Germany	The demand for childcare for children under 3 years is considerably higher than the existing provision can cover, especially in the former West Germany, where the insufficient provision of formal childcare obstructs participation in the labour market.	Bigger cities have better provision. 8 % of the youngest age group attended a childcare in West Germany; in East Germany, this rate is at 39.8 %. For children aged 3–5 years there is still a difference, but it is less pronounced.
Spain	For the youngest age category, the availability of places is not enough to cover demand; there is fuller coverage for children aged 4–5.	
France	Full coverage for children from 3 years old. For younger children (0–3 years), the system is less developed and does not cover all needs.	Big cities have a much greater coverage.
Italy	Coverage of nurseries is small and falls far short of meeting demand of working parents.	Better coverage in the North and the worst coverage in the South of Italy.
Hungary	Coverage of nurseries is small and falls far short of meeting the demand of working parents. Supply of kindergarten facilities is more or less adequate.	Small localities do not have funds to provide nursery services; 43% of families live in localities where nurseries are not available.
Portugal	Coverage of nurseries and pre-school arrangements is small and falls far short of meeting the demand of working parents.	Very large disparities, lack of services in disadvantaged areas.

Group size /staff-child ratio	Childcare Price	Attitudes towards collective childcare
Max 8 children/ 1:4.	Income related fee.	Generally accepted.
1:3 for 1-2 year-olds, 1:6 for 3-6 year olds.	Parents' fees are income-related and are free for parents on low-incomes.	It is the norm.
1:6 for 0-2 year-olds, 1:10 for 3-5 year olds.	Parents pay an income-related fee, which differs between communities and regions. Low-income households are charged relatively more than middle- and high-income households with reference to public childcare.	Large differences between the former East Germany (more positive attitude) and West Germany; but there are also convergence trends.
14 children in a group for 0-2 year olds; 21 children in a group for 3-6 year olds /1:10 ratio.	Private services are expensive.	Acceptable but realistically for children age 3 and older.
Childminder can look after 4 children at most; nursery schools have 28-30 children.	Parents pay an income-related fee. For higher earning households, a childminder is a cheaper option than collective childcare.	Widely acceptable, including the collective care for children under one year old.
For 0-3 year-olds the ratio ranges from 1:5 to 1:7.	Public childcare for children below 3 years is only partly subsidised. Parents pay an income-related fee; low-income households pay low or no fee.	Traditionally childcare was considered a family responsibility, but more positive attitudes towards childcare are spreading.
Nursery group of 12 with a 2:12 ratio; kindergarten group of 24 with a 2:22 ratio.	Public childcare services are heavily subsidised. In kindergartens only meals have to be paid for. The very few existing private childcare institutions charge prices that can be afforded only by high-income families.	General attitude is that children under 18 months should stay at home.
In crèches max 10-12 /2:12. In kindergarten max 25 /1:25. For child-minders max is 4 children. In centres for out-of-school activities 20 /1:15.	Childcare services rendered by public or non-profit institutions are partially financed by the state; families pay a share according to their economic situation.	Attitudes towards mothers' employment are positive, but people believe that children under 12 months benefit more from informal care (e.g. relatives).

**Table A4 - Fourteen European countries in terms of their childcare characteristics**

	Supply and demand of childcare facilities	Regional disparities
Finland	Since 1990, all children under 3 years have been guaranteed a municipal childcare place. In 1996 this right was expanded to cover all children under school age (7 years).	Local authorities do not always able to provide childcare services.
Sweden	Public childcare is available all over Sweden. The supply for children aged 2 and older more or less corresponds with demand.	
UK	Despite the expansion in formal childcare services there are still problems with availability. Moreover, the universal right to free pre-school for 3-4-year-olds is for a part-time place only.	There is a mismatch of supply and demand across the country, with sizeable vacancies in day care, out-of-school and child-minder places in some areas and heavy shortages in others.
Iceland	Quite extensive coverage for children in all age categories.	
Norway	Since 1980, full coverage for care services has been the political goal. Yet the demand for childcare services for the youngest children is not always met.	Substantial variations.
Netherlands	Shortage of childcare services.	

Group size /staff-child ratio	Childcare Price	Attitudes towards collective childcare
No regulation for standard group size. The ratio is 1:4 for 0–3-year-olds (full-time and part-time) and 1:7 and 1:13 for 3–6-year-olds (respectively full-time and part-time).	Local authorities charge a monthly fee, according to family size and income level, ranging from EUR 18 to EUR 200 for a child in fulltime day care. Families with low-incomes are not charged at all.	Very positive attitude towards public childcare for children older than 1 month.
Groups contain on average 17 children in pre-schools and 32 in leisure-time centres. The ratio for pre-schools is 1:5, and for leisure-time centres this is 1:19.	Parents pay an income-related fee, which may differ by municipalities.	Parental leave is 16 months. After that is a norm to use a childcare but many parents believe that it is better to be used on part-time basis
Regulation for child-minders: for group care 30-35 children per room; 1:3 for 0–2-year-olds, 1:4 for 2-year-olds, 1:8 for 3–7-year-olds.	The Government provides several forms of subsidy to parents for childcare costs: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Free part-time nursery for 3-4 year olds.</li> <li>2. Assistance with childcare costs for low-income employed families via the tax credits system</li> <li>3. For all employees if their employers adopt the tax-efficient childcare voucher system introduced in 2005.</li> </ol>	Mixed attitudes towards childcare for children under 3. For 3-4 years old it is commonly acceptable to use formal part-time day care.
The ratio for child-minders is 1:4.	Fees for registered care in private homes differ extensively within and across municipalities. The municipalities subsidise the cost of each child in registered private home care.	Most parents take it for granted that their children will enter pre-primary school at a very young age.
1:7–9 for 0–3-year-olds and 1:14–18 for children of 3 years and older.	Payments vary according to municipality. The majority use flat-rate fees, independent of the family's income; 23 % of municipalities have income-graded fees.	In the past decade, the general normative climate has changed; people's attitudes are becoming increasingly favourable towards working mothers and public childcare.
Max 12 for 0-2 year-olds, 1:1/1:2 ratio; 16 for up to age 4/ 1:6 ratio; 20 for up to age 8/ 1:8 ratio.	For most income levels childcare services are highly subsidised.	Collective childcare is still not a completely acceptable option, especially for younger children.

Source: uses data from national expert reports on childcare provision prepared European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment Issues (EGGE), as presented in Plantenga and Remery (2009).



## APPENDIX B: CHILDCARE POLICIES IN FIVE NON-EUROPEAN OECD COUNTRIES

In this Appendix we further present childcare and family policy characteristics in five OECD countries, Australia, New Zealand, United States, Canada and Israel. The choice of these countries is determined by certain similarities in welfare regimes characteristics that exist between these countries and the UK. Thus, all these countries (although some of them to a lesser extent than the others) have features of the Liberal welfare regime which shape to a large extent the features of family and gender oriented policies, that including childcare policies (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990). The information is further summarised in Table B1 and Table B2.

### I. AUSTRALIA.

#### Background

Australia performs well on a number of important outcomes of work-life balance. The female employment rate is 66.2% and the gender wage gap is relatively low (12%). Mothers often return to full-time work once their children reach schooling age. Non-employment (inactivity or unemployment) among single parent's families is high (only 50% of single parents are in employment) and consequently the incidence of poverty is high in one-parent families (43% compared with the OECD average 31 %).


#### Childcare arrangements hours and costs

Australia spends less on childcare services than most OECD countries. This has contributed to low childcare enrolment rates for young children, with only 40% of children aged less than six years enrolled in formal childcare and only 52% children aged 12 years or younger attended one or more types of childcare, with 24% were in formal care and 39% were in informal care (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011; OECD, 2010).

Children in one parent families (55%) were more likely to attend informal care than children in couple families (35%). Of those children who usually attended formal care, 40% attended for less than 10 hours per week, and 9% attended for 35 hour or more per week.

Of children in couple families in which both parents were employed, 63% usually attended childcare. Where one parent in a couple family was employed, 31% of children attended care and where neither parent was employed, 25% attended care. In one parent families where the parent was employed, 82% of children usually attended childcare, compared with 49% of those whose parent was not employed (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011).

For all children who usually attended any care, the mean time spent in care was 17 hours per week. Of those children who usually attended informal care, 62% attended for less than 10 hours per week.



For the majority of children (63%) in formal care, the usual cost was less than \$80 per week. A large majority of children (92%) who usually attended informal care did so at no cost (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

### **Family-friendly workplace practices**

Among the 1.8 million families with at least one employed parent, 65% parents used some form of work arrangement to allow them to care for their children. The most commonly used arrangements are flexible working hours, part-time work and working from home.

Paid comprehensive parental leave was introduced in Australia for new parents who are the primary carers of a child born or adopted on or after 1 January 2011. An eligible person will receive taxable PPL payments at the level of the Federal Minimum Wage for a maximum period of 18 weeks. In most cases, the person receives the payment through their employer. Eligible persons must have been engaged in work continuously for at least 10 of the 13 months prior to the expected birth or adoption of the child; and undertaken at least 330 hours of paid work in the 10 month period (an average of around one day of paid work a week). If a primary carer returns to work before they have received all of their PPL entitlement, they may be able to transfer the unused part of their PPL to another caregiver (usually the father) who meets eligibility requirements (Australian Government, 2009).

Flexible working time is an important feature of Australian workplace practices and in 2005, 41% of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) among working parents facilitate flexible working hours (this was 44% of AWAs covering working mothers (Australian Government, 2006). In one parent families, 59% of employed fathers used flexible working hours, compared with 29% in couple families. Among working mothers, similar proportions in couple families and one parent families used flexible working hours (42% compared with 45%) and part-time work (41% compared with 46%) to care for their children. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011).

Home-based work is another important arrangement which is being used by working parents. In Australia 43% of employees worked from home at some time in 2005 (OECD 2011)

**Reduced working hours** Working parents of children born after 1 July 2004 have a right to reduce working hours until the child's seventh birthday, upon which the worker is entitled to increase hours to a full-time working week. . This is limited to companies employing more than 20 staff, and the claimant must have been employed with the same employer for at least 3 years. All other parents can negotiate a reduction of working time until the child's fourth birthday.

## **Type of Childcare facilities**

(Sources: Care for Kids. Australian online childcare resource; Childcare. New South Wales)

### *Long Day Care*

This is provided in day care centres mainly for children up to school age. These centres may also call themselves kindergarten, preschools, childcare centres, or early learning centres. It can be all-day or part-time and is provided by private operators, employers, local councils, community organisations, or non-profit organisations.

### *Family Day Care*

This is provided in an approved carer's home, for children. The hours of care are flexible and can be matched to your needs. Family Day Care can be all-day, part-time, casual, before and/or after school, and during school holidays.

### *Outside School Hours Care (before and after school and vacation)*

This is provided in places like schools and community halls, mainly for primary school children.

### *Occasional Care*

This is provided in small day care centres for children.

### *In Home Care*

This type of care is provided by individuals at the child's home

## **II. NEW ZEALAND**

### **Background**

New Zealand has experienced a steady growth in the female employment rate, which currently stands at 67%, well above the OECD average of 57%. Rising female employment has been coupled with a decreasing gender-wage gap, which at 8% is currently the 3rd lowest in the OECD (OECD, 2011).

The proportion of preschool children from two-parent families where both parents were employed was 38.2 per cent in 2009. The proportion of children in single parent employed families also increased, up by 2.4 percentage points. Lone-parents employment rates were about 48% in 2009. Children from both family types tend to attend formal childcare.

Family and childcare policies include flexible workplace practices and affordable early childhood care and education services. Part-time work is a common working practice used by New Zealand mothers who reduce their working hours when their child is young and return to full-time work when the child starts school (OECD country reports on family policies, 2009).

### Childcare services

In 2009 childcare centres were the most common form of childcare (25% enrolment) followed by public kindergartens (15%). Overall 54% of pre-school age children use formal childcare. About 11.6 % use both formal and other types of childcare.

About 10% of children under 12 months attend formal childcare; 42% of one-year-olds, 50% of two year-olds, 72% of three year-olds and 86% of four years old are attending formal childcare ( NZ Government, 2012).

### Costs

In 2009 61.4% of children attended kindergartens at no cost per week to their parents. This increase was most likely another effect of introducing the 20 Hours ECE scheme (for 3 and 4 year olds). Because the increase in the number of hours per week that each child attended a childcare centre, over part 10 years the proportion of children attending childcare centres at a cost to their parent \$100 or more per week increased as well (by 11%) with a medium cost per hour being around \$3 in 2009 (NZ Government, 2012).

### Work arrangements used by employed parents

There are four types of work arrangements available for employees: working flexible hours, working in a job-sharing arrangement, shift work, and work for three hours or more in the weekend.

The proportion of employed parents who worked in the weekend for three hours or more was 28.0% in 2009. This arrangement is used by both employed mothers and fathers.

Flexible working hours are being used by 34% of employed mothers and by 30% of employed fathers. Further 10% and mothers and 12% of fathers use shift work and about 5% of the mothers and 2% of the fathers have job-sharing arrangements.

About 6% of parents were using paid leave for childcare in 2009.

Additionally work arrangement used by employed parents to help with childcare was to have a child at work with them (about 10%).

## III. CANADA

### Background

Female employment is higher than most OECD countries. However, at around 40% of children under 6, enrolment in formal childcare lags behind OECD standards (OECD, 2007, 2010). In Canada, poverty rates among household with children are higher than OECD averages if both parents are not in work: 85% of jobless households with children are poor compared with 53% across the OECD. Employment is viewed as a key to reducing poverty.

Canada is a federal country and each province has different policies in this area. Of the Provinces, Québec has the most comprehensive mix of family-friendly policies, including childcare and out-of-school-hours care supports, in-work benefits for sole-parents and couples with kids, and paternity leave. Lone-parent employment rates were 80% in 2008. However, poverty incidences in lone parent families are also high (42%) (OECD, 2011).

### **Family and childcare policies**

Childcare is a significant issue in the context of Canadian public policy and the relationship between federal, provincial, and territorial governments. The Childcare legislates falls under provincial jurisdiction and provincial governments also provide financial benefits in the area of childcare, which include. This may be provincial tax credits as well as direct subsidies to childcare providers to reduce the cost of childcare for parents (Government of Canada, 2004, 2005). Another form of provincial/territorial support for childcare is direct subsidies to parents. For example, parents claim the tax credits to reduce their annual tax liability, and then can use the savings to cover their child-care costs. Some childcare subsidies are universal, while other subsidies specifically target lower-income families.

Childcare provision in Canada is patchy. Programs and initiatives differ from province to province and from territory to territory, and between groups, such as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. Similarly the nature and extent of financial subsidies for childcare costs also vary between provinces.

In many cases, parents or extended family members provide childcare. Only a small percentage of childcare facilities for under 5-year-olds in Canada are publicly operated, either by provincial or municipal governments. The majority of childcare in Canada is provided by private individuals or agencies, which offer childcare services as a private business. In some cases, these are for-profit agencies, while in other cases they are not-for-profit childcare providers. In each situation, however, parents are charged a fee in exchange for childcare services received. Provincial/territorial governments do offer kindergartens, which are available to children around the age of five or six and are meant to prepare children for primary schools.

In Quebec the Government moved closest to what can be viewed as public childcare (Tougas, 2002). There, the Government of Quebec initiated a network of community-based, not-for-profit childcare centres; they are independently operated, but funded primarily by public funds (with a small fee paid by parents). In other provinces and territories although childcare is partly subsidized, the parents are required to cover the majority of the childcare costs (e.g. Canadian Encyclopedia 2007).

### **Family-friendly arrangements**

No general statutory entitlement to part-time work or other modification of working time arrangements.



## IV. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### Background

Although in the USA, total public spending on child welfare is above the OECD average, the most money is being spent on the public compulsory education with early investments including childcare and support for families around the time of birth being at a low level (OECD, 2011).

The USA, is the only OECD country without a national paid parental leave policy, although some states do provide leave payments. Available parental leave is short (12 weeks), covers only some employees (those in companies with 50+ workers).

A significant proportion of public family support is delivered via tax breaks and credits (45% of total compared to 10% on average in the OECD). Female employment in the US is high (but falling), level of gender inequalities is low, better career prospects for women compared to most other OECD countries and lower career costs associated with child-rearing.

Child poverty remains a major concern: in 2005 over 20% of US children still lived in a poor home, and with the continuing financial crisis it is raising further.

### Childcare provision

The two most common forms of childcare in the USA are day care licenced centres and family childcare. Access to the childcare is widely available for working parents but the quality of childcare is related directly to the family income, with better off families being able to purchase a better quality childcare services. Economically better-off parents pay around 6% of their income in childcare; household below the poverty line pay about 28% to their income. For low-income families the most common option of childcare is Family childcare (OECD 2011; US Child Statistics 2012).

A licensed group day care centre is one of the most common forms of childcare in the USA. Every state has guidelines regarding day-care facilities and how they should operate. These centres can be part of a national or regional chain or an independent for profit or non-profit centre, such as are offered by some religious communities. Centres may be a free-standing and independent enterprise or part of a larger organization, such as an on-site care facility sponsored by an employer.

### Family childcare

About 25 % of all children are in this type of childcare at some point before the start of elementary school. A majority of young children with working mothers are cared for in private homes. Family childcare providers also make up a sizeable portion of small business owners in the United States (US Census Bureau). Additionally there are some other types of childcare available for pre-school children such as:

### **Federal and corporate childcare**

The growing trend of corporate-sponsored day care is fuelled by greater demand for employee satisfaction, as well as practical solutions for employers who want reliable childcare for employees. Federal and state government workers have benefited from on-site day-care for years.

### **Nursery schools**

Nursery schools and mother's day out programs offer a part-time childcare option. Many of these programs operate half-days, or a limited number of days a week. In 2008 37% of three-year-olds and 57% of 4 year-olds were enrolled in nursery schools (US Census Bureau, 2010)

### **Pre-kindergarten/Kindergartens**

Pre-kindergarten curriculums usually emphasize preparation for school. Object lessons, or learning by discovery, do play an essential role in pre-kindergarten, but teachers also emphasize social skills necessary in kindergarten. Kindergartens in the USA are the settings for the first year of primary education and are attended by 5-6-year-olds. Many states in the US offer free kindergartens but they are not compulsory in all states. In 2008, 72 percent of 5-6 year-olds, were enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs (US Census Bureau 2010).

### **Flexible working arrangements**

No general statutory entitlement but some unions has won the right to reduced working time on a temporary basis so that workers can take care of family needs.

## **V. ISRAEL**

### **Background**

Israel has a greater proportion of children than in other welfare states: one third of population is under 18. Israel's child population is comprised of nearly 69.2% Jews, 24.2% Muslims, 1.8% Christians, 1.9% Druze and 2.9% of unclassified religion. The share of immigrant children in the general population of Israeli children is among the highest in the Western countries (Gal et al., 2010).

The Israeli welfare state is a relatively comprehensive welfare state in an advanced market economy. However, overall levels of social spending are not high and are similar to those in liberal welfare states. While covering a wide range of social risks and needs, the Israeli welfare state has tended to offer relatively ungenerous benefits and services.

There were many market-oriented reforms recently in various domains of social protection and attempts to cut spending levels and to reduce access to benefits and service. This is particularly the case for families with children, and can partly explain the particularly high levels of child poverty in Israel, particularly those among the Arab Muslims and ultra-orthodox Jewish populations (Gal et al., 2010).

Labour market participation rates in Israel are relatively low in comparison to other advanced market economies, although they are growing over time. In particular, female labour market participation rates in Israel remain relatively low, and part-time employment is common.

Low participation rates are particularly common among Arab women. By contrast, male labour market participation rates are particularly low among ultra-orthodox Jewish men. In 2007, labour market participation in the male ultra-orthodox population was estimated to be 36.9%, compared to 67.7% among the remainder of the male Jewish population.

Families with children in which there are one or no breadwinners are likely to be susceptible to poverty. There is a high level of poverty among single parent and immigrant families and among children in large families, such as ultra-orthodox-Jewish and Arab Muslim families (Gal et al., 2010)

### **Childcare arrangements**

Over two-thirds of Israeli children, aged 2-5, attended a public or private preschool education setting. This percentage is lower in the Arab sector than in the Jewish sector, especially among 2-year-olds. In both sectors the percentage rises with age.

In the Arab population (without East Jerusalem), the gap is particularly acute with regard to children under the age of 2. Enrolment rates for this age group is 14%, though it increases to 75% for 3-year-olds, 83% for 4-year-olds and 95% for 5-year-olds (Gal et al., 2010).

Kindergartens (including day-care nurseries) – municipal, public, and private preschool kindergartens (age 5) and nurseries (ages 4 and 3) all operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. 87.1% children were enrolled in these settings (with 84.1%, in municipal or public settings). There was a gradual increase in the numbers and share of children enrolled, especially in the Arab sector. (Gal et al., 2010).

Day Care Centres provide early childhood education for infants aged 0 to 3.5. Currently most of these centres are operated by non-governmental organisations, including various women's organisations, the Israel Association of Community Centres (IACC), and other political or religious movements. The latter is most prevalent among the Arab and the ultra-orthodox populations.

Family Day Care Program “Mishpachton” – this is a program operated by a single caregiver who provides group care and education in her home for up to five children, aged 3 months to 3 years. The caregiver is provided with guidance, training, and supervision either by the local welfare department or by the Israeli Association of Community Centres (IACC).

Afternoon Childcare Facilities operate during the afternoon and often include lunch and developmental activities.

**Unlicensed Day Care** In addition to services provided by governmental and non-governmental organisations, there are also many private unlicensed educational services available. Although Israeli law prohibits private unlicensed day care centres, they are nevertheless very common. These centres are not regulated and are not part of the subsidized system.

## **VI. SUMMARY**

Tables B1 and B2 summarise childcare arrangements and female employment in these countries.

Sources for Tables B1 and B2: OECD (2007); OECD (2011); OECD Family Database; Australian Government (2009); New Zealand Government (2009); New Zealand Government (2012); Revenue Canada (2007); Government of Canada (2007a), Government of Canada (2007b); Canadian Encyclopaedia 2007; Tougas (2002); US Census Bureau (2010); US Child statistics (2012); Gal et al. (2010).

**Table B1 - Background characteristics of six OECD countries**

	Australia	New Zealand	Canada	US	Israel
Employment rate, all women/ mothers with a child under 2 (%)	65.5/48.3	68.4/46.6	69.0/58.7	66.1/54.2	Thought to be lower than OECD average due to very low employment rates of Muslim Arab women.
Gender wage gap in median earnings of full-time employees (%)	16.4	7.8	19.7	19.8	not available
Employment rate of lone parents (%)	62	54	68	75	not available
Incidence of poverty	One parent family	One parent family	Households with two not-employed parents/lone parent families	One parent family	Large families with one or no breadwinner, immigrant families, one parent families
Childcare spending (% of GDP) (OECD average = 0.6%)	0.4	0.8	0.2	0.4	0.7
Paid parental leave	18 weeks (introduced in 2011)	14 weeks	35 weeks	No national paid parental leave policy, but is available in some states (12 weeks)	12 weeks
Flexible work arrangements used by parents	<b>Flexible working hours:</b> Fathers: 59% in single parent families/29% in two parent families; Mothers: 49% in single parent families; 42% in two parent families. <b>Part time work / reduced working hours:</b> Commonly used until child's seventh birthday <b>Working from home:</b> 42 % at some point use this arrangement	<b>Flexible working hours:</b> 34% of mothers and 30% of fathers <b>Work during weekends:</b> 28% Part-time work: common practice among mothers with young children <b>Having children at workplace:</b> 10% <b>Shift work:</b> 10% of mothers and 12 % of fathers Job sharing: 5% of mothers, 2% of fathers	No statutory entitlements.	No general statutory entitlements.	No general statutory entitlement, women often work part-time.



**Table B2 – Childcare provision in five OECD countries**

	Childcare enrolment rates	Types of childcare used	Costs and funding of care
<b>Australia</b>	Two parent family, both in employment: 63% Two parent family, one in employment: 31% One parent family, parent in work: 82% One parent family, parent not in work: 49%	Long day care, Approved home carer, Out of school care (in schools and community centres), occasional care in small care centres.	About \$80 per week
<b>New Zealand</b>	Under 12 months: 10% 1-year-olds: 42% 2-year-olds: 50% 3-year-olds: 72% 4-year olds: 86%	Childcare centres/kindergartens used by 54%. 12% use both formal and informal care.	Free for 60% of children attending kindergartens
<b>Canada</b>	40% enrolment	For younger children in Quebec; community-based, not-for-profit child care centres, independently operated, but funded primarily by public funds. Elsewhere, mostly private providers. For pre-school, Provincial/territorial governments do offer kindergartens, which are available to children around the age of five or six and are meant to prepare children for primary schools.	Small fees in Quebec/ partly subsidised elsewhere through direct subsidies/tax credit
<b>US</b>		Day care centres, family childcare (25% of children attend this type of childcare), federal and corporate childcare providers, nursery schools, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.	Most of the support is available through tax breaks and tax credits. High earning parents spend about 6% of their income on childcare; poorer families may spend up to 28%.
<b>Israel</b>	About 75% of 2-5 year-olds attend public or private childcare. Numbers are lower for Muslim Arabs, especially for younger age groups, but the gap decreases with age; 95% of 5 year old Arab children are enrolled.	Public and private provision, unlicensed childcare is very common. Kindergartens, day care centres, family day care, afternoon childcare facilities.	Relatively low for public childcare, in some localities may be free for low-income families; high unsubsidised costs for private childcare.

## APPENDIX C: CHANGES IN MATERNITY AND PATERNITY RIGHTS AND BENEFITS

**Table C1 - Changes in maternity and paternity rights and benefits**

Type of benefit and eligibility	Before April 2007	From April 2007
<b>Ordinary Maternity Leave (OML)</b> All employed women regardless of length of service	18 weeks	36 weeks
<b>Additional Maternity Leave (AML)</b> All employed women regardless of length of service	26 weeks in addition to 26 weeks OML for women who have completed 26 weeks of service by the 15th week before the baby is due	26 weeks in addition to 26 weeks OML
<b>Paternity Leave</b> Men who have completed 26 weeks of service by the 15th week before the baby is due	2 weeks	2 weeks
<b>Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP)</b> Women who have completed 26 weeks continuous employment with their employer into the 15th week before the baby is due and have earned on average, at least the lower earnings limit for NI contributions	26 weeks – First 6 weeks: 90% of the woman's average earnings – Last 20 weeks: flat weekly rate: £108.85 (2006) or 90% of earnings if less	39 weeks – First 6 weeks: 90% of the woman's average earnings – Last 33 weeks: flat weekly rate: £117.18 (2008) or 90% of earnings if less
<b>Maternity Allowance (MA)</b> Women who do not qualify for SMP and who have been an employed or self-employed earner in any 26 weeks in the 66 week period ending with the week before the week the baby is due. They must also have had average weekly earnings of £30 during any 13 weeks of the qualifying period	26 weeks £108.85 (2006) or 90% of earnings if less	39 weeks £117.18 (2008) or 90% of earnings if less
<b>Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP)</b> Men who have completed 26 weeks of service by the 15th week before the baby is due	2 weeks £108.85 (2006) or 90% of earnings if less	2 weeks £117.18 (2008) or 90% of earnings if less

Source: Chanfreau et al. 2011

## APPENDIX D: LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

**The authors would like to thank the stakeholders who took the time to speak to us during the course of this research.**

Interviews were conducted with:

Nora Smith and Rachel Dennison, Employers for Childcare  
Marie Cavanagh, Gingerbread  
Siobhan Fitzpatrick, Early Years  
Joan McGovern, Barnardos Tuar Ceatha  
Ellen Finlay, Children in Northern Ireland  
Jacqueline O'Loughlin, Playboard  
Bronagh Hinds, Democrashe  
Patricia Haren, Women's Support Network  
Louise Coyle, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network  
Frances Murphy, Contact a Family  
Sue Pentel, Ionad Uibh Eachach and Chair, Belfast Childcare Partnership  
Maura Mason, Co-ordinator, Western Childcare Partnership  
Bridget Nodder, Northern Ireland Child Minding Association  
Carolyn Stewart, MENCAP Segal House  
Shirley Simpson, Windsor Women's Centre  
Christine McKeown, Ashton Centre  
Martin Tyrell, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister  
Colum Boyle, Department of Employment and Learning  
John White, Department for Agriculture and Rural Development  
John Mooney, Training for Women Network  
Anne McVicker, Women's Tec

We also held a small initial roundtable with:

Marie Cavanagh, Gingerbread  
Rachel Dennison, Employers for Childcare  
Lynn Carvill, Women's Resource and Development Agency  
Anne Moore, Save the Children.





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