

## **Invest in the Early Years Workforce**

Invest in the early years workforce to redress the increasing staffing crisis and secure quality early years care and education services for children 6 months -5 years, that are accessible, affordable, support parents/families and promote children's health, well-being, learning and development in line with national quality standards.

# **2018 Budget Recommendations**

### **Prepared by representatives from the following groups:**

- NFCCS-National Forum for Community Childcare Services
- ACP-Association for Childhood Professionals
- PEEP-Private Early Education Providers
- PARCC ( Positive And Realistic Change in Childcare)
- PPPI-Pre-school Practitioners and Providers Ireland
- Montessori Alliance
- PLÉ: the national association of third level institutions offering undergraduate and postgraduate degree level training in ECEC
- SIPTU

Facilitated in working together by the  
National Childhood Network

## Summary of Recommendations

<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> Increase ECCE capitation and subvention levels in January 2018 and work to help ensure that no staff, including those working with children under 3 years, are paid less than the living wage.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> Establish a multi-agency commitment which includes service providers/staff to simplification and streamlining all systems, particularly the PIP system, inspections, audits and administration processes as well as agreement that new changes to either custom or policy will be introduced only with adequate time for consultation, negotiation and adaptation. Develop KPI's to show improved systems of working.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> Support the sector through increased investment to link pay to occupational profiles that reflect roles, responsibilities, qualifications, experience. Introduce pay parity with other professions by supporting the development and implementation of a funded national salary scale for the early years' sector.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4:</b> Introduce a national target to increase the numbers of Level 7 and 8 graduates working in the sector incrementally over the next 5 years from 18% to 40%. In line with this, extend the learner fund to significantly fund those already working in the sector to upskill to degree level</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 5:</b> Introduce a financial incentive (similar to that attached to LINC training) to services where staff engage in upskilling and CPD opportunities including working to achieve validation of the Siolta Quality Standards.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6:</b> Streamline the current inspection system into one unitary model as envisaged within the White paper on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1999.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 7:</b> Provide for 3 days of paid training in the funding model for all staff in 2018.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 8:</b> Build in one hour per day paid time for all staff to engage in curriculum planning/review and service development.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 9:</b> Review the supports and timeframe needed to secure the achievement of agreed quality standards in all services</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 10:</b> Formalise agreement with the Department of the Environment that, as education providers, early years care and education services will not be liable for rates, as of 2018.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 11:</b> Introduce 0% VAT status for the sector to enable providers to claim VAT back on all purchases, and, reduce employers PRSI as an interim measure until the issue of salary scales and subsidization of them is addressed.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 12:</b> Fulfil obligations within the programme for Government<sup>1</sup> for a full cost and quality review of early years' provision and appropriate staffing costs to be conducted utilising co-production methodology.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 13:</b> Maintain and increase the capital grants, by €500,000 and alter the application process to allow for annual requests for maintenance and essential repairs similar to the Summer Works Programme for primary schools.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 14:</b> Dedicate resources to the development of more detailed guidelines and processes to support co-production within early strategy and policy development. Development of an action research evaluation on the effectiveness of co-production models of strategy and policy development should be undertaken alongside this process.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Department of the Taoiseach, A Programme for a Partnership Government (Department of the Taoiseach 2016) 76.

## **1. Submission Overview and the Voices Represented**

This pre-budget submission has been prepared by a broad range of stakeholders involved directly or indirectly, in the delivery of early years care and education services across Ireland. Those who have informed the submission include management and staff of both committee managed and, independently managed early years' services as well as parents, grandparents, registered childminders, training/education providers, and quality support staff engaged with a variety of agencies working to support the delivery of quality early years and school age childcare services. SIPTU staff engaged in the Big Start Coalition have also informed our work.

Consultation highlights that a number of key issues are currently impacting negatively on service delivery in spite of significant developments and, substantial state investment in recent years. The escalation of problems following the introduction of the Government's childcare affordability measures, points strongly to the need for Government, to review and evaluate, the current implementation of schemes, with a view to addressing the problems for providers in making the schemes available to parents. Consultation also points to the need for a significant increase in financial investment in the early years' workforce in order to secure the current and future engagement of qualified, skilled and competent staff. In addition to increased investment, creating the right conditions for the delivery of quality services that meet the needs and rights of all children, will also require creative thinking and innovative policy development on behalf of Government and policy makers. Without a more supportive policy framework, and sufficient investment, the Government's need to engage all early years' providers in the delivery of the Affordable Childcare Scheme in 2018 will not be realised, nor will the goal of having world class early years/childcare services in the future. More importantly, the absence of the right policy developments and increased investment will prevent the early years' sector from reaching its full potential to deliver services that support families and enhance children's health, well-being, learning and development in their early years. Failure to invest in children, families and the early years' profession will also compromise Ireland's economic and social development.

*“Investments that bolster the parenting capacities of families are the most effective way to promote social mobility and foster equal opportunities for all. They empower children with the capabilities to flourish as dignified and engaged citizens and workers throughout their lives. Such investments provide significant returns to individuals and society, provided that we invest in quality systems*

*throughout the critical years of birth to age five.” (Remarks from James Heckman at the 2015 Education Writers Association National Seminar, April 16 2015).*

The issues preventing the delivery of affordable quality services are complex and multi-faceted. They include but are not confined to:

**Insufficient Capitation** levels across the various Government schemes e.g. ECCE-Early Childhood Care and Education, CCS and CCSP. It is widely acknowledged that the levels do not enable providers to cover:

- **Appropriate staff salaries.** The current rate of pay (€10.27/hour) is unjust, leading to ‘in-work poverty’, and an exodus of qualified and experienced staff from the sector year on year. Accordingly, the sector is unable to retain, or attract staff, and is now underpinned by a looming staffing crisis. As a result, providers are finding it increasingly difficult to adhere to legislative requirements, and to provide a quality service responsive to the varied needs of children, parents and families.
- **Increasing operational costs** associated with service delivery including rent, mortgage costs, rates, insurance, and regulatory compliance.
- **Unprecedented Administrative responsibilities** as a direct result of a myriad of government schemes. This in turn impacts upon staff time, diverting attention away from service delivery, curriculum development, and ultimately, attention to promoting children’s health, well-being, learning and development.
- **Invest in the development and implementation of a national strategy** to ensure the implementation of the practice frameworks: Síolta and Aistear. This has prevented the development of a systematic comprehensive approach to implementing these frameworks nationally across all early years services;
- Provide meaningful recognition and remuneration for service providers who deliver to a high quality standard. Failure to do this has further undermined the importance and value of delivering services to a high standard.
- **Cover escalating governance responsibilities** for board members of committee managed services, all of which are operated by volunteers. Increasing numbers are unable or unwilling to meet their duties as company directors. Consequently, many services are being left in a vulnerable position which in some cases, leads to reckless trading.

We call upon the government to undertake, as a matter of urgency 1) a comprehensive analysis of current policy developments and their impact on services and parents, and 2) the identification of policy gaps. This analysis must be followed rapidly by the development of a comprehensive plan to enhance service delivery to meet the diverse needs of children and parents. The ability of early years' staff to provide enriching experiences for children in all settings, will not be possible unless additional investment and, a variety of support systems based on needs, are put in place, to enable management and staff to meet all legislative, funding, administrative and quality requirements.

The difficulties facing service providers and staff is compounded by an over whelming anxiety felt by many, that they cannot keep pace with the volume of change and expectations impacting upon them as a result of Government initiatives in recent years. Anecdotal evidence gathered by the National Childhood Network (NCN) indicates that *“for providers who put children at the heart of policy and practice and have a deep commitment to the delivery of services in line with regulations and national quality standards, current difficulties and demands are becoming insurmountable and frustration and stress among managers and staff is increasing daily”*. Anecdotal evidence also indicates that with the many challenges facing providers, there is a reduction in the provision of centre based regulated spaces for babies and children less than two years of age. As a result, parents have no option but to forego work opportunities or rely on family or unregulated childcare.

Given the desire of all stakeholder representatives involved in the preparation of this submission to resolve the difficulties outlined, we have committed to working together to bring both issues and solutions to the attention of the Taoiseach, all Government Ministers, political representatives, and policy makers. Given the importance of early year's services to children, families, communities and Ireland's economic and social development, it is vital that decisions made in budget 2018 and, subsequent budgets, are right for children, parents/families and the early year's sector. It is imperative that the decisions made now, provide a platform for comprehensive service delivery that Government can build on in the future to secure the delivery of world class care and education services for young children. Budget measures in 2018 must therefore include increased investment to:

- **Improve staff pay and conditions.** This is vital to secure the employment nationwide of a qualified, skilled and competent early years' workforce that will support families

and promote children’s health, well-being, learning and development from six months –five years;

- **Support the sustainability of services** so that management and staff can concentrate on service development, and the delivery of services in the best interest of children, and in line with national quality standards;
- **Resolve systems and administration difficulties** created by Government subsidisation schemes to support parents with the costs of services.
- **Support the implementation of the national quality frameworks Síolta and Aistear**

The national quality frameworks provide a clear outline of the quality standards that should be achieved in all areas of service delivery.

The organisations/groups involved in preparing this submission link with over 10,000 service providers and staff nationwide, as well as 1,000 + students engaged in training and educational programmes relevant to the early years’ profession.

Collectively, the stakeholder group holds a unique position within the Irish early year’s landscape as it represents:

1. Independent/private and committee managed service providers/staff involved in providing both full time/crèche and sessional/part time early years services;
2. Registered childminders<sup>2</sup>,
3. Quality support/training agencies; and,
4. Third level college staff providing undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications to those wishing to work in the sector, as well as early years professionals seeking higher level qualifications.

In preparing this submission stakeholder representatives have endeavoured to work from a point of consensus in order to progress an agenda that has children and families at its heart.

This submission therefore, sets out our vision, for the future of early years care and education services, the key issues preventing progress towards the achievement of this vision and, key recommendations for budget 2018, that we believe, can work towards addressing the current dilemmas

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<sup>2</sup> Unregistered childminders and strategy in relation to this falls outside the expertise and remit of our group



## **Vision for the Delivery of Early Years Care and Education Services**

In considering our vision, we welcome the ongoing development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, to be launched in 2018. This will go some way towards addressing the issue of affordability for parents. We welcome also, the inclusion of members from our early years' stakeholder network in the DCYA Business Consultative Sub-Group which provides an opportunity for on-going consultation and, co-production of the scheme's final design. We appreciate also Minister Zappone's desire, to use the Government's current childcare schemes to increase access and affordability for parents, in the short term, in spite of the many administrative difficulties caused for providers and staff.

From a quality support perspective, we welcome the many developments, such as the increase in Sólta Mentors nationwide, the National Sólta/Aistear Initiative, the many Equality and Diversity measures, establishment of the Better Start quality support system to complement that provided by NVCOs, CCCs and other local, regional and national groups. The Learner Fund too, has provided essential financial support to improve workforce qualifications and professional development.

The 2016 commitment by Taoiseach Enda Kenny and, Minister Katherine Zappone, on behalf of the Government, to complete the development of a comprehensive Early Years' Strategy is also welcome, as is the DCYA's view, that the Early Years Strategy will require a broad approach to early childhood development initiatives within which the early years care and education sector has a significantly important role to play, in supporting the achievement of best outcomes for children. The development of a comprehensive, all-encompassing early years' strategy provides hope that "scatter gun" policy development in relation to the development of early childhood care and education services over the last twenty years will be replaced by more effective, co-ordinated, integrated and strategic planning accompanied by the necessary investment. Given these, and the many other developments impacting on the sector, the need for collaborative, co-production of policy development and implementation will be essential. The establishment of such a platform would assist in achieving agreement on of a series of practical and achievable steps, to realise our vision for high quality, affordable early years care and education services for children, aged from six months to six years.

*Our collaborative vision, which is shared between stakeholders, is for children to be at the heart of early years' care and education provision that is sustainable, accessible and affordable for parents, evidenced as high quality in all areas of service delivery, and which provides fair and equitable remuneration, clear progression paths and professional recognition for staff.*

We view early years care and education services as integral to the achievement of national policy, namely Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures<sup>3</sup> and its associated five outcomes. In light of the invaluable role early years' professionals play in promoting children's health and well-being in their pre-school years, there is also a need to support the sector in fulfilling its vital role in relation to the Healthy Ireland Framework<sup>4</sup> and to advancing other Government policy agendas. These include: supporting families, improving literacy and numeracy, alleviating the poverty levels of around one fifth of Ireland's children that are at risk of poverty and exclusion<sup>5</sup>, increasing access to employment, training and education, as well as creating employment opportunities within the sector itself, and enhancing social inclusion.

Early years services play a vital role in progressing all of these political agendas and laying the foundations for future Ireland. However, this means providing universally high quality services that provide care and developmental opportunities for children. All of this is dependent upon significant additional investment. The future early years' strategy can provide a vital opportunity to highlight our collective vision of how the sector can support parents, and contribute to children's overall holistic development.

In the strongest terms possible, we request that the strategy be developed in line with co-production methodologies<sup>6</sup>, where the expertise and sectoral understanding of providers is a key resource for future planning.

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures - the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020 (DCYA 2014).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.healthyireland.ie>

<sup>5</sup> 2017 SILC survey revealed that 19.5% of all children (0-17) were at risk of poverty in 2015.  
<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions2015/>

<sup>6</sup> Together for Better Public Services: Partnering with Citizens and Civil Society.  
<http://www.oecd.org/gov/togetherforbetterpublicservicespartneringwithcitizensandcivilsociety.htm>

## 2. Issues within the Sector and Recommendations to Address These

The following four issue areas – **sustainability, staffing, quality and co-production**, are considered the most urgent and serious issues affecting the delivery of services and are the basis for proposals set out in the following sections. While these are presented as discreet issues, they are interrelated, and it must also be noted, that issues in relation to sustainability and staffing, have significant negative effects on service quality. The benefit of this interrelatedness is that advantageous policy that affects sustainability will also benefit quality. The key issues from the perspective of the group are:

### **Sustainability**

Within Ireland there is an inability for many early years' service providers – both independent and community to adequately cover all costs involved in service delivery. As mentioned, costs result from increasing operational costs; compliance with all legislation and staffing requirements. This situation is leading to *“a closure of services in some areas, mounting debt for many providers, and the resignation of staff from numerous services nationwide in the pursuit of more financially rewarding employment opportunities”* - Marie Daly, Crann Support Group. The 2017 report of the Oireachtas Working Group on Children and Young People, highlighted the Working Conditions of the Early Education and Care Sector, and describes a situation where community services are fundraising on their own time and private services are operating at break even<sup>7</sup>. The issue of sectoral sustainability has been reported widely (e.g. Moloney and Pettersen, 2017) over a number of years, and most recently summarised in the Oireachtas report. While some State progress has been made in relation to investing in the sector, this has done little to ensure sustainability of services whether delivered by an independent or community provider. While some costs of service delivery are estimated within policy papers underpinning the introduction of the ACS, they tend to be based upon minimum wage for example, and do not reflect the true cost of providing quality care and education services to meet the needs of children and parents.

We welcome the DYCA commitment to undertake a full and independent cost review, and urge that this should be completed by mid 2018 at the latest. In order to be relevant, comprehensive and useful this review must define quality in a way that all stakeholders can endorse and,

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<sup>7</sup> 2017 Report on the Working Conditions of the Early Years Education and Care Sector 2017. Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs July 2017. House of the Oireachtas

ensure that the full cost of providing quality services to meet legislative requirements, appropriate salaries commensurate with qualifications, experience, roles, and responsibilities, and national quality standards is estimated. We call upon the Government to support the development of a funded national salary scale for the early year's sector, and to introduce pay parity for staff in line with other professions.

However we also need to highlight lengthy delays in key actions that have kept the sector in an unacceptable status quo that is impacting negatively on current service delivery. At a time when there is an increasing demand for services by parents, lengthy delays, and consequent negativity, undermine Government plans to increase places and reduce costs to parents. It also undermines Minister Zappone's ambitious plan to develop 'a world class' early years system.

Unreasonable expectations that providers can deliver services premised upon unrealistic costs serve nobody well; children, parents or society. It is recommended therefore, that concrete steps are taken to estimate the realistic cost of service delivery based on realistic and fair salary costs while the review is ongoing.

The system of payments and administration attached to Government funding schemes for parents has been described by the EU as complex and difficult to navigate<sup>8</sup>. This complexity carries a cost for providers who must dedicate ever increasing time to administrative duties managing the processes, informing parents and providing duplicate information to Government intermediary bodies. The difficult and complex situation has been exacerbated with the Government's recent initiative that seeks to deliver "more affordable childcare" for parents from September 2017 without providing sufficient investment in the early year's workforce for the additional paper work and liaison with parents that is required. Recent consultation by members of our group with service providers nationwide highlights the many difficulties attached to this work. (See appendix 1)

The following recommendations would go some small way to reducing the burden on providers and help stem the flow of providers and staff leaving the sector.

### **Staffing**

It is evident from consultation with service providers that many are experiencing a staffing crisis. Services nationwide, are reporting significant difficulties in retaining and recruiting

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<sup>8</sup> European Commission (2015) Commission Staff Working Document. Country Report Ireland 2015.

staff, a fact outlined in Solas sector reviews and highlighted in a Pobal review which found that 32% of staff had been in current roles less than two years<sup>9</sup>. This issue is rightly described as a ‘crisis’ in the recent 2017 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs Report<sup>10</sup> launched before the summer recess. Our collective experience is that this is due to the unsustainable low rates of pay within the sector<sup>11</sup> as compared to other similarly qualified roles. This view is endorsed by the Early Years Survey<sup>12</sup> which found that 57% of staff leaving the industry attributed their departure to the low salaries. Anecdotal evidence gathered by member groups since the beginning of September, 2017 indicates that the situation has become even more serious with numerous providers experiencing staff resignations and, the impossibility of recruiting replacement staff. Experienced qualified staff are leaving to work as Special Needs Assistants with school going children in formal education settings, as assistants or in other roles with ABC services or other community programmes, or in support roles with various agencies such as CCC’s and Better Start. Some staff are also choosing to leave employment in centre based services to establish childminding services where few regulations exist and the “hassle of working in childcare is much less”. Others are leaving to work abroad, or in shops, supermarkets and restaurants where they can earn up to €13/hour<sup>13</sup>

The pay issue is reflective of a wider lack of recognition of the importance of childrens early years as a period of rapid development and the skills, role and increasing responsibilities of early years’ professionals in the promotion of children’s holistic development. As noted in the Start Strong report<sup>14</sup>, this issue must be addressed as a matter of urgency. It also needs to be understood in relation to gender inequality<sup>15</sup>, an issue of current priority for the State<sup>16</sup>. The vast majority of early years workers (95% +) are women, who while each holding the necessary qualifications to work within the sector earn on average €10.27 per hour, just in line with the

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<sup>9</sup> National Skills Bulletin 2016 (September 2016) <http://www.skillsireland.ie/Publications/2016/National-Skills-Bulletin-2016-Web-Final.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> 2017 Report on the Working Conditions of the Early Years Education and Care Sector 2017. Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs July 2017. House of the Oireachtas

<sup>11</sup> See for instance Moloney, M. and Pope, J. 2013. Where to now for early childhood care and education graduates? A study of the experiences of Irish BA ECCE degree graduates. *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*. And Moloney, M. and Petterson, J. 2016a. Early childhood education management. Insights into business practice and leadership. London: Routledge. And Moloney, M. 2016b. The Affordable Childcare Scheme – parental panacea, or paradoxical ideology? PLE Technical paper analysis of affordable childcare scheme. PLE

<sup>12</sup> Early Childhood Ireland (March 2017) Doing the Sums – The Real Cost of Providing Childcare.

<sup>13</sup> Moloney, M. 2016

<sup>14</sup> Start Strong (2011) The Economics of Children’s Early Years: Early Care and Education in Ireland – Costs and Benefits. OECD (2014) OECD Family Database. Available at: [http://www.startstrong.ie/files/Childcare\\_Business\\_or\\_Profession\\_Full\\_Report\\_Web\\_Ver](http://www.startstrong.ie/files/Childcare_Business_or_Profession_Full_Report_Web_Ver)

<sup>15</sup> Also highlight in the 2017 joint working group report

<sup>16</sup> National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020: Creating a Better Society for All. Also see current consultation process on gender pay gap.

minimum wage. Many earn less than this. For those holding a Level 7 or 8 degree, the average rate per hour is just one Euro more, and in some instances it remains at €10.27/hour. Worryingly, a significant proportion of this professional workforce, is forced to seek unemployment benefit for two months each summer. This humbling, but mortgage paying, option is not even available to self-employed early years workers.

The 2015 Inter-Department Working Group report<sup>17</sup> highlighted professionalism of the sector as a proxy for quality. All stakeholder representatives preparing this submission agree that in order to progress quality it is necessary for the workforce to professionalise. Professionalism entails; introducing national pay scales and a competency framework with a workforce development strategy with state paid access to essential training, such as that found in the teaching and nursing professions, and which is currently being introduced across other social care sectors<sup>18</sup>. It is also necessary to ensure parity across programmes in order to ensure equity of delivery, this means that minimum qualifications, CPD and progression routes should be implemented for all programmes, rather than the current situation where the various Government schemes to assist affordability and the ECCE scheme have differing standards.

**Recommendation 1: Increase and extend the ECCE capitation system from January 2018 to ensure that no staff, including those working with children under 3 years, are paid less than the living wage.** Increased capitation as outlined, would serve to highlight a genuine commitment to the early years' workforce to address poor pay and conditions. It would also signify recognition that those who work with children within services should not have to subsidise the cost of delivery.

**Recommendation 2: Establish a multi-agency commitment to simplification and streamlining all systems, particularly the Pobal PIP system, inspections, audits and administration processes as well as agreement that new changes to either custom or policy will be introduced only with adequate time for consultation, negotiation and adaptation. KPIs must be developed and agencies assessed on achievement of streamlining these.**

**Recommendation 3: Support the sector through increased investment to link pay to occupational profiles that reflect roles, responsibilities, qualifications, experience. Introduce pay parity with other professions by supporting the development and implementation of a funded national salary scale for the early years' sector. This work**

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<sup>17</sup> Report of Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland. 2015, and 2017 Report on the Working Conditions of the Early Years Education and Care Sector 2017. Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs July 2017. House of the Oireachtas

<sup>18</sup> see [http://www.coru.ie/en/education/continuing\\_professional\\_development](http://www.coru.ie/en/education/continuing_professional_development)

needs to take place with the sector, through a co-production approach, to clarify the mechanism by which a national salary scale can be developed and adhered to over a 5 year period.

## **Quality**

It is widely acknowledged that the quality of early years provision is influenced by staff qualifications and training. While all stakeholders agree on the need for quality early years services, and the fact that bad services can harm children, while good services provide protective measures<sup>19</sup>, this agreement has not been made concrete through strategy, policy development or resourcing. It is estimated that 18% of the work force currently hold an early years' degree. This falls far short of the CoRe (2011) recommendation that 60% of the workforce should be qualified to degree level. Not only does Ireland not have a target to increase the number of graduates, many of those who wish to upskill to degree level are prevented from doing so by their abysmal salaries.

**Recommendation 4: Introduce a national target to increase the number of Level 7 and 8 graduates working in the sector incrementally over the next 5 years from 18% to 40%. In line with this, extend the learner fund to fully fund those already working in the sector to upskill to degree level.**

Of 4,300 services<sup>20</sup> registered with Tusla, the Department of Education and Skills has confirmed that only 150 services have been validated as achieving the standards outlined in Síolta, the national quality framework for early education and care. The work involved in meeting and sustaining these standards requires additional staff time that providers do not have the budget to cover. Only 392 services have been validated as achieving the Healthy Ireland Award, a programme devised under the Healthy Ireland Framework by the HSE in collaboration with the National Childhood Network to support the development of health promoting pre-school services. Time to implement the learning from the programme is also demanding of staff time. DES and Tusla inspections highlight key quality areas which require improvements within many services. Increased investment to cover this cost is essential to enable early years services and staff to reach their true potential and fulfil the vital role they play in the lives of children as they work to achieve and maintain high quality standards. Increased resourcing and financial recompense must be forthcoming on an incremental basis,

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<sup>19</sup> ibid

<sup>20</sup> Pobal 2016 Report on Childcare Services

to assist with all measures, including essential CPD opportunities that build quality provision and practice. Staff who engage in CPD opportunities, in their own time, and generally paid for from their meagre earnings, receive no recognition, or financial reward. However participation of staff in the LINC training programme results in a financial reward for the service involved. This is an unfair situation.

**Recommendation 5:** Introduce a financial incentive (similar to that attached to LINC training) to services where staff engage in upskilling and CPD opportunities that will enhance their capacity to achieve the Healthy Ireland Award, and Síolta Validation for example.

While there are significant demands on services from a variety of bodies (Tusla, Pobal, DCYA, DES), there is a no clear standardised approach to supporting or recognising the achievement of quality standards in all areas of service delivery, nor is there a consistent approach to their promotion, measurement and regulation. As advocates for quality standards we consider the existing system to be inefficient, with little clear information on its effectiveness, mixed messaging coming from the various inspection teams and inadequate supports in place for the achievement of real quality improvements in all services.

**Recommendation 6: Streamline the current inspection system into one unitary model as envisaged within the White paper on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1999.**

As noted in the 2017 joint committee report<sup>21</sup>: ‘The OECD (2012) identified “Improving qualifications, training and working conditions” of the early years workforce as an effective policy lever for improving quality provision in early childhood education and care.’ In endorsing this viewpoint, the following recommendations are intended to progress this over 2018, and beyond.

**Recommendation 7: Provide for 3 days of paid training in the funding model for all staff in 2018,** with a commitment to increase this over time based on the outcomes of the full costs and quality review.

**Recommendation 8: Build in one hour per day paid time for all staff to engage in curriculum planning/review and service development.** This would help staff to better meet the requirements of the Early Years Education Focussed Inspections, as well as the ‘Health, welfare and development of child’ requirements of the Early Years Services Regulations, 2016. Moreover, it would support staff to prepare for engagement with quality development processes

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<sup>21</sup> 2017 Report on the Working Conditions of the Early Years Education and Care Sector 2017. Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs July 2017. House of the Oireachtas

for Síolta and Aistear. Staff should also be supported through the provision of paid time for engagement with interagency processes such as Meitheal. Government funded schemes do not provide paid time for staff to carry out these essential duties which creates a very real tension and well documented<sup>22</sup> challenges. Providing for paid planning and evaluation responsibilities would reduce the gulf between the reality of current service provision and the essential need for early years services to achieve quality standards and contribute to the holistic development of young children, as outlined in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures and the Programme for Government.

**Recommendation 9: Review the supports and timeframe needed to secure the achievement of agreed quality standards in all services.** The adequacy of, and access to the current quality support system also needs to be assessed. Consideration must also be given to the cost of developing and implementing a comprehensive quality support system that all providers can access based on their level of need in progressing the quality agenda.

#### **Other Financial Constraints**

The issue of rates, and VAT has been well documented, and the subject of much debate in recent years. There is no doubt that the cost of rates, and VAT places an inordinate financial burden on providers, and, that these costs are passed onto parents through the service fee. In keeping with Minister Zappone's desire for affordable and accessible childcare for parents, both issues warrant attention.

**Recommendation 10: Formalise agreement with the Department of the Environment that, as education providers implementing the Early Childhood curriculum framework: Aistear and undergoing, Early Years Education Focused inspections, early years care and education services will not be liable for rates, as of 2018.** This measure will directly support increased sustainability of the business model required for the delivery of quality services, and positively impact on the turnover of providers/staff within the sector.

**Recommendation 11: Have the Dept. Finance consider the possibility of 0% VAT status so that providers can claim VAT back on all purchases, and, as an interim measure, reduce employers PRSI until the issue of salary scales and subsidization of them is addressed**

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<sup>22</sup> Department of Education and Skills, Report on the National Consultation Process and the Trial of Early Years Education-Focused Inspections (Department of Education and Skills 2017).

**Recommendation 12: Fulfil obligations within the programme for Government<sup>23</sup> for a full cost and quality review of early years’ provision and appropriate staffing costs to be conducted utilising co-production methodology.** This process would need to articulate what a quality service is in reference to existing quality guidelines and strategic documents<sup>24</sup>, and outline the staff hours and remuneration required to deliver this. This review must involve full engagement with the sector to ensure robust and accurate assessments and analysis.

**Recommendation 13: Maintain and increase the capital grants, by €500,000 and alter the application process to allow for annual requests for maintenance and essential repairs similar to the Summer Works Programme for primary schools.**

While the current system is beneficial, the process means that a centre may successfully apply for a new play gym, however not have funds to pay for essential plumbing repairs that same month.

### **Co-production**

Recent multiagency engagement by the DCYA on the development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme has highlighted the value of state engagement with a variety of sectoral voices. The continuation and strengthening of dialogue with service providers is of prime importance to informed policy making. As anyone working within the sector understands, the structures and system are not simple, there are also numerous examples of policy making that has not adequately considered the realities of the sector and which has been defined by policy reversals such as the deferral of the intended Affordable Childcare Scheme until 2018 or unforeseen negatives such as the decreasing interest among providers and staff in providing services for babies, or in achieving the Síolta quality standards. Co-production is also essential to avoid inefficient and ineffective policy making which leads to frustration among families/service providers and staff as well as with policy makers themselves. Failure to adequately engage with stakeholders and co-construct the development of policies prior to their implementation costs time, money and good will, and ultimately takes resources away from service development. It also generates negativity and hostility to policy makers that could be avoided. It is vital therefore that policy makers and the sector model co-production and co-design approaches. In a recent presentation to stakeholders involved in preparing this submission, Early Years, the

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<sup>23</sup> Department of the Taoiseach, A Programme for a Partnership Government (Department of the Taoiseach 2016) 76.

<sup>24</sup> Namely Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, SOILTA, Aistear, and health Ireland and related programmes.

organisation for young children has cited many examples from Northern Ireland in relation to co designing early years' policy developments.

**Recommendation 14: Dedicate resources to the development of more detailed guidelines and processes to support co-production within early strategy and policy development. An action research evaluation on the effectiveness of co-production models of strategy and policy development should be undertaken alongside this process.**

### **Summary**

There is a positive and increasing commitment to early years' sectoral development within State policy and strategy. In order to translate this commitment into the reality of high quality, affordable service provision, increased systemic financial investment is essential. If this was forthcoming there is potential for Ireland to move towards showing leadership across the world regarding aspects of early years care and education. More importantly, Ireland can move towards providing quality services to the country's most important asset – children. Ultimately they are the stakeholders who will benefit most from the delivery of early years care and education services of a high standard in the future.

### **A summary of recommendations for Budget 2018**

While we have endeavoured to cost a number of the recommendations made it has not been possible as yet to estimate the cost of all.

**Recommendation 1:** Increase ECCE capitation and subvention levels in January 2018 to ensure that no staff, including those working with children under 3 years, are paid less than the living wage.

**Estimated cost:** This will depend on the level of increase approved.

**Recommendation 2: Build in additional non-contact time to the funding model** to support service planning, curriculum development and review, engagement in all quality processes as well as supporting engagement in audits/inspections, engagement with interagency processes such as Meithal, A number of funded programmes (FPSY) do not provide non-contact time, and the programmes that do require extension of this. A lack of non-contact time, which is not seen in other educational environments, creates a very real tension and well documented<sup>25</sup> challenges. Providing for this essential quality development work would reduce the gulf between the reality of service provision and the stated intention for early years to achieve

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<sup>25</sup> Department of Education and Skills, Report on the National Consultation Process and the Trial of Early Years Education-Focused Inspections (Department of Education and Skills 2017).

quality standards and contribute to the educational development of young children, as outlined in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures and the Programme for Government.

**Estimated Costs: €15,000,000**

**Recommendation 3: Develop pay scales for the sector, with an agreement that all staff should start at a living wage, and funding should be ring fenced for wages.** Working with the sector through a co-production approach, clarify the mechanism by which increases could be delivered to staff over 5 years.

**Estimated cost 20,000**

**Recommendation 4: To develop a framework to align pay scales to occupational role profiles.** This framework to be developed in consultation with the sector and developed in line with co-production methodologies.

**Estimated cost: 20,000**

**Recommendation 5:** Introduce a financial incentive (similar to that attached to LINC training) to services where staff engage in achieving Síolta validation for their provision and practice.

**Cost to be estimated**

**Recommendation 6** To fulfil obligations within the programme for Government for a full cost and quality review of early year's provision to be conducted utilising co-production methodology. This process would need to articulate what a quality service is in reference to existing quality guidelines and strategic documents, and outline the staff hours and resources required to deliver quality services. This review needs to be conducted with full engagement with the sector to ensure robust and accurate assessments and analysis.

**Estimated Costs: €70,000 (Budget neutral as this has already been ring-fenced)**

**Recommendation 7 :** To accompany the full cost review, a review of the quality requirements and supports to be undertaken to clarify the time required and how the business model supports this, whether supports are adequate, the quality and accessibility of support and how these can be improved.

**Estimated Costs: €20,000 as part of the full cost review**

**Recommendation 8: To formalise agreement with Department of Environment that, as an education provider, early year's services will not be liable for rates, as of early 2018.** By reducing outgoings this will directly support increased sustainability of business model and have an effect of turnover of providers within the sector.

**Estimated Costs: €4,000,000 approx.**

**Recommendation 9: To maintain the capital grants system, however to increase this by €500,000 and alter the application process to allow for annual requests for maintenance and essential repairs.** The current system is beneficial however the process means that a centre may successfully apply for a new play gym however, not have funds to pay for essential plumbing repairs that same month.

**Estimated Costs: €500,000 (possibly budget neutral – possible use of dormant accounts funding)**

**Recommendation 10: To establish a multi-agency commitment to simplification and streamlining** all systems, inspections, audits and administration processes as well as agreement that new changes to either custom or policy will be introduced only with adequate time for consultation and adaptation. KPIs to be developed and agencies assessed on achievement of streamlining KPIs.

**Estimated Cost: Cost neutral**

**Recommendation 11: Provide for three days of paid training in the funding model for all staff in 2018,** with a commitment to increase this over time based on the outcomes of the full costs and quality review outlined in recommendation 1.

**Costs to be estimated:**

**Recommendation 12: Introduce a national target to increase the number of Level 7 and 8 graduates working in the sector incrementally over the next 5 years from 18% to 40%.**

**(Cost neutral). In line with this, extend the learner fund to fund those already working in the sector to upskill to degree level**

**Costs to be estimated:**

**Recommendation 13: Streamline the current inspection system into one unitary model as envisaged within the White paper on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1999.**

**Cost neutral with the possibility of saving costs**

**Recommendation 14: Dedicate resources to the development of more detailed guidelines and processes to support co-production within early strategy and policy development. An action research evaluation on the effectiveness of co-production models of strategy and policy development should be undertaken alongside this process.**

**Estimated costs:** Development of policy / resources: €20,000, costs of engagement (consultation support fund for sector): €20,000, action research evaluation of the process: €30,000.

**Total 70,000**

