

Early Education and Childcare: The need to consider equality

Kathryn Barr

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

publicpolicy@equalityni.org

Outline

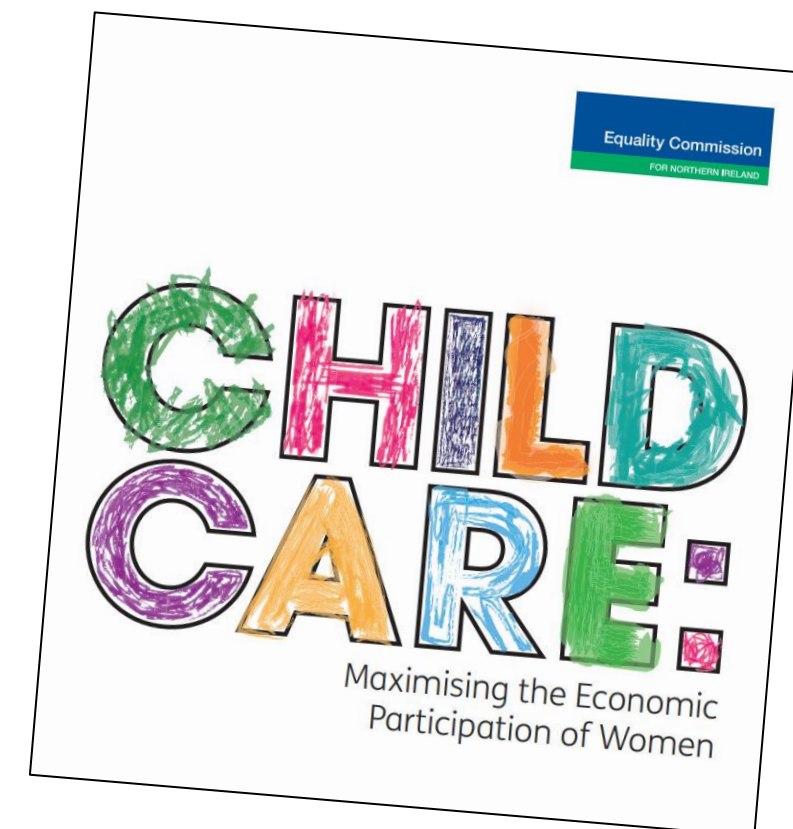
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- equality and childcare
- our recommendations
- Early Learning and Childcare Strategy
- wider education recommendations
- questions and discussion

The Equality Commission

- independent public body, with 14 Commissioners
- promote equality of opportunity
- work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination
- oversee the effectiveness of the statutory equality duties on public authorities
- keep relevant legislation under review

What that means in practice

- policy influencing, including law reform
- communications/awareness raising
- advice and assistance to those with responsibilities under the law
- advice and assistance to individuals with potential complaints – legal casework
- research, investigation
- stakeholder engagement/partnerships





***Nursery apologises as
disability discrimination
case is settled***



Equality and Childcare – Gender

In 2023, just under
three in ten working
age women were
economically inactive,
compared to just over
one in five men

Equality and Childcare – Gender

For men, the least common reason for economic inactivity was family/ home (8%)

Equality and Childcare – Gender

But 25% of
economically inactive
women cited family/
home

(NISRA, Women in Northern Ireland
2023)

Equality and Childcare – Gender

Economic activity
Men with pre-school
children: 95%
Women with pre-
school children: 70%

(NISRA, Women in Northern Ireland
2023)

Equality and Childcare – Children

‘investment that could improve access to special educational needs (SEN) services and provide support for other specific types of need (as experienced by disadvantaged families, newcomers and Roma/travellers) in early years could provide a significant long-term saving as well as improving long-term outcomes for children’

Independent Review of Education

Equality and Childcare – Children

Responding families
who have a child with
a disability are twice
as likely to be using
no childcare at all

(Employers for Childcare, Childcare
Survey 2023)

Equality and Childcare – Children

Responding parents
with English as an
additional language
were less likely to use
external childcare

(RSM (2023) Review of Childcare
Services in NI)

Recommendations

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

- meet the specific needs for children from across the full range of equality groups

46% of respondents with children with disabilities, special needs and other additional needs outlined challenges accessing registered childcare

(RSM (2023) Review of Childcare Services in NI)

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

- assist parents and carers (particularly mothers) to enter, remain, progress, or return to work, training or education
- meet the needs of particular groups

"I could apply for a job and walk into it tomorrow if I had the childcare in place."

(Women's Support Network (2024) Women, Skills & Barriers to Work)

Maximise the quality and sustainability of Childcare and Early Learning services

- high-quality and sustainable provision, including in disadvantaged and rural areas
- value providers, with workforce development
- learn lessons from other jurisdictions

13% of providers surveyed had received financial support to provide childcare for children with disabilities, special needs and other additional needs

(RSM (2023) Review of Childcare Services in NI)

Tackle gender stereotypes concerning Childcare and Early Learning roles

- tackle gender-based stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes from an early age and across all areas of life
- consider the diverse range of family types in Northern Ireland

60% of employed women with dependent children worked full-time, compared to 96% of employed males with dependent children

(Women in NI 2023, NISRA)

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

- promotion of flexible working practices, and role of training providers
- sharing of family roles and responsibilities between women and men

95% of parents responding who are using childcare say that childcare stress impacts on their productivity in work

(Employers for Childcare, 2023)

Early Education and Childcare Strategy

- targeting interventions, tracking impacts
- equality data
- leadership
- stakeholder involvement
- implementation friendly design
- resources
- wider Governmental work

Wider education recommendations

- address inequalities in attainment and access experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children
- engage with parents / families / carers and the wider communities of key equality groups
- ensure the quality of educational experiences received by children with special educational needs (SEN) in Northern Ireland
- embed equality of opportunity and good relations in learning

www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy

Any questions?

www.equalityni.org/Childcare