

Early childhood policy in England 1997–2013: anatomy of a missed opportunity ^[1]

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Abstract

The new Labour government that entered office in 1997 made early childhood education and care (ECEC) a policy priority, after decades of neglect. The article provides an overview of the subsequent policy developments, looking at three areas in more detail: governance and finance; the organisation and management of services; and the workforce. It then brings the story up to the present day, with policy developments since the 2010 election, during a period of severe public austerity. The article concludes by providing a critical assessment of these developments. From all the attention and activity that has surrounded ECEC in England in recent years, what actually has been achieved? Has it been a case of evolution or transformation? Overall, the article concludes that the period since 1997, despite some important gains, has overall been a story of missed opportunities, a case of more of the same rather than transformative change.

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