

Early Years Policy

Education

Why early provision attracts policy attention, and what the evidence says.

Early years education covers provision before compulsory schooling. Gaps in language and number are measurable at school entry, which is why policy targets this stage.

ENTRY GAP
measurable

SCALING EVIDENCE
weaker

- Quality of provision matters more than hours attended.
- Staff qualification levels predict quality.
- Gains from famous small programmes are hard to scale.
- Perry Preschool and Abecedarian were tiny samples.
- Some measured gains fade in later primary years.
- Effects on later life outcomes are debated.

LOOK FOR IT

Headline returns quoted from 1960s American programmes come from samples of around 60 to 120 children, in conditions unlike today's.

Educational reference. Contested at the level of return on investment; the existence of an early gap is not contested.