



Preoccupations, contradictions, opportunities in early child development A budget briefing: March 2023

We in Foundation Years Information and Research (FYIR) collect the evidence on the earliest months of life, particularly the first 1000 days, to inform policy-making and debate.

We acknowledge the many valid concerns about finance, education and childcare at present. But other organisations and sources of support of vital importance to mothers, fathers, families and society risk being sidelined in the current debate.

Don't take our word for it. Follow the links to the evidence below. You'll find many of the authors on our Youtube site: <https://www.youtube.com/@fyirfoundationyearsinforma3020/videos>

1. Experiences during pregnancy and up to between ages two and three, the period of greatest neuroplasticity, affect the lifetime brain architecture of the developing child in a positive or negative way. For many in disadvantaged and stressful circumstances the basis of self-control and coherent thought may be severely compromised with lifelong negative consequences. Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University.

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/wp3/>

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/the-timing-and-quality-of-early-experiences-combine-to-shape-brain-architecture>

2. The most important aspect of an infant's environment is the quality of the relationship between the child, parents or other prime caregivers. Early relational health builds the strongest foundation for future social emotional and cognitive development. If this is compromised it may have long-term and costly consequences to society and the individual. Disadvantage can be mitigated by 'nurturing care' and high quality services from the start. World Health Organisation

<https://www.who.int/teams/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-health-and-ageing/child-health/nurturing-care>

3. Real terms spending on childcare support programmes and services for families has fallen dramatically, as government subsidies for early education and childcare (largely focused on 3-4 year olds) have risen steeply in recent years alongside nursery prices and costs, <https://ifs.org.uk/education-spending/early-years> (figures 4&5)

4. Unicef-UK has described health visiting as 'the backbone of early support' but the health visitor workforce has fallen by some 44% since 2015, creating a postcode lottery for families and impeding effectiveness. Plans are needed to reinstate the health visiting workforce, ensuring not just an increase in training places, but arrangements for retention of existing and new recruits, including sustainability of an appropriately funded service for the future. Unicef-UK <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/unicef-uk-responds-to-the-institute-of-health-visiting-annual-survey/> NHS Workforce statistics, November 2022 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics/november-2022>: <https://bit.ly/413ZEwf>

5. The universal early childhood intervention Sure Start has been shown to have long-term health benefits, but has been greatly diminished by cuts in spending <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/health-impacts-sure-start>

6. Evidence that the current government subsidy system for early education and childcare makes much of a long-term difference to child development outcomes is weak

Blanden et al 2016 DOI <https://doi.org/10.1111/eoj.12374>

7. There is a huge divide between the pay and employment conditions of the qualified early years teachers and teaching assistants working in public provision and the private childcare sector workforce

Bonetti, 2020 [https://epi.org.uk/wp-](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Early_years_workforce_development_EPI.pdf/)

[content/uploads/2020/01/Early_years_workforce_development_EPI.pdf/](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Early_years_workforce_development_EPI.pdf/)

Haux et al 2022

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1072062/SCEYP_thematic_report-April_2022.pdf

8. An online survey of 1331 childcare providers in January and February 2022 found 92% had provided money for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) 'out of their own pockets'. 53% did this regularly; 74% said the number of children in their settings had risen in 2021/2022; 40% received no funding for SEND. Early Years Alliance <https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/too-little-too-late-report>

9. Part-time entitlement to subsidised childcare does little to help parents work Brewer et al 2022

https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/labour-economics/vol/74/suppl/C?dgcid=raven_sd_via_email

10. Media and politicians' lack of knowledge about (or interest in?) in the first days of life is part of a pattern in English society. Royal Foundation research has highlighted that very few people recognise the unique importance of the 0-5 period compared to other stages of life and that around one in three (36%) adults report knowing 'just a little' or 'nothing' about how children develop in their early childhood. <https://royalfoundation.com/early-childhood/>

11. We know school students welcome parenthood education and lessons on early infant brain development, but no government has prioritised this. SEEN programme. <https://www.psych.ox.ac.uk/research/seen>

12. The COVID cohorts' of babies and infants suffered severely from the social isolation of lockdown, along with parents and carers,Ofsted 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-recovery-in-early-years-providers-spring-2022>

and adequate compensatory measures have not been put in place (Kindred Squared/ YouGov 2022 *School Readiness Survey* January 2023 <https://kindredsquared.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Kindred-Squared-School-Readiness-Report.pdf>)

13. Treasury budgeting should treat spending on mothers as an investment for all, not a cost. Bridging the gender gap in the United Kingdom could increase GDP by billions of pounds over the next decade McKinsey 2016 <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-the-united-kingdom>

14. Preventative action on adverse experiences in early childhood could save huge later expenditure on, for example, mental health, social care, crime and anti-social behaviour. The Royal Foundation on Early Childhood estimated that the costs associated with lost opportunities in England alone in 2018/2019 were in the region of £16.3 billion <https://centreforearlychildhood.org/research/>

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FYIR is a registered charity: no. 1158170

Full references

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