

Transforming early childhood education and care ^[1]

Sharing international learning: Part 2

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Excerpt

Executive Summary

The Fawcett Society has long campaigned for universal, free, accessible and inclusive education and care from end of maternity leave until the child is aged 12 as there is strong evidence that affordable childcare increases women's labour market participation and choices. With 98% of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce female¹, and a retention and recruitment crisis, it is essential for pay and conditions in the sector to improve in order to address the systemic and long-term undervaluation of care work.

This report explores how England can undertake sustainable, holistic transformation from the position we are currently in. Our international research demonstrates that transformation is not a pipe dream – other countries, some of whom started in a similar place to England, are further along the process than we are and already delivering a better outcome for women and children. Moreover, if we can learn from what they've done we can go some way to catching them up, by avoiding their mistakes and learning from their current discussions.

For England to transform our system, we will need a shared understanding across all stakeholders and political parties about what it is that the transformation is trying to achieve, to prevent wasting time and money. The plan we set out below is consistent with our goals, and there is much to learn from the international evidence on how to deliver reforms that achieve better outcomes for children, as well as better outcomes for parents.

A universal and free system will not be delivered overnight, but can be achieved, in time, if a future government puts in place a clear, evidence-based plan that includes investment, training, and reforms to regulation. And we can do it a lot more quickly if we learn the lessons of those ahead of us.

This report is part two of a two-part project to identify what England can learn from the early childhood education and care systems (ECEC) in France, Estonia, Ireland, Australia and Canada. It builds on our previous research: *Childcare and Early Education Systems: a Comparative Literature Review of Liberal Welfare States*, exploring the systems in Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and Switzerland.

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