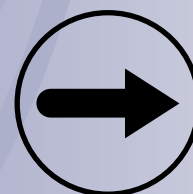


The Childcare Strategy for Wales

Information
Document



Childcare

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Childcare is for Children



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**PLANT A PHOBL IFANC - GWEITHREDU'R HAWLIAU
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE - RIGHTS TO ACTION**

Adran Hyfforddiant ac Addysg
Department for Training and Education



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

- Title of Document:** The Childcare Strategy for Wales: Childcare is for Children
- Audience:** Chief Executives of Local Authorities, Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts; Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships; Framework Co-ordinators; Children's Partnership Co-ordinators; Key Children's Voluntary Organisations; Directors of Education, Social Services and Public Health; Council for Racial Equality; Children's Information Services; Social Partner Contacts; Financial Services Contacts; County Librarians; Equal Opportunities Commission; Wales TUC Cymru; Community Voluntary Services; Welsh Local Government Association; Members of the Childcare Working Group; Children's Commissioner for Wales; Assembly Members.
- Overview:** This document sets out in more detail how the Assembly Government will tackle the challenges in the coming years so that our children have the flying start in life they deserve. It follows the structure of the Childcare Working Group's report, and addresses the recommendations within its content.
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This document can also be accessed from the Welsh Assembly Government website www.learning.wales.gov.uk
- Related documents:** Consultation on the Interim Report of the Childcare Working Group issued on 1st June 2004. "A Flying Start". "A Flying Start: Childcare for children, parents and communities" (The Final Report of the Welsh Assembly Government Childcare Working Group) was issued on 1st February 2005.

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Childcare is for Children

1. Introduction

1. When the National Assembly for Wales was created in 1999, central Government had recently published a ground-breaking National Childcare Strategy. That Strategy recognised the need for a step change in the availability of childcare - for children, for parents and for the economy. It recognised that childcare needed to be locally accessible, affordable and of good quality, and introduced partnerships between the local government, childcare providers and other agencies to plan for an expansion in childcare.
2. In 2001, the Assembly Government decided to review the operation of the National Childcare Strategy in Wales. Following a task force report, the Childcare Action Plan published in 2002 set out the perspective that children should be at the heart of childcare policy in Wales.
3. In 2004, the Assembly Government formed a new Childcare Working Group, chaired by the then Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Transport, Brian Gibbons, in order to build on the implementation of the principles of the Childcare Action Plan. The Group provided a substantial report with 77 recommendations. This Strategy document is the Assembly Government's response to that report.
4. Many parents will need or want to entrust their children to others so that they can work or study. In this situation, Government has a role in ensuring that the childcare parents use is safe and provides the best possible development for their children. It can use its resources strategically to ensure that childcare is of good quality, but also available locally at an affordable price.
5. The Assembly Government has the vision of childcare as part of the modern welfare state, available to all parents who need it. Childcare will be delivered by qualified professionals, dedicated to serving the development needs of the children in their care.
6. Childcare can come directly from state provision - for example as early years education within nursery schools; from private provision - for example childminders and nurseries; or from voluntary commitment - for example playgroups or out of school clubs managed through volunteer committees.
7. Government must ensure all these sectors complement each other so as to create a joined up childcare service, offering children the best possible start in life.

8. The Childcare Strategy must support three broad inter-related objectives:

- To ensure that all childcare supports the developmental needs of children in Wales.
- To ensure that childcare is widely available and affordable, to enable parents to train or work and thus raise levels of economic activity in Wales.
- To provide childcare so that parents can have flexibility and choice in how they balance family, work and other commitments within their lives, and in doing so promote gender equality within the workforce.

9. As with the earlier Childcare Action Plan, this Strategy will see the objective for children's development as paramount, not least because it sees investment in childcare as delivering significant long term returns to society.

10. There has been considerable expansion of childcare in recent years. With Lottery support, more than 24,000 out of school childcare places were created between 1999 and 2002. While not all of these were required to be registered, the overall number of registered childcare places for children aged under 8 has increased by nearly 18,500 between March 1999 and March 2005. The Assembly Government has delivered on its commitment to a free half time term time education place for all three year olds.

11. However, childcare continues to face many challenges. For example:

- The provision of childcare remains uneven across Wales.
- Areas of high poverty facing particular deficiency.
- With the end of lottery funding for out of school childcare, expansion of places is faltering.
- Some potential new providers find the barriers to start up, both regulatory and financial, daunting.
- Providers report a challenge in recruiting, training and retaining sufficient qualified staff.
- Despite support from the Working Tax Credit and the tax advantages of employer provided vouchers, it can be difficult for some providers to gain sufficient income for sustainability at the required level of quality.

12. The Assembly Government is already taking action to meet these challenges:

- It has secured £12.5 million over three years from European Structural Funds for childcare.
- It has committed substantial resources for a unique programme of free childcare and family support - "Flying Start".

- The Cymorth grant scheme is receiving increased funding, and part of that funding is now ring fenced for childcare.
- It is using the forthcoming Childcare Bill to place a statutory duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient childcare in all areas.
- It has taken over leadership of the CWLWM Equal Project, which brings a number of childcare development interests together to tackle childcare challenges in partnership, with an additional £1 million over two years.

13. This document sets out in more detail how the Assembly Government will tackle the challenges in the coming years so that our children have the flying start in life they deserve. It follows the structure of the Childcare Working Group's report, and addresses the recommendations within its content.

2. Childcare with children at the centre

14. The Assembly Government has adopted seven Core Aims for children and young people. These Core Aims are based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and as such can be seen as entitlements for children and young people that we should strive to meet. The Core Aims are to:

- **Ensure that all children have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development.**
- **Ensure that all children and young people have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including acquisition of essential personal and social skills.**
- **Ensure that all children and young people enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.**
- **Ensure that all children and young people have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities.**
- **Ensure that all children and young people are listened to, treated with respect, and are able to have their race and cultural identity recognised.**
- **Ensure provision of a safe home and a community that supports physical and emotional wellbeing.**
- **Ensure that all children and young people are not disadvantaged by child poverty.**

15. Through the development of childcare we can support all these aims:

- Good quality childcare ensures a flying start in life by providing professional care based on international best practice.
- Childcare supports learning - early developmental learning with the very youngest children; informal play based learning or accredited early years education for three year olds; and learning through play within out of school clubs. We also have a responsibility to support the childcare needs of students in schools and colleges.
- Childcare supports the healthy development of children. Active play is one of the best opportunities for children to have exercise, and is encouraged in good quality childcare. In regulated childcare, food provided is required to be well prepared and nutritious. Good hygiene is promoted. A range of activities and sensitivity to individual needs promote the emotional health of the child. Every regulated setting has child protection procedures in place which are shared with parents. This includes a requirement that a trained member of staff has specific responsibility for child protection.

- Childcare must be open to the diversity of children in Wales, and respectful of different cultural traditions. Welsh medium childcare in particular has a special role in protecting the Welsh language and culture.
- Childcare is often rooted in community enterprise. Playgroups and out of school clubs are often managed by parents and help bring communities together to support children.
- Childcare can offer parents new opportunities to access training and work, and thus lift families out of poverty. At the same time, an investment in good quality early years services can open the opportunities for children to break the cycle of deprivation. This Strategy outlines a number of ways that the Assembly Government is concentrating resources for childcare on our disadvantaged communities. It complements the Assembly Government's Child Poverty Strategy "A Fair Future for our Children", and the implementation plan currently being developed by the Deputy Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration.
- Childcare facilities in further education institutions can help parents to access learning by providing nursery and crèche facilities. Institutions may currently use a proportion of the capital funding they receive from ELWa to support the development and expansion of childcare facilities and, from April 2006, will be able to make proposals specifically for improving these facilities. Where new build or FE expansion takes place it would be good practice to take into account childcare facilities from the outset and this can, as in the new lifelong learning campus at Ebbw Vale, form an important part of the business case for the development.

A "Flying Start"

16. The Assembly Government is consulting separately on a new initiative for the youngest children in disadvantaged areas. "Flying Start" is firmly based on international and UK evidence on how best to support children in their earliest years, especially those facing poverty. We have already delivered free part time education for three and four year olds. This initiative aims to begin to provide free part time good quality childcare for two year olds. Initially, this will be provided in primary school catchment areas where there is a high eligibility for free school meals.

17. Below age three, especially, there is no meaningful distinction between "education" and "care", providing that the care uses good practice to support children's social, physical, language and intellectual development.

18. "Flying Start" will also encourage additional health visiting, and parenting support programmes that are well evaluated for their impact. Integration of these elements, and existing services for this age group provided through Cymorth, will be essential. The funding includes provision

for capital investment to create more integrated centres. These will probably be based on the schools at the centre of the areas targeted. However, it will be important for local partners to create a well integrated programme based on shared information and multi-agency working, whether or not a physical centre exists.

Inclusion of disabled children

19. The Assembly Government recognises the challenges facing disabled children and their families. The Childcare Working Group report highlights the financial pressures, and the risks of social isolation. The report also highlights examples of good practice.

Neath Port Talbot Referral and Assisted Places Scheme

Gam i Gam aims to promote and encourage the development of the accessibility and affordability of a range of quality and integrated registered childcare and play provision, which enhances the care, learning and play opportunities of all children and young people aged 0 to 14 (16 years) years of age within every community for those who need it and in the language of their choices.

The Referral element of the scheme enables children with specific needs to access and participate fully within a quality registered childcare or play facility. This is achieved by providing funding to the provider to employ an extra play worker to ensure the child's needs are met in partnership with parents' wishes.

The Assisted Places element enables children from families on low income and/or in receipt of certain benefits to access quality registered childcare and play facilities. Parents are able to access funds to assist with the cost of the childcare fee and travel costs to and from the facility if appropriate.

To date over 300 children in Neath Port Talbot have benefited from this scheme. The knock on effect and benefits include - parents feeling they are being listened to; the provision of respite for families in need; children with special needs are being identified earlier, initial/earlier intervention and preventative measures are helping to reduce long term intervention and there are visible signs of increased communication and improved planning.

Gam i Gam is funded through the Cymorth grant scheme.

20. We understand the financial pressure on families with disabled children. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) undertake an annual review up-rating various benefits including Disability Living Allowance and Carers Allowance linked to the Retail Price Index. Allowances are paid to cover the additional cost faced by disabled people in their care needs. Carers Allowance recognises the need to provide income for carers and provide the option to combine with employment up to the earning limit.

- 21. Action: The Assembly will continue a dialogue with DWP in making the case for extra support to the most vulnerable groups.**
22. The Carers and Equal Opportunities Act 2004 will be implemented this summer and requires authorities to take into account in the assessment the carer's wish to work. That includes the parents of disabled children. Funding for implementing the Act has been made available to authorities through the Carers Grant.
23. The draft National Service Framework (NSF) for Children, Young People and Maternity Services points to the need for joint training for professionals who work with disabled children on inclusion and duties under the Disability Discrimination Act. The new Disability Discrimination Act requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity in delivery of its service and make 'reasonable adjustment' for access for disabled people.
24. Guidance for the Cymorth grant scheme strengthens support for disabled children and their families, requiring partnerships to be proactive in supporting the inclusion of disabled children within all Cymorth services.
- 25. Action: The NSF will set standards for inclusive play, and the Assembly Government will publish on its website exemplar practice of inclusive childcare and play.**

3. Regulation and Quality

Regulation of childcare providers

26. The Assembly Government created the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) in 2002. The CSIW works to the Regulations and National Minimum Standards made by the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government respectively. This organised regulation is on a consistent all Wales basis for the first time.

27. This framework of regulation ensures that children are safe; that parents have clear contracts and recourse when problems arise; and that the experiences children enjoy in childcare satisfy a minimum standard of quality.

28. The Assembly Government has maintained close contacts with representatives of childcare providers since the CSIW began, and does not propose to make any radical changes in the regulation and inspection requirements.

29. However, the Assembly Government is pleased to note the actions the CSIW intends to take to ensure the child's experiences are the central focus of regulation. CSIW has in place a 3 year strategy which also seeks to reduce any unnecessary administrative burdens on providers. Pilot studies of new inspection procedures started in May 2005. The first childcare service area piloted is the inspection of Childminders. Consultation on the reform has taken place with key representative organisations.

30. Action: CSIW's 3 year strategy will make children's experiences the central focus of regulation, and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens.

Quality assurance

31. While the CSIW ensures that only providers meeting the regulations and minimum standards operate, we wish to encourage the overall quality of provision to rise above that minimum.

32. "Quality" can mean a variety of different things. It can encompass the qualifications or numbers of staff in the setting, the quality of information given to parents, or a commitment to continuous improvement. It should also encompass the nutritional quality of food provided to children. What is most difficult but most important is to measure quality from the child's perspective - the quality of individual relationships with staff; whether the activities provided by the staff enhance their enjoyment.

33. The Assembly Government believes that if childcare is for children, then quality must be top of the agenda.

34. At present, each of the childcare sectors in Wales - day nurseries, childminders, playgroups and out of school clubs - have different quality assurance systems to gain external accreditation for providers.

35. As regards early years education, the Welsh Assembly Government has made a commitment to develop a mixed economy of early years' provision in which both maintained and non-maintained sectors are encouraged to provide care and education for young children before compulsory school age. With this commitment comes the need for high-quality provision across both sectors which in turn will provide parents with a choice of provision. With this in mind the Welsh Assembly Government has commissioned the development of a single quality assurance scheme which all education providers in the non-maintained sector in Wales can adopt. The scheme drawn from documents and schemes used by the key stakeholders will provide a comprehensive quality assurance scheme which is easily understood by practitioners of the service, and parents.

36. This scheme will be extended to provide a consistent but appropriate product of value to childcare settings working with babies and toddlers, and also out of school clubs or staffed playgrounds.

37. Action: The Assembly Government will support the development of a consistent quality assurance methodology across childcare and early years education.

38. A consistent methodology can assist the statutory inspection process, because CSIW will be able to make a judgement that a setting offers lower risk if it has properly implemented a quality assurance scheme, and inspection would be proportionate.

39. Where childcare settings also provide early years education, there is some overlap between Estyn and CSIW inspections in early years. The overlap is limited - CSIW inspect approximately 4,500 under 8s settings annually, and Estyn inspect 520 early years settings once in 6 years. The focus is also different - CSIW are concerned with whether the standard in all areas is sufficient to allow operation, while Estyn are concerned with the developmental quality of those settings funded for pre-school education. The Childcare Working Group report recommended the development of "a joint inspection regime between Estyn and CSIW to reduce bureaucracy and give a clear message of joined-up thinking", breaking down distinctions between education and care. There is already a protocol between the two organisations in place and work is in hand to strengthen it.

40. Action: The Assembly Government has asked CSIW and Estyn to bring forward their considered proposals for a more complementary approach in settings which are inspected by both.

Regulation of the workforce

41. At present, the childcare workforce is not regulated in the way, for example, teachers are. If a register of childcare and play workers could be set up, then the workforce would become more professional and focused on continuous personal development. Parents would have the assurance that individuals were bound by a Code of Conduct and there would be statutory recourse if a worker breached it. In Scotland, the Scottish Social Services Council is opening its register to managers in the early years and childcare workforce, with a long term vision of a fully qualified and registered workforce. That is our vision for the workforce in Wales as well, and we are discussing how to bring this about with the Care Council for Wales and childcare organisations. The challenge of developing the workforce more broadly is discussed further in section 5 of this Strategy.

42. Action: Subject to discussion with childcare organisations and the Care Council for Wales, we will consult on regulations to enable the CCW to open its register to early years and childcare workers.

Childcare within the family home

43. Currently, all regulated care takes place outside the family home. Registered childminders offer a service in their own home. However, many parents make a variety of formal or informal arrangements with friends or relatives in which their children are cared for in their own home.

44. The Assembly Government does not wish to bring any regulatory requirements into informal arrangements based on family relationships or friendship. However, where there is a business arrangement to provide care in the family home the position becomes more complex. To make registration and inspection mandatory would be intrusive into the family home. However, we recognise that the UK Government has made tax benefits available to parents who make use of childcare in their own home, provided that the person providing the care goes through a voluntary approval scheme made by the Assembly.

45. The Assembly Government considered how to offer parents some minimum assurances on child protection, safety and understanding of child development if they use an “approved” carer in their home, when there is no provision to undertake inspection. We have concluded that our proposals for the registration of the workforce with the Care Council for Wales may offer an appropriate mechanism to support this. Registration would initially depend upon an existing qualification at level 2 or above, and consideration of a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure. If workers are then registered and look after others children in the family home, the parents would be able to access the childcare tax credit. This approach would assure parents that their carer has studied the requirements of good childcare, and been assessed on the job.

46. Action: The Assembly Government will ensure that parents who use childcare workers within their home that are registered with the Care Council for Wales can access the childcare tax credit.

Childcare for children aged over 7

47. At present there is no regulatory regime for childcare settings which cater exclusively for children aged over 7. This means that there is no assurance to parents or society more widely that such settings reach minimum quality standards. It also means in most cases that parents cannot access tax credits in respect of such provision.

48. The Care Standards Act 2000 created powers for the Assembly to regulate such settings. An alternative approach would be to provide a voluntary scheme for settings to meet minimum standards.

49. More work needs to be done to establish the baseline number and nature of provision for this age group. But we should also look at provision more broadly. We need to consider how the approach to childcare should relate to other out of school activity, such as out of hours learning, activity groups such as Cubs, Brownies, sporting or creative groups, and play schemes. We need to ask not only how to manage risk and assure quality, but also what type of provision meets the needs of children as well as parents. We need a review of the role of schools in childcare for this age group. We will therefore commission research to answer these questions.

50. Action: The Assembly Government will undertake research to review the range of out of school care available for children aged 8 to 14, how it can best serve children's current needs and long term outcomes as well as meeting parents' requirements, and whether further regulatory action is needed to assure quality and control risk. Children will participate in this research.

4. Parental Choice and Affordability

51. Previous sections of this Strategy have outlined the need for childcare to be of good quality in order to meet the developmental needs of children. It would be a challenge for many parents to meet the full cost of such childcare, and therefore the market might fail to provide sufficient childcare to meet parents' aspirations to have access to work or training. For these reasons, Government intervenes to seek to make childcare more affordable.

52. The Assembly Government can provide support on the childcare supply side. It provides a range of support, mainly through the Cymorth grant scheme, to assist childcare providers with start up and sustainability costs. Until 2008, this is supplemented by the Genesis Wales European Structural Funds project, which can also support the market, especially in disadvantaged areas.

53. However, on the demand side of the market, the tax credit system is the main means whereby childcare can be made more affordable to many families that are in work, providing direct benefit to parents that make use of childcare.

54. Thus, the role of the Assembly Government is to use its own powers and resources to support providers as effectively as possible, while working alongside central Government in its direct tax and benefits support to parents.

55. In this context, the Assembly Government welcomes the UK Government's announcements that from April 2005 the maximum eligible costs that the Working Tax Credit will cover increases from £135 to £175 a week for one child and from £200 to £300 per week for two or more children. From April 2006, the maximum proportion of childcare costs covered by the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit will increase from 70 per cent to 80 per cent.

56. Genesis Wales in some areas may assist parents moving into work for the first time with a repayable advance equivalent to the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit so that they are not out of pocket as they begin their new employment.

57. We recognise that the Working Tax Credit system does not itself provide a benefit to parents that are in education or training. It should be noted that for young parents in school, if the grandparents are in work they can claim the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit in respect of their grandchild.

58. We have evidence from our survey of parents that significant numbers of parents on low incomes do not know about help with childcare costs from the tax credit system. The Assembly Government will play its part in promoting understanding and take up of this benefit. This will include working to ensure that Flying Start, integrated centres and childcare settings play their part in initiatives to maximise income through face to face advice.

59. Action: We will mount a communications campaign, working with all local children's information services, childcare providers and primary health contacts to ensure they have accessible promotional material to provide to parents regarding the Working Tax Credit.

Children's Information Services

60. If childcare is to be accessible, parents need to know how to find it, and to have information to choose childcare.

61. The Assembly Government has supported the introduction of staffed and computerised children's information services in each local authority in Wales. These provide up to date information on childcare within the authority, as well as a wide body of information and relevant advice to support families more generally. We have made such services a statutory requirement. This requirement is supported by guidance which ensures that the services are accessible at all times, and readily signposted within local authority web services.

62. These local information services can also be accessed through the Childcarelink website - www.childcarelink.gov.uk which also covers England and Scotland.

63. The Assembly Government accepts that the profile of these services should be raised further. They are vital resources which also serve our Parenting Action Plan. We are aware that there are discussions across the UK on the branding of these services, and in order to have the greatest impact we consider that we should act in conjunction with any re-branding of these services in England and Scotland.

64. Our vision for children's information services is that they are a strong, visible and mainstream part of local authority provision, widely understood and used by families.

65. Action: We will work with children's information services to strengthen their profile through a national publicity strategy. This will include the preparation nationally of a "Choosing Childcare" booklet for parents in Wales.

Support to student parents

66. From 2006-07, the Welsh Assembly Government will be responsible for statutory student support to Welsh students. The Assembly Learning Grant (ALG) provides means-tested support for students in further and higher education and currently provides up to £1,500 a year towards course related costs. It is paid to eligible Welsh-domiciled students in support of the costs associated with study such as books, travel, equipment and childcare. From September 2006 the maximum Assembly Learning Grant will increase to £2,700 to help with students' maintenance costs.

67. Also with effect from 2006-07, students undertaking a first degree will be able to defer their tuition fees by taking out a fee loan - no student will have to pay up-front fees in future. From 2007, Welsh domiciled students who choose to study in Wales will also receive a fee grant of up to £1,800 a year to meet the additional cost of higher fees to be introduced that year. The fee grant will be available irrespective of income.

68. Maintenance loans will continue to be available to support students' basic living costs while they are studying. In addition, student parents may be eligible to apply for specific help through the Parents Learning Allowance and Childcare Grant which will also be available from the Assembly Government. Details of the financial support available from the Assembly Government are available at:

<http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk/studentfinancewales/index-e.html>.

69. The Education Maintenance Allowance Wales scheme acknowledges that certain groups of students need more support than others. That is why those 16 and 17 year olds who have responsibility for a child of their own, and qualify in all other respects for EMA, are automatically eligible for the maximum allowance of £30 per week.

70. In relation to NHS students, the Assembly introduced a childcare allowance into the NHS Wales Bursary Scheme in September 2004 that applies to all NHS students in Wales. The allowance pays 85% of registered or approved childcare costs up to a maximum of £114.75 per week for one child or £170 for two or more children.

The Role of Local Authorities

71. Since the National Childcare Strategy first required local authorities to actively review and build local childcare provision, they have taken a lead alongside a range of local partners in developing childcare. For this reason, resources for childcare have been channelled in the main through local authority-led partnerships - since April 2003, within the Cymorth grant.

72. We want to put childcare into the mainstream of local government services, while maintaining the partnership approach to local planning and delivery. For these reasons we are joining with the UK Government on provisions within a new Childcare Bill, to place statutory duties on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare within their areas, and also to ensure that parents have access to adequate information on childcare and other children's services. We intend that the timing of this duty and supporting guidance will be in the control of the Assembly Government. Partnership working will be embedded by placing the new duty in the context of the "duty to co-operate" with relevant partners in all services for children and families, introduced by the Children Act 2004.

73. Action: Local authorities will be under a new duty to secure sufficient childcare, supported by regulations and guidance appropriate to Wales.

The Role of Employers

74. Enabling more people in the workforce to achieve a better work-life balance (e.g. through home-working and other flexible working patterns) is likely to bring benefits for employers and employees. Over the past few years we have been working in partnership with Chwarae Teg to roll-out a work life balance strategy which has enabled seven large public sector organisations (Local Authorities, Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies and Higher Education Institutes) to develop and improve work life balance policies and practices; funded a work life balance challenge fund (grant scheme) aimed at the private and voluntary sector to help them introduce work life balance solutions to their organisations and developed a work life balance website - www.wlbinwales.org.uk. The Welsh Assembly Government have recently commissioned Chwarae Teg to deliver a further 3 year Work Life Balance Strategy for Wales called "Getting the Balance Right", which will run until 2008.

75. The Assembly Government accepts in principle the Childcare Working Group recommendation that childcare provision should be included in the development of business and industrial parks as part of regeneration and commercial activities.

76. The Welsh Development Agency's Property Strategy for Employment Land in Wales requires that a full sustainability appraisal of each site and premises included in the Property Programme would be carried out. Developers will be aware of the need to address social and community issues, either on a site or business park basis, depending on the individual circumstances. The inclusion of childcare in such projects is dependent on a sufficient critical mass of businesses and people.

The Welsh Assembly Government as an employer

77. The Welsh Assembly Government supports its employees who are seeking childcare. It is among a minority of employers who provide childcare vouchers as an addition to salary, rather than as a salary sacrifice. It is a member of a consortium running the Lilliput day nursery in Cardiff, which strives to provide quality of care above that required by the national minimum standards. It participates in the SPICE playschemes which are run in school holidays. The Assembly Government also administers a staff lottery, which can provide financial help to employees facing difficulties with childcare.

5. The Childcare Workforce

78. A high quality workforce is the bedrock of high quality childcare. The quality of the relationship with individual children is the most important determinant of the influence of childcare on their future outcomes.

For example, where children from disadvantaged areas attend good quality playgroups at age 2, there is clear evidence of significant developmental gain into the future. Conversely, where poor quality childcare is combined with deficient parenting, it may offer no developmental benefit for the child or even disadvantage them.

79. The National Minimum Standards for Daycare require that from April 2008 all registered childcare settings will be managed day to day by a person with a Level 3 qualification, and in full day care 80% of staff will have a Level 2 qualification.

80. However, there is a long way to go. Historically the childcare workforce has been poorly paid and perhaps lacking in career opportunities, because of the large number of small voluntary and private organisations providing childcare.

81. The issues are similar within the care workforce as a whole and there can be clear advantages in taking forward the development of the childcare workforce alongside the wider care workforce. Such an approach offers the childcare workforce a stronger voice; it can make clear parallels in career paths; and take a unified view of safeguards to keep unsuitable workers out of the workforce. It can avoid the pitfall that if childcare is both education and care, it might have no clear home in either the education or care workforces.

82. This is the context within which the childcare workforce will be developed. Within Wales, the Care Council for Wales has the task of acting as the Sector Skills Council for Care and Development (SSC). The Assembly Government is working closely with the Care Council for Wales to ensure that its activities take account of the needs of the childcare workforce. To this end, the Care Council for Wales has appointed a dedicated official to consider the development needs of the childcare workforce.

83. A strategic aim of the SSC will be to generate improved sector wide strategic workforce intelligence. The SSC is charged with developing a Workforce Development Plan for Wales within 6 months of receiving its licence. The role of the SSC is to increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce, including action on equal opportunities and improving learning supply. We recognise that there needs to be a particular concentration on developing Welsh language skills in this sector.

84. It will be important for the SSC to map out how childcare career routes can be matched appropriately with wider social care career frameworks already developed, while also mapping the opportunities for career development into Education.

85. A professional and growing early years and childcare workforce is critical to this Strategy, the Foundation Phase, and the new early years initiative “Flying Start”. Therefore, part of the “Flying Start” funding will be dedicated to workforce development.

86. We recognise that recruiting older workers into the sector is vital and funding needs to be made available to support the over-25s across Wales in attaining vocational qualifications. More flexible training routes are needed with increased support for distance learning. The age-limits on Assembly funded training programmes have been removed and ELWa is now developing a suite of all-age skills programmes.

87. Action: The Welsh Assembly Government will work with the new Sector Skills Council for Care and Development to create a Workforce Development Plan for Wales.

88. Action: The Welsh Assembly Government will make available part of the “Flying Start” funding to support workforce development.

6. Childcare and the Economy

89. The economic case for childcare is well established. Work is the best route out of poverty. Parents, especially lone parents who are not in work, cite the unaffordability and unavailability of childcare as a barrier. A variety of economic studies have found that it is possible to dramatically improve the life chances of disadvantaged children through targeted, well-funded and sustained early interventions. Research has found that such interventions can lead to improved educational performance, as well as resulting in reduced rates of criminal behaviour, truancy and drug use. Longer-term studies have found that early interventions can also provide employment and earnings benefits in later life.

90. These arguments have justified the additional investments that the Assembly Government has made in early years and childcare. At the same time, the economic argument has been critical to securing European Structural Funds in this area. This section of the Strategy describes the Genesis Wales project funded by ESF, the Assembly Government's partnership with Jobcentre Plus, the range of business support available to childcare enterprises, and the role of social enterprise.

Genesis Wales

91. Genesis Wales is the Assembly Government's unique strategic programme for childcare, delivered by Local Authorities in both Objective 1 and Objective 3 areas. We have won approximately £10.1 million of ESF under Objective 1 and £2.5 million under Objective 3. Both these awards are funded over 3 years. Genesis Wales in each area will provide a comprehensive package of advice, guidance, support and childcare for individuals wishing to access work, training, and/or learning opportunities.

92. Genesis Wales has been designed by building on the experience of the Genesis Project in Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT). The RCT Genesis project uses a combination of outreach, measures to increase self-esteem, and readily available childcare to introduce women (especially) to opportunities to work and train. The national project will adopt similar principles, working with local partnerships to support individuals and groups and complement already existing provision.

93. Action: the Assembly Government will ensure Genesis Wales delivers on its national targets:

- To assist 13,000 people.
- To increase childcare places by 8,500.
- 50% of beneficiaries with children under 5 years in work for at least 6 months after ESF support.
- 40% of beneficiaries achieving a qualification.

Mapping ESF investment in childcare

94. The Wales European Funding Office carried out a childcare mapping exercise in October 2004, the findings of which highlights where funds have been used to support childcare and where gaps still exist. WEFO will also be carrying out monitoring and evaluation of the current Programmes, which should give a clearer indication of what funded provision has been successful and how we might build on that provision for the future. The WEFO Equality Unit has agreed to carry out a similar exercise over forthcoming years to compare the data.

95. Action: WEFO will disseminate information widely from the monitoring and evaluation of the childcare programmes that it is funding.

New Deal for Lone Parents

96. The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is one of the suite of New Deal programmes that come within the UK Government's Welfare to Work agenda, delivered in Wales by Jobcentre Plus. NDLP is a voluntary programme designed specifically to help lone parents from 16 to 60 years who want to work, and is available to all those who are not in work or who are working less than 16 hours a week and is operated through Jobcentre Plus.

97. It provides a Personal Adviser who can offer practical help and support with job search, training, childcare and in-work benefits. The programme can help with costs associated with approved training such as childcare, course fees, fares and equipment costs, as well as with the cost of travelling to interviews or cost of childcare while attending an interview.

Childcare Partnership Managers

98. Jobcentre Plus Childcare Partnership Managers (CPMs) took up post in Wales in each of the eight Jobcentre Plus districts on 1st April 2003. They play a key role by helping their customers to find accessible, affordable and good quality childcare so they can make the most of opportunities to work, train or study. They help support the growth of local childcare provision, working alongside childcare partners including children's information services, Children's Partnerships or Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, and employers to meet the childcare needs of unemployed parents.

99. They also play an important role in developing the childcare workforce within Wales working with partner organisations such as the National Childminding Association to promote opportunities. All of the postholders are members of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) and/or Children's Partnerships within their particular region.

100. Their work contributes to the Assembly Government's overarching aims of taking more children out of poverty and reducing the proportion of children living in workless families, and increasing employment opportunities for parents.

Torfaen Community Focused Schools Childcare Pilot

101. This innovative project was launched in September 2004. The Community Focused Schools Childcare Pilot is testing the assertion that lack of affordable, accessible childcare is a significant barrier to work by providing the childcare which lone parents need to enter employment. Torfaen have set a target to enable 100 lone parents and 100 unemployed parents who are not lone parents to enter work as a result of the project providing them with greater access to affordable childcare. This is another example of joint work with central government, running alongside similar pilots in England and Scotland.

Partnership with Jobcentre Plus

102. The important role Jobcentre Plus plays in Wales in helping the Assembly get more people into jobs and meet economic and social objectives is a welcome one and a close working relationship has been developed between Jobcentre Plus, the Childcare Partnership Managers, Assembly policy officials and local Children's Partnerships. This is also helping to ensure that non-devolved employment policy and programmes continue to contribute to measures to address the Assembly Government's economic and social policy priorities, and vice versa.

Business Support for Childcare

103. Childcare providers must recognise that effective business management is vital to sustainability, and conversely that business support agencies must see childcare settings as an important market for their services. There have been several initiatives to improve the support to childcare providers and businesses more generally, and some of these are detailed here. The national childcare organisations have an important role to play, as well as local children's information services.

Childcare Business Development Toolkit

104. Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs has developed a toolkit, "Nuts and Bolts", aimed at the Voluntary Management Committees of out of school childcare clubs. Voluntary Management Committees manage around 70% of out of school clubs in Wales. With the rapid growth in the number of out of school clubs in recent years, it was recognised that long-term sustainability of these clubs not only depends on sufficient income but also on efficient, well organised management structures where roles and responsibilities are clearly understood. "Nuts and Bolts" will strengthen the support that Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs offers to voluntary management committees.

105. Under the CWLWM ESF project, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs propose to develop a further toolkit to complement the output from Nuts and Bolts. The proposed toolkit will provide information and training for childcare business start up and business advisors and other gatekeepers.

Support to new childminders

106. From April 2002 the National Childminding Association (NCMA) have worked with the WDA not only to halt the decline in childminder numbers (the trend since 1999), but also to demonstrate an increase as from October 2004. NCMA's initial 3-year contract with the WDA has resulted in 812 new registered childminding businesses across Wales. Each childminder is generally allowed to care for up to 6 children at any one time and is able to care for children and families with special needs. In April 2005 NCMA's contract with the Welsh Development Agency was renewed and it is proposed to achieve a further 1280 new childminding business starts throughout Wales in the next 3 years. The contract enables NCMA to provide a comprehensive training and business support package for aspiring registered childminders across Wales. Of the 2,400 childminders registered at June 2005, some 800 (33%) have been assisted by the WDA new business starts initiative. Given that research indicates that the average duration of a childminding business is 6 years, this is compelling evidence that the initiative has made a real difference to registered childminding and the availability of quality, affordable childcare.

Business Eye

107. Business Eye/Llygad Busnes, managed by the WDA and sponsored by the Welsh Assembly Government holds a range of general business support information, and signposts new, existing and potential businesses impartially to the most appropriate business support provision in the public, private or voluntary sectors.

108. Business Eye can provide free general information on starting a business including such issues as business planning, how to obtain finance, and employment law, as well as specific information on points to consider when setting up and running a business in the childcare sector.

109. The Business Eye service can be accessed through a National Contact Centre on 08457 96 97 98 or on the web-site www.busesseye.org.uk/ www.llygadbusnes.org.uk. Customers can also obtain access to the service via a network of 26 local Business Eye offices, established throughout Wales.

110. Finance Wales is able to offer loan support to social enterprise childcare facilities through its Community Loan Fund and private childcare facilities through its mainstream loan funding. In doing so it has to take into consideration areas such as duplication of services and over burdening the market.

Social Enterprise

111. There are many examples of social enterprises and co-operatives as childcare providers and the Assembly Government supports these through a number of initiatives described in this Strategy.

112. The Social Enterprise Strategy for Wales commits to strengthening links within the Assembly Government around the social enterprise agenda. In this context childcare is specifically mentioned. In addition one of the specific actions within the Strategy is to use existing and emerging networks to develop growth areas such as childcare, recycling, housing and renewable energy.

7. Childcare and Diverse Communities

The Welsh Language

113. The Assembly Government and the Welsh Language Board has worked with Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin to provide Welsh Medium playgroups widely across Wales. To date a grant of £4.5 million has been made available to Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin to train an additional 300 early years practitioners with additional funding committed for future years. “Cam Wrth Gam” is setting the infrastructure for an innovative long term solution which will ensure a career path for Welsh-medium practitioners ensuring access to qualifications from NVQ Level 2 to graduate and postgraduate qualifications through partnership with Coleg y Drindod.

114. This training will also be crucial to support the establishment of a new Foundation Phase curriculum for children aged 3-7. With bilingualism and multicultural understanding becoming a new Area of Learning within the Foundation Phase curriculum, there will be the need for additional early years Welsh medium practitioners.

115. This investment will also assure new generations of Welsh speakers into the future, and is key to our vision of a truly bilingual Wales. Other representatives of childcare providers are committed to supporting bilingual provision or in some areas Welsh language provision.

116. We recognise that in some areas parents cannot find accessible Welsh medium childcare, for example in the form of full day care or childminding. We propose now to monitor Welsh language provision specifically, as set out in Section 9 of this Strategy. We are requiring Cymorth plans to document their contribution to Iaithe Pawb's vision of a bilingual Wales, and these plans will include childcare provision.

117. Action: Through Children's Information Services we will establish baselines and monitor progress in the provision of Welsh language and bilingual childcare settings, in all childcare sectors.

Childcare and ethnic minority communities

118. The regulatory framework for childcare providers already requires them to have equal opportunities policies. However, it does not follow that formal childcare meets the needs of ethnic minority communities. Ethnic minorities are relatively under-represented amongst childcare staff and amongst the children that are cared for. The Childcare Working Group heard useful evidence on this from an individual representative from the All Wales Saheli Association, but the Assembly Government recognises that there is a need to consider this issue in more depth. As with all provision supported by public funds, childcare provision should be genuinely inclusive and that means investigating barriers to ethnic minority access directly.

119. Action: We will commission independent action research into the perceptions and take up of formal childcare by ethnic minority parents in Wales.

Childcare and Rural Regeneration

120. We recognise that childcare for parents in rural areas is likely to be less accessible. Childminding and mobile provision may be an important part of provision in these areas. Local schools may also be part of the solution, using spare capacity to provide or host childcare.

121. Childcare will be considered within the new Wales Transport Strategy and in guidance to regional transport consortia for the development of the new round of Local Transport Plans in 2006/07. The consideration is likely to be in relation to a broad assessment of accessibility to jobs and services.

Communities First

122. We have long recognised that in disadvantaged areas, it is more difficult to sustain formal childcare. A large part of the reason is that parents do not perceive it as affordable. Nevertheless, the provision of childcare in these areas offers families a route out of poverty. This is why the Cymorth grant, the development of integrated centres, the Genesis Wales childcare programme, and the “Flying Start” initiative for the early years all concentrate resources on these areas. In all these cases, the engagement of local communities will be critical to the success of the initiatives.

123. Communities First Partnerships need better support and guidance to recognise the potential value of childcare within their plans. Childcare providers should work closely with Communities First Partnerships to ensure that the relevant services are available in the Communities First areas. This will also require a joined up approach within the Assembly Government. The revised Communities First Guidance will provide advice on this.

124. Communities that Care, an independent charity, is working as part of the CWLWM project with Communities First partnerships, testing out models for supporting the partnerships to ensure that well evaluated childcare and early years interventions are embedded in their plans.

125. Action: Advice linking childcare with the Communities First programme will be contained in the revised Communities First Guidance.

8. An Integrated Approach

126. The Assembly Government has already acknowledged childcare to be a cross-cutting issue, and in developing our childcare strategy we will ensure that it is aligned with other relevant Assembly Government policies and programmes. The previous sections have already highlighted many links - from the Foundation Phase to the Wales Transport Strategy. They have highlighted the important roles in the strategy for local authorities and childcare providers in both the voluntary and private sectors. In this section we highlight the ESF funded CWLWM project, which is itself, an integration of childcare interests, and the role of schools in the strategy.

CWLWM

127. The Assembly Government is pleased to see a wide range of partners coming together within the CWLWM Project, funded under the EQUAL programme. We have agreed to take over leadership of this project from the Welsh Development Agency.

128. CWLWM (Childcare Wales Learning and Working Mutually) brings together several Welsh childcare organisations, Cardiff County Council, the University of Gloucestershire and Communities that Care.

CWLWM's principal objectives are to create and sustain high quality, accessible, affordable childcare provided by qualified staff and reduce gender inequalities in the childcare workforce by promoting new means of combating inequalities in the labour market. The contribution of each partner includes:

- Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids Clubs: Community Business Toolkit.
- Communities that Care: Highlighting well evaluated and effective provision.
- Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin: Developing the Welsh language skills of childcare staff.
- Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association: Linking small childcare providers with corporate sector organisations.
- Play Wales: Improving playwork practice.
- Cardiff County Council: Investigating the sustainability of childcare.
- University of Gloucestershire: Project facilitation and transnational work.

Schools as Community Resources

129. The Assembly Government believes that schools will be an increasing resource for childcare provision across Wales.

130. The Welsh Assembly Government's vision for schools developing a community focus and providing a wide range of community activities and services including childcare is set out as a key aim in the Assembly Government's strategic document for education 'The Learning Country'. Ministers and Welsh Assembly Government officials have consistently emphasised this message widely at a range of events.

131. Guidance to assist schools and their key partners to develop a community focus was issued following consultation by the Welsh Assembly Government in December 2003.

132. We have made regulations so that where school governing bodies provide childcare it is registered and inspected in the same way as other childcare provision, thus maintaining the assurance to parents that minimum quality standards are met.

133. The Welsh Assembly Government is making available £3 million in 2005-06 to support the development of community focused initiatives in schools.

Local Co-operation

134. The Children Act 2004 created a statutory basis for local co-operation between local authorities in Wales, key partner agencies and other relevant bodies, in order to improve the well-being of children in the area. It also created a power for the Assembly to require local authorities in Wales to publish a single plan for services to children and young people. The Assembly Government has published draft Guidance on the requirements for local co-operation. These powers will put the existing Children and Young People's Framework Partnerships on a more firm statutory footing, supported by Children's Partnerships and Young People's Partnerships for the 0-10 and 11-25 age groups respectively.

135. Childcare planning and delivery should be driven within these arrangements. The Children's Partnership is likely to have particular ownership of local childcare strategy, though the Young People's Partnership should review the particular needs of young people aged 11-14 out of school hours. The draft Guidance points to the discretion of local partnerships to create subgroups, and such an approach may be used to give childcare strategy particular focus.

9. Monitoring the strategy

Measures of success

136. The Welsh Assembly Government document “Rights to Action” suggested the development of measures to monitor progress against the Core Aims. The Childcare Working Group proposed a wide range of measures to monitor childcare provision.

137. We propose to focus on a small number that are straightforward to measure, strategic in scope and for which we can set realistic targets. We consider that the key measure is the number of childcare places as registered with the CSIW. This is not a perfect or complete measure, but has clarity and indicates that we consider success to be a wider range of settings with inspected minimum quality.

138. We will therefore monitor nationally.

139. The total number of registered childcare places divided into:

- childminders;
- sessional care;
- full day care;
- out of school clubs;
- open access play;
- crèches;

- and analysed between Welsh medium, bilingual or neither;

- measured by local children’s information services based on CSIW data.

140. The number of registered childcare places available per 100 children aged 0-7 in each Local Authority area - measured by CSIW records and annual population estimates.

141. Take-up of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit - measured by the Inland Revenue.

142. The proportion of disabled children accessing childcare provision as compared with the population in general - measured by bi-annual Parental Demand for Childcare survey.

143. The proportion of children from ethnic minorities accessing childcare provision as compared with the population in general - measured by bi-annual Parental Demand for Childcare survey.

144. The proportion of childcare settings achieving a recognised Quality Assurance mark - measured by children’s information services.

Monitoring the Strategy in partnership

145. The Childcare Working Group provided an important opportunity to bring provider, social, education and economic interests together. We now need to move forward, taking into account the development of “Flying Start” and ensuring that action is part of an over-arching vision encompassing the Foundation Phase, the school breakfast programme, the integrated centres and Community Focused Schools programme. Within the “Flying Start” consultation document, we set out this vision.

146. We will now proceed to set up an Implementation Group of external partners for this Strategy together with Flying Start, to work initially for a two year period. While the Group will not oversee related initiatives, it will include Assembly officials leading on them.

147. Action: An Implementation Group of external partners for this Strategy and Flying Start will be set up.

Summary of Actions

Action	Timing
The Assembly will continue a dialogue with DWP in making the case for extra support to the most vulnerable groups.	Ongoing
The NSF will set standards for inclusive play, and the Assembly Government will publish on its website exemplar practice of inclusive childcare and play.	March 2005
CSIW's 3 year strategy will make children's experiences the central focus of regulation, and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens.	March 2008
The Assembly Government will support the development of a consistent quality assurance methodology across childcare and early years education.	September 2006
The Assembly Government has asked CSIW and Estyn to bring forward their considered proposals for a more complementary approach in settings which are inspected by both.	September 2006
Subject to discussion with childcare organisations and the Care Council for Wales, we will consult on regulations to enable the CCW to open its register to early years and childcare workers.	March 2006
The Assembly Government will ensure that parents who use childcare workers within their home that are registered with the Care Council for Wales can access the childcare tax credit.	September 2006
The Assembly Government will undertake research to review the range of out of school care available for children aged 8 to 14, how it can best improve children's long term outcomes as well as meeting parent's needs, and whether further regulatory action is needed to assure quality and control risk. Children will participate in this research.	June 2006
We will mount a communications campaign, working with all local Children's Information Services, childcare providers and primary health contacts to ensure they have accessible promotional material to provide to parents regarding the Working Tax Credit.	June 2006
We will work with Children's Information Services to strengthen their profile through a national publicity strategy. This will include the preparation nationally of a "Choosing Childcare" booklet for parents in Wales.	June 2006

Action	Timing
Local Authorities will be under a new duty to secure sufficient childcare, supported by regulations and guidance appropriate to Wales.	April 2008
The Welsh Assembly Government will work with the new Sector Skills Council for Care and Development to create a Workforce Development Plan for Wales.	March 2006
The Welsh Assembly Government will make available part of the "Flying Start" funding to support workforce development.	March 2007
<p>The Assembly Government will ensure Genesis Wales delivers on its national targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To assist 10,000 people in the Objective 1 area. • To increase childcare places by 7,000 in the Objective 1 area. • To assist 3,000 people in the Objective 3 area. • To increase childcare places by 1,500 in the Objective 3 area. • 75% completing course/activities. • 50% of parents with children under 5 years in work for at least 6 months after ESF support. • 10% of beneficiaries achieving NVQ level 2 or equivalent qualification. • 10% of beneficiaries achieving NVQ level 3 or equivalent qualification. • 20% of beneficiaries achieving a basic qualification. 	March 2008
WEFO will disseminate information widely from the monitoring and evaluation of the childcare programmes that it is funding.	March 2006
Through Children's Information Services we will establish baselines and monitor progress in the provision of Welsh language and bilingual childcare settings, in all childcare sectors.	Starting April 2006
We will commission independent action research into the perceptions and take up of formal childcare by ethnic minority parents in Wales.	September 2006
Advice linking childcare with the Communities First programme will be contained in the revised Communities First Guidance.	March 2006
An Implementation Group of external partners for this Strategy and Flying Start will be set up.	December 2005