Dear colleagues

Early Years Republic of Ireland e-briefing – w/c 27 June 2016
‘Valuing Staff, Members and their Commitment’

The following briefing outlines key issues or developments of relevance to our members and the organisation in the Republic of Ireland.

1. Weekly agenda
‘Schedule of Business’ link: http://www.oireachtas.ie/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=-1&CatID=60&m=w

Access to Oireachtas Live Webcasts link: http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/watchlisten/

2. Key motions and debates

2.1 Leader’s Questions - Child Care Services Staff

During Leader’s Questions at the Dáil on Wednesday 22 June 2016 Deputy Gino Kenny (Anti-Austerity Alliance – People Before Profit – Dublin Mid West) asked the Taoiseach the average wage for child care workers; and how this compares to European Union and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures. [17147/16]. Deputy Kenny also asked this question as a separate written question. The associated response from Minister of State, Deputy Regina Doherty, and full discussion involving Deputies Doherty, Kenny, Micheál Martin and Gerry Adams, is available via the link, and also replicated below. This covered such areas as the need for better collation of required data, salary levels, staff levels, early child development, workforce recognition and education, training and qualifications.

Leader’s Questions - Child Care Services Staff
http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2016062200016?opendocument#O00050

Deputy Gino Kenny asked the Taoiseach the average wage for child care workers; and how this compares to European Union and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures. [17147/16].

Deputy Regina Doherty (Fine Gale – Meath West): The exact information the Deputy is looking for is not currently available. The statistics on the average wages are compiled from the quarterly earnings, hour and employment costs surveys, EHECS, the periodic labour costs surveys and structure of earnings surveys conducted under EU regulations. While these surveys include breakdowns by sector and by occupation, the figures do not include a separate breakdown with regard to the child care sector. Accurate results at this level of detail cannot be provided from sample surveys.

In the EU statistical classification of economic activities in the European community, NACE, revision 2 system, child day care activities are classified as a sub-group of NACE code 88, social work activities without accommodation. Figures are available for the latter sector from the quarterly EHECS survey, showing an average earning per week of €465.12 in the fourth quarter of 2015. This is the average earning for all occupations working in the social work activities without accommodation sector.
Some comparative EU statistics are available for the social work activities sector from the 2012 EU labour costs survey. Annual earnings in the social work activities sector in Ireland were €32,896 in 2012, the fourth highest average earnings in the EU. The UK had a comparative figure of €28,583, while the EU average was €25,468.

Average hourly earnings for the social work activities sector are also available from the 2012 EU labour cost survey and show that Ireland earned the fourth highest average hourly earnings in the EU, with mean hourly earnings of €20.21. This compares to mean hourly earnings of €15.87 in the UK and a €15.76 average across the EU. Denmark recorded the highest average hourly earnings in this sector with a figure of €26.70.

There are no comparative earnings statistics available on child care workers for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, member countries. The Central Statistics Office, CSO, is currently preparing updated results on the structure of earnings for the years 2011 to 2014 based primarily on administrative rather than survey data. Broad sectoral and occupational statistics from this source will be published before the end of July and more detailed breakdowns will be subsequently available on request from the CSO, subject to the confidentiality rules.

While this will enable a more detailed structural table than before, the CSO does not expect that it will be possible to provide tables on earnings on specific detailed occupation codes within the child care worker sector. To identify earnings of child care workers, individual occupations would need to be coded with a four-digit level of international standard classification of occupations. That does not occur currently.

Deputy Gino Kenny: Strangely enough, I received the Minister of State's response earlier on. It is a bit chaotic here because I was supposed to speak at 3.30 p.m. I was looking over the Minister of State’s response and was listening to her when she was verbally responding. It is probably slightly misleading because I was just looking up the SIPTU average hourly rate for child care workers and it is €9.56. If a person is earning that, he or she will probably earn €380 per week for a very important job. I was at a major protest outside the Dáil about a year and a half ago about child care workers who have been so badly paid. There is a huge turnover of child care workers. The Government said that it would address it and so forth. From my research on this, Ireland has the highest cost of child care in the OECD but I do not know the position at this moment. It is a very important industry. It came into the news about two years ago because of the turnover of workers as well as job practice and employment legislation. I do not know if the Minister of State can comment on that.

Deputy Regina Doherty: There is a variance between the details I read out and the information the Deputy got from SIPTU. SIPTU, in my opinion, classify child care workers at a different mean level of average. For argument’s sake, the OECD and the CSO take child care workers as a sector. That could be somebody working in a crèche right up to somebody working for Tusla, as a clinical social care worker. That is where the mean average is coming from.

I agree with the Deputy that we expect a very high standard, and rightly so, from our child care providers and yet they are probably among some of the lower-paid workers in the country. I was also at the protest outside the House a couple of years ago that the Deputy mentioned.

Deputy Regina Doherty: A great deal of work is being done with the sector. Many educational resources are being provided, including compensation for improvements in standards in the sector not only with regard to education but also in terms of facilities. However, the salary is very much on the lower end of the scale, which is why the Low Pay Commission and particularly the aspiration to move to the living
wage are important policies for the Government. That is where I hope we would pursue it.

**Deputy Micheál Martin** (Fianna Fáil – Cork South-Central): I am disappointed that there appears to be an incapacity within the system to get the average working wage for child care workers. I note the reply suggests that because it is a broader social work category which the CSO examines, it is not in a position to look at child care work. That is poor from a policy formulation perspective. We are not in a position to identify officially, and with statistical precision, what the average child care worker is being paid. That will clearly impact in terms of policy development. We have all met with workers in the child care sector and there is a real issue in this regard. In fact, the sector is in crisis because of the downward spiral in wages. Many young students undertook early childhood studies and secured bachelor of arts degrees because, over the last decade, it was considered to be a growing issue and one the country wished to provide for and so forth. My view is that the sector is under the wrong Department. The sooner it is more aligned with education, the better. I tried to do it once but the Department of Justice and Equality wanted the responsibility under the current programme and then it moved to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The salary levels are too low but it would be useful if we could have statistical work carried out on it. Many young people will not choose these courses in college or further education colleges because of the wage structures afterwards. There is a huge responsibility. All of the providers are at the end of their tether as well because of the various inspections and so forth, and then they cannot keep personnel in work because they wish to go elsewhere. The years from birth to three years of age are the most important three years in a person’s development. They will learn more in those three years than they will learn for the rest of their lives and yet the level of wages for those workers, and I acknowledge there is a historical background to this, is way below anything in primary teaching or otherwise. Therefore, clear choices will be made where people have signed on for early childhood education due to a love of it and, after four or five years, there is no appreciable improvement in sight in terms of career prospects or wages. My concern is that there is a very bleak prospect for the sector in general for the future and that we will go backwards in terms of attracting the right personnel into the sector with proper prospects.

I ask that the CSO looks again at how it is carrying out the various statistical analyses. From a policy perspective, this country should be seeking to get a proper understanding of what is happening with wages in the child care sector. I am not referring to the higher levels but to those not just in crèches but also in early schools, and the difference between what is happening in the private sector as opposed to the community sector and the State sector. There is an opportunity there to do something more fundamental. More, and more specific, statistics on the child care sector would be very welcome.

**Deputy Gerry Adams** (Sinn Féin – Louth): The Minister of State said earlier that she does not agree that there is a race to the bottom, which does not mean there is no race to the bottom. There is. The child care sector employs approximately 25,000 women and, as Deputy Gino Kenny said, the average pay is €9.56 per hour. Many of the workers must do significant preparation and administrative work which in many cases is unpaid. That is unacceptable and causes burn-out. In spite of the high cost of child care to parents, the educators on whom the quality of care depends are undervalued and underpaid. There is no job security or paid leave for many. Many child care workers are laid off in the summer months and many services are unable to pay staff for anything other than core hours. There is evidence that highly skilled graduates are being lost from the sector. The pay and conditions of child care workers must be a consideration for a quality child care system to work.
I understand the Department of Education and Skills is carrying out a comprehensive review of the education and training qualifications in early childhood education. When will that review be complete? Would it also be possible to carry out a review of wages paid to child care workers, with a view to introducing salary scales and raising payments accordingly? Will the Government also review the rights of child care workers with a view to strengthening and enhancing them?

Deputy Regina Doherty: There is a risk of straying into policy matters which have absolutely nothing to do with me, so I will reply to the questions on statistics and refer Deputy Adams and Deputy Martin to the relevant Ministers to discuss the policy issues they raise.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister is learning too quickly.

Deputy Regina Doherty: I know my place. Regarding the data, I appreciate the constraints the Deputies mention in so far as we are only collecting them by sector and are not breaking them down by digits but we are not alone in that. Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and the OECD countries collect the data in the same way we do. That is not to say it is the right way.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is masking the problem.

Deputy Regina Doherty: Yes, I know. However, it is not necessary to conduct a collective survey of every child care worker in the country to find out what the average wage is. If SIPTU can arrive at €9.56 for the average child care worker in preschool, obviously we can do it based on sample surveys. I say that because the cost prohibiting us collecting the data is relevant and we must be aware of that. However, let us have a look at it. Deputy Gino Kenny raised this in the first instance, so let us find out if we can get a sample of the particular sector we are discussing to see if it corroborates or matches what SIPTU has announced and perhaps that could feed into some policy decisions to which the Deputies are keen to have changes made. I can come back to the Deputies on it.

2.2 Statements on the EU/UK Referendum Results
On Monday 27 June 2016 Dáil Éireann business largely focused on the result of the EU/UK Referendum. The full debate, covering a range of potential implications at national, bilateral and international level, can be accessed via the following Houses of the Oireachtas website link. A summary of the debate is also available via the RTÉ web link also included below:

Monday 27 June – United Kingdom Referendum on European Union Membership: Statements
http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/tak es/dail2016062700001?opendocument

Taoiseach: Stakes over Brexit ‘always higher for Ireland’ – RTÉ news

3. Questions to the Taoiseach
3.1 Child Care Services Staff

Deputy Gino Kenny (Anti-Austerity Alliance – People Before Profit – Dublin Mid West) asked the Taoiseach the average wage for child care workers; how this compares to European Union and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures. [14721/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): The exact information requested by the Deputy is currently not available. Statistics on average wages are compiled from the quarterly Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey (EHECS), and from the periodic Labour Costs Survey and Structure of Earnings Surveys conducted under EU Regulations. While these surveys include
breakdowns by sector and by occupation, the figures do not include a separate breakdown in relation to childcare workers. Accurate results at this level of detail cannot be provided from sample surveys. In the EU NACE Rev 2 economic activity classification system, Child day-care activities are classified as a sub-group of NACE code 88, Social work activities without accommodation. Figures are available for the latter sector from the quarterly EHECS survey, showing average earnings per week of €465.12 in quarter four of 2015. This is the average earnings for all occupations working in the Social work activities without accommodation sector.

Some comparative EU statistics are available for the Social work activities sector from the 2012 EU-Labour Costs Survey. Average earnings in the Social work activities sector in Ireland were €32,896 in 2012, the fourth highest average earnings in the EU. The United Kingdom had a comparative figure of €28,583, while the European Union average was €25,468. See Table 1.

Average hourly earnings for the Social work activities sector are also available from the 2012 EU-Labour Cost Survey and show that Ireland earned the fourth highest average hourly earnings in the European Union, with mean hourly earnings of €20.21. This compares to mean hourly earnings of €15.87 in the UK and €15.76 as an EU average. Denmark recorded the highest average hourly earnings in this sector with a figure of €26.70. See Table 1.

There are no comparative statistics available on childcare workers for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries. The CSO is currently preparing updated results on the structure of earnings for the years 2011 to 2014, based primarily on administrative rather than survey data. Broad sectoral and occupational statistics from this source will be published before the end of July and more detailed breakdowns will subsequently be available upon request, subject to CSO confidentiality rules. While this will enable more detailed structural tables than before, the CSO does not expect that it will be possible to provide tables on earnings on specific detailed occupation codes of child care workers. To identify the earnings of childcare workers, individual occupations would need to be coded at the 4 digit level of the International Standard Classification of Occupations.

Table 1: Mean annual and hourly earnings in Social work activities sector (NACE code 88) - 2008 and 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Annual Earnings</th>
<th>Average Annual Earnings</th>
<th>Average Hourly Earnings</th>
<th>Average Hourly Earnings</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>€</td>
<td>€</td>
<td>€</td>
<td>€</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Union (28 countries)</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Growth</td>
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<td>28,972</td>
<td>28,583</td>
<td>-1.28%</td>
<td>-1.48%</td>
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4. Questions to the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality

4.1 Traveller Community

Deputy Gino Kenny (Anti-Austerity Alliance – People Before Profit – Dublin Mid West) asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she is considering recognising the ethnicity of Travellers during the lifetime of this Government. [17153/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The issue of Traveller ethnicity is being considered within the context of discussions on the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. The final phase of a three phase consultative process in terms of the development of that Inclusion Strategy is currently underway at a cross-Departmental level under the coordination of my officials. There will be a further round of public consultations with interested parties, as part of that process, in September 2016.

It is important that the discussion on this issue be an inclusive one, including members of broader Irish society, so that we can develop a greater understanding within society in general of the issue. I have initiated discussion with Traveller interests on this question of how work on involving mainstream Irish society in the discussion can be taken forward in the context of finalisation of the new Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.

4.2 Paternity Leave Scheme

Deputy Brendan Howlin (Labour – Wexford) asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she intends that the Bill to introduce two weeks of paid paternity leave will be a step along the road to introducing a year’s paid parental leave to be shared between mothers and fathers; the timetable for proposed further developments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17143/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, the Paternity Leave and Benefit Bill 2016 was published on
Monday, and I look forward to the Bill's passage through the Oireachtas and the debate on its provisions. The additional steps required to implement the commitment in the Programme for Partnership Government to increase parental leave significantly in the first year of a child’s life will be taken forward by the relevant departments over the next five years, under the aegis of the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy.

5. Questions to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

5.1 Child Care Services Provision

Deputy James Browne (Fianna Fáil – Wexford) asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will make a statement on the matter. [17074/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a number of childcare support programmes. These are the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme, the Community Childcare Subvention Private (CCSP) Programme and the Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) programmes. These programmes primarily provide support for childcare and early years education in formal settings such as preschools and creches, some of which are run by community/not-for profit organisations, and some by private providers.

With a budget of €233m for 2016, the largest scheme is the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, which from September 2016, will make free preschool available for 15 hours per week for 38 weeks per annum to all children from the time they turn three, until they go to school, entering at three points in the year: September, January and April. On average, from September 2016, children will benefit from 61 weeks, up from the current provision of 38 weeks. Access to the average 61 weeks of ECCE can reduce the cost of childcare by €4000 per child. The current ECCE programme is accommodating 67,000 children; this figure will increase to 127,000 next year.

The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme provides funding to childcare services to enable them to provide quality childcare, including after-school care, at reduced rates to disadvantaged and low income working parents. Parents qualify as disadvantaged or low income on the basis of means-tested entitlements. With a budget of €45m it is anticipated that over 25,000 children will benefit from this programme this year in over 900 community (not for profit) childcare services. In the case of full day care, parents qualifying for the higher rate of subvention under the CCS programme can have up to €95 per week deducted from the overall charge for childcare in the participating childcare facility.

As part of Budget 2016, the Department announced an expansion of the CCS programme to allow private services to offer the programme. This expansion provided for a further 3,200 (full-time equivalent) childcare places on the programme, or approximately 8,000 children based on average uptake. The expansion also saw the inclusion of private childcare providers in the CCS Programme for the first time. The Community Childcare Subvention Private (CCSP) Programme launched in March 2016. The 2016 budget for CCSP programme is €16m.

The following three programmes ASCC, CEC and CETS are known collectively as the Training and Employment Childcare ('TEC') programmes. My Department administers two programmes, ASCC and CEC, on behalf of the Department of Social Protection. ASCC provides subsidised childcare to support low-income and unemployed people who have primary school children in returning to work or to increase their days of employment. CEC supports people engaged in Community Employment Schemes who have preschool children and/or primary school children. Eligibility for these programmes is the responsibility of the Department of Social Protection.
The After-School Childcare (ASCC) programme has a budget of €1.3m and has capacity to provide 300 whole-time equivalent after-school places annually. Each eligible parent is given a maximum allowance of 52 weeks of ASCC which does not have to be used consecutively, but when it is exhausted, the parent’s eligibility ceases. ASCC childcare places are subject to availability and are allocated on a first-come first served basis. The programme pays childcare services €40 per week for an after-school place or €80 per week in situations where the childcare service provides a pick-up service that collects or brings the child to and from school. The programme also provides a full day care rate of €105 per week, for a maximum of 10 weeks, to cater for school holiday periods. In all cases, the maximum fee payable by parents is €15 per week per child.

The Community Employment Childcare (CEC) programme, with a budget of €6.7m, has capacity to provide 1,200 preschool places and 800 afterschool places. It is targeted specifically at participants in the Community Employment (CE) schemes. Each eligible parent can avail of a maximum of 50 weeks childcare per academic year. Eligible parents must reapply for childcare each September. CEC childcare places are subject to availability and are allocated on a first-come first served basis. Under this programme, childcare services are paid €80 per week for pre-school places for children up to the age of 5 and €40 per week for after-school places for primary school children up to the age of 13, with a set charge of €15 per week to the parent in either case. The programme also provides a part time day care rate of €80 per week, for a maximum of 10 weeks, to cater for school holiday periods.

My Department administers the Childcare Education and Training Support programme on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. With a budget of €17m, the Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS) programme provides 2,500 childcare places, including part-time and after-school places, to qualifying Solas or Education and Training Boards (ETB) trainees or students for the duration of their courses. Eligibility for the CETS programme is determined by the Department of Education and Skills.

In late 2017 my Department plans to replace ASCC, CEC, CETS and CCS/CCSP; with a single and simplified programme that will be available through community (not for profit) and private childcare providers. This programme, when developed, will provide an infrastructure through which any further investment in the subsidisation of childcare can be delivered.

6. Questions to the Minister for Education and Skills

6.1 Preschool Services

Deputy John Brassil (Fianna Fáil – Kerry) asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current policy towards the opening and facilitation of preschools in existing primary schools where there is adequate space to provide a facility and a demonstrated need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16737/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015 - 2019 specifies that the use of school premises during the school day, for purposes other than regular school business, must have the prior approval of the Minister.

Proposals to the Minister to allow use of accommodation during the school day have been facilitated in the past, provided that the school's current and future accommodation needs are not compromised and the consent of the patron has been received. In general, future accommodation needs for the primary school intake will take precedence over the needs of the preschool. A proposal from the school concerned will be considered in that regard.

In facilitating the establishment of preschools in schools or co-located with schools, my Department looks favourably on the establishment of preschool facilities on
school sites. However, there are a number of complex issues that need to be considered in respect of such arrangements. These issues, including property, governance, insurance and liability, are being considered as part of a review within my Department of the requirements to be established around the use of school premises/property for preschool services and the preparation of guidelines in relation to same.

My Department is seeking legal advice in relation to certain aspects and when this advice is received, it will be considered by officials in my Department with a view to putting arrangements in place to facilitate this matter.

My Department is also working closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in relation to the Programme for Government commitment to facilitate the use of school premises outside of the school day for afterschool care and other community purposes.

6.2 Irish Language

Deputy Carol Nolan (Sinn Féin – Offaly) asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will carry out a projection of the future demand among parents for the provision of education through the medium of the Irish language; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16916/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places will arise nationwide. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and information from my Department’s own databases. With this information my Department carries out demographic analyses to determine where additional school places are required nationwide.

When it is decided that a new school is required to meet demographic needs in an area, my Department runs a separate patronage process to decide who will operate the school. It is open to all patrons and prospective patrons to apply for patronage of the school under this process and the level of parental preference for each patron, including for those providing Irish-medium education, is key to decisions in relation to the outcome of the process.

The criteria used in assessing the patronage applications received from prospective patrons place a particular emphasis on parental demand for plurality and diversity of provision, with parental preferences at the centre of the process. In this regard, prospective patrons must collect and demonstrate evidence of the level of parental demand for their preferred model of provision and medium of instruction, English or Irish, as part of their application under this process.

In this context, I recently announced the patronage of the three new primary schools which will open in September of this year. The outcome of the patronage process is that, Educate Together, a multi-denominational provider, is patron of the two new schools to serve the Cabra/Phibsborough/Dublin 7 area and the Drumcondra/Marino/Dublin 1 area and An Foras Pátrúnachta is the patron of the new school to serve the Goatstown/Stillorgan school planning area, providing education through the medium of Irish.

My Department is currently carrying out an analysis of the applications received for the patronage of the nine new post-primary schools which will open in coming years - six in September 2017 and three in September 2018. In line with the arrangements referred to above, prospective patrons were required to submit with their application a parental preference template in which parents have been requested to state their preference for their child(ren) to be educated through the medium of English or Irish. On completion of this assessment, my Department will draft a report for the
consideration of the New Schools Establishment Group who will submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision.

6.4 Special Educational Needs Service Provision

Deputy Carol Nolan (Sinn Féin – Offaly) asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that currently have no special needs unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16918/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's policies focus on ensuring that all children can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in mainstream school settings through the primary and post-primary school network.

Section 2 of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act provides that a child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs, unless the nature or degree of the needs of the child is such that it would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child, or children with whom the child is to be educated.

Accordingly, most children with special educational needs will attend mainstream schools with additional resources provided to assist the child in that setting.

For pupils who have needs which require more specialist interventions, my Department provides for special classes and special school placements.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post-primary schools for special educational needs supports, including the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

The NCSE recently published a list of special classes for the 2016/17 school year, details of which are available at www.ncse.ie.

In total there will be 1153 special classes available next year, which is an increase of almost 100% in the number of special classes which were available in 2011, which was 548.

There will be 842 special classes in 421 primary schools from September 2016, which means that approximately 13% of primary schools now have one, or more, special classes.

There will be 311 special classes in 193 post-primary schools from September 2016, which means that approximately 26% of post-primary schools now have one, or more, special classes.

The NCSE continues to monitor and review the requirement for special class places in particular areas and has capacity to establish such new special classes where necessary subject to the willingness of schools to open classes.

Full details of all special classes are available at www.ncse.ie.

6.5 Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Deputy Carol Nolan (Sinn Féin – Offaly) asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children currently being taught in classes that have fewer than 25 pupils, have between 25 and 28 pupils, and have over 28 pupils, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16919/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Provisional results from the 2015/2016 National School Annual Census showing the information requested by the Deputy are shown in the following table. Final figures will be published at the end of June. Further details on individual school class size are available on my Department's website at
www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/. Due to the moveable nature of classes at post-primary level depending on subject choices, class size data are not available at post-primary level.

Provisional Data - Number of Pupils In Mainstream Chasses classified by class size and County, 2015/2016 National School Annual Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>PUPILS 0-25</th>
<th>CLASSES 0-25</th>
<th>PUPILS 25-28</th>
<th>CLASSES 25-28</th>
<th>PUPILS OVER 28</th>
<th>CLASSES OVER 28</th>
<th>TOTALS PUPILS</th>
<th>TOTALS CLASSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>40,877</td>
<td>2038</td>
<td>46,809</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td>46,602</td>
<td>1544</td>
<td>134,288</td>
<td>5332</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>21,438</td>
<td>1071</td>
<td>18,508</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>21,139</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>61,085</td>
<td>2450</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>12,234</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>8,335</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>8,994</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>29,563</td>
<td>1243</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kildare</td>
<td>6,830</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>12,079</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>10,125</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>29,034</td>
<td>1105</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>5,402</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>9,778</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>11,140</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>26,320</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>7,272</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>6,939</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>8,031</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>22,242</td>
<td>890</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>7,262</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>5,584</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>6,010</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>18,856</td>
<td>791</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tipperary</td>
<td>7,392</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>5,818</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>5,198</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>18,408</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wexford</td>
<td>5,872</td>
<td>283</td>
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<td>237</td>
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<td>198</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>4,411</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>6,879</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>6,180</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>17,470</td>
<td>672</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>5,504</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>5,308</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>5,938</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>16,750</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>6,496</td>
<td>335</td>
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<td>4,698</td>
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<td>663</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>6,466</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>3,960</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>3,892</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>14,318</td>
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<tr>
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<td>199</td>
<td>4,926</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>5,116</td>
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<td>14,137</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>5,721</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3,778</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>4,101</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>13,600</td>
<td>575</td>
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<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
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<td>188</td>
<td>3,371</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>3,920</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>11,046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kilkenny</td>
<td>3,323</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>3,753</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>10,876</td>
<td>427</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>3,631</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>3,802</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>3,262</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>10,695</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>4,322</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>3,053</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>2,460</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>9,835</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>4,002</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>3,333</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2,234</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>9,569</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>2,832</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>2,265</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2,464</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7,561</td>
<td>305</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>1,758</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2,882</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>2,881</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>7,521</td>
<td>287</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>3,158</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>2,186</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2,056</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>7,400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>3,109</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>1,835</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2,420</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>7,364</td>
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<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
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<td>108</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>1,573</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5,140</td>
<td>212</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leitrim</td>
<td>1,563</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3,646</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>180875</td>
<td>9093</td>
<td>178795</td>
<td>6724</td>
<td>181285</td>
<td>5907</td>
<td>540955</td>
<td>21724</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.6 Gaeltacht Policy

Deputy Carol Nolan (Sinn Féin – Offaly) asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will finalise and publish the Gaeltacht education policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16925/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The drafting of a Policy on Education in the Gaeltacht is at an advanced stage. This is a key response by my Department to the Government’s commitment to implement the Twenty Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 – 2030.
I will consider the Policy and its recommendations and will present it to my colleagues in Government for approval.
I expect that the report will be published before the end of the year.

6.7 Special Educational Needs Data

Deputy Thomas Byrne (Fianna Fáil – Meath East) asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students with special needs in mainstream classes at primary and post-primary level in the school years 2014/2015 and 2015/2016, in tabular form. [16994/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested is presented in the following table.

Number of Students accessing additional learning supports in Primary and Post Primary Mainstream Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Primary GAM*</th>
<th>Primary LITH</th>
<th>Post Primary HITH*</th>
<th>Post Primary LITH</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>110,813</td>
<td>25,647</td>
<td>10,623</td>
<td>12,767</td>
<td>159,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>113,888</td>
<td>28,714</td>
<td>10,835</td>
<td>14,217</td>
<td>167,654</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimated.

7. Questions to the Minister for Health

National Children's Hospital

Deputy Louise O’Reilly (Sinn Féin – Dublin Fingal) asked the Minister for Health the consultation his Department undertook with parents’ groups, patient advocacy groups, staff and other stakeholders in respect of the location of the new children’s hospital; when it undertook this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16871/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The new children’s hospital will be co-located with St James’s Hospital on its campus at Dublin 8, and ultimately trilocated with the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital, which will re-locate to the campus in due course. Satellite centres of the hospital, providing urgent and outpatient care, are to be built on the campuses of Connolly and Tallaght Hospitals.

The decision of An Bord Pleanála on April 28 last to grant planning permission for the hospital, satellite centres and related buildings is a huge and very welcome milestone for the project, and means that construction can now commence on all three sites in the coming weeks and months.

At every stage of this project over the years, through the various reports and the design process, there has been extensive consultation with numerous stakeholders and interested parties.

In 2012, following the refusal by An Bord Pleanála of planning permission for the hospital at the Mater campus, Minister Reilly established the Dolphin Group to advise on next steps. The Group met with a range of stakeholder groups and interested parties, including advocacy groups such as the Jack and Jill foundation, Children in Hospital Ireland and the Youth Advisory Council, CEOs, clinicians, nurses and health and social care professionals from the existing hospitals, and representatives of children's research organisations.

Previous reports and reviews on the location also involved stakeholder consultation. The 2006 Joint HSE/Department of Health Task Force met with advocacy groups including Heart Children Ireland, Cystic Fibrosis Ireland, the Irish Patients Association and the New Crumlin Hospital Action Group, as well as with the existing hospitals and maternity hospitals. In 2011, an Independent Review Group established by Minister Reilly to review the project at the Mater campus also included
stakeholder consultation as part of its work, consulting with parents and care givers as well as the hospitals themselves and the Faculty of Paediatrics.

During the design process for the hospital, there have also been extensive consultations with families, young people and children who are former or current users of the service, with staff of the existing hospitals, with clinical leads and with local residents. This process has led to the development of a world-class building which has been designed to enable staff to deliver the best possible clinical care for children and young people, while also seeking to provide a pleasant environment for staff and families.

8. Questions to the Minister for Social Protection

8.1 Child Benefit Eligibility

Deputy Sean Fleming (Fianna Fáil – Laois) asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will consider extending child benefit to students who are in full-time secondary education even though they have reached 18 years of age, given that it is a very expensive time for parents and families when the students are coming up to leaving certificate to withdraw this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16867/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability.

Child Benefit is currently paid to around 624,000 families in respect of some 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure in the order of over €2 billion in 2016. Child Benefit is an important source of income for all families and in Budget 2016 the Government increased Child Benefit by €5 per month, at a cost of €72 million.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years. A value for money review of child income supports, published by the Department of Social Protection in 2010, found that the participation pattern of children in education supports the current age limit for Child Benefit.

Families on low incomes can avail of a number of provisions to social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- qualified child increases (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- family income supplement (FIS) for low-paid employees with children;
- the back to school clothing and footwear allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second level education rate).

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked with household income and thereby supports low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Extending Child Benefit to students who are in full-time secondary education who are over 18 years of age can be examined between now and the budget with the caveat that there are potentially other areas of need that also have to be accounted for.

Any changes to the eligibility criteria for Child Benefit, therefore, would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

8.2 Community Services Programme

Deputy Charlie McConalogue (Fianna Fáil – Donegal) asked the Minister for Social Protection if he has invited any organisations to make an application to the community services programme; if not, when he expects to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17188/16]
Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The community services programme (CSP) is designed to address gaps in the delivery of key local services, to tackle disadvantage and to ensure that community facilities are utilised. It provides valuable resourcing for service delivery undertaken by not-for-profit companies and cooperatives in communities around the country. There are some 3,000 people in full and part time posts which are supported in employment by the programme across approximately 400 not-for-profit companies. Funding of just over €45m has been provided for the programme in 2016 which will maintain the current level of activity. Service providers must operate community or social enterprises that deliver tangible services and are capable of generating non-public revenues from their operations by way of charging fees, sales and/or fundraising. The programme is not intended to represent full funding for any operation.

Given the level of resources available and the number of companies currently supported the Department has been unable to make an open call for new proposals to the programme for a number of years. However, from time to time as resources allow, the Department does process new applications received from organisations that have expressed an interest in and are considered eligible under the programme. Any not-for-profit company wishing to be considered for the programme can send an expression of interest to the Department by email to cspinfo@welfare.ie. I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

8.3 Child Benefit Payments

Deputy Carol Nolan (Sinn Féin – Offaly) asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on proposals to link child benefit payments to school attendance rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17708/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Child Benefit as a universal payment to help families with the cost of raising children and plays an important role in tackling child poverty. It does not rely on a means test or social insurance contributions and is paid to the parents of qualified children up to the age of 18 years. It is paid to around 624,000 families for almost 1.2 million children with my Department spending this year an estimated €2 billion on Child Benefit.

It is not linked to school attendance for children under 16 and the Social Welfare Acts do not require monitoring of school attendance for under 16s. There is no power in the Act to do so.

For older children aged 16 and 17 years, an annual declaration is required from parents, signed by their school, that their children attend school or they have a disability.

The monitoring of children’s attendance at school is an important child welfare issue and is monitored by TUSLA under the Education (Welfare) Acts on a statutory basis on behalf of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Any issues concerning school attendance including the operation of the monitoring systems are a matter for TUSLA and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

My Department operates control programmes on all departmental schemes, designed to ensure that payments cease where there is no longer an entitlement. Child Benefit operates a very effective and efficient control programme, ensuring that payment is only paid to families who continue to have an entitlement.

8.4 Child Benefit Administration

Deputy Michael McGrath (Fianna Fáil – Cork South-Central) asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of increasing the age at which child benefit is paid to cover children in full-time education up to 19, 20, 21 and 22 years of age respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17787/16]
Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability.

Child Benefit is currently paid to around 624,000 families in respect of some 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure in the order of over €2 billion in 2016. Child Benefit is an important source of income for all families and in Budget 2016 the Government increased Child Benefit by €5 per month, at a cost of €72 million.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years. A value for money review of child income supports, published by the Department of Social Protection in 2010, found that the participation pattern of children in education supports the current age limit for Child Benefit.

Families on low incomes can avail of a number of provisions to social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- qualified child increases (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- family income supplement (FIS) for low-paid employees with children;
- the back to school clothing and footwear allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second level education rate).

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked with household income and thereby supports low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

The estimated annual costs of extending the upper age limits for payment for those in all full time education settings, based on figures from the Department of Education and Skills are as follows:-

- Up to 19 years in the region of €147.8 million
- Up to 20 years in the region of €205.8 million

It is not possible to disaggregate the figures for 21 year olds and 22 year olds as the Department of Education and Skills only capture the numbers of all people in education age 21 and over.

Any changes to the eligibility criteria for Child Benefit have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

9. News releases and articles

Department of the Taoiseach

Chief Whip announces Legislation Programme for the Current Session

Government Chief Whip Regina Doherty has announced the Legislation Programme for the Current Session

The Legislation Programme can be downloaded by clicking below:


The full press release can be accessed here:

**Taoiseach on UK Vote to Leave European Union**

Government Statement on EU Referendum Result


**Government Brexit Contingency Plans Announced**

The Government has adopted a Contingency Framework identifying key policy issues to be managed by Government Departments arising from the referendum vote in the UK to leave the EU.

The framework will ensure that the Government and its constituent Departments are able to focus on key policy areas/issues to be addressed in any exit negotiations with a view to minimising potential operational risks likely to arise.

Priority issues identified include: UK-EU Negotiations, British-Irish Relations, Northern Ireland, Trade, Investment, North-South Border Impacts, Competitiveness and Macro–economic issues, Research/Innovation funding and Energy.

The press release can be accessed by clicking below:


A summary of the key actions to manage contingencies arising can be accessed via the link below:


**Department of Education and Skills**

**Minister Bruton announces Action Plan for Disadvantaged Schools**

Minister Bruton visited a primary school in north Dublin to lay out his initial plans to improve opportunities for children from disadvantaged areas, as part of his first major public engagement as education Minister.

The plan is expected to include targeted measures in the areas of:

Supporting school leadership.Networks and clusters for DEIS teachers and schools – including greater supported self-evaluation.Teaching methodologies.Explore ways in which the work of schools could be better integrated with other state supports within the community.Greater use of Home School Community Liaison.


**Minister Bruton announces 860 extra Special Needs Assistants by end 2016**

Education Minister Richard Bruton has announced the provision of 860 additional Special Needs Assistants which will be available for allocation to schools over the period September to December 2016, a 7% increase, in order to meet the level of assessed demand.

This will bring the total number of Special Needs Assistants to 12,900, at a total gross annual cost of €425m. This increase reflects the growing participation of children with Special Needs and will support their full participation and progression within the educational system.
There will also be a comprehensive assessment of the SNA Scheme, to be carried out by the National Council for Special Education. The aim of this process will be to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs and to ensure that we are making the best form of additional investment for children with special needs.


Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Better Pre-School Access for Children with Disabilities: ‘Access and Inclusion’

Children with disabilities will have better access to pre-school under a new programme of supports unveiled on 15th June 2016 by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone TD.

AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, depending on the needs of the child and the pre-school. It is being introduced from today to allow parents and pre-school providers to apply for supports and plan ahead for September enrolments. A range of different initiatives are being launched as part of the model as follows:

- In order to foster an inclusive culture, the Minister has published a new Inclusion Charter for the Early Years sector, alongside updated and strengthened Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education. A programme of training on the guidelines will now be rolled out nationally over the coming months.

- Applications will open this week for a new higher education programme for early years practitioners (LINC) which will commence this September. The LINC programme is being delivered by a consortium, led by Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, together with Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University and Early Childhood Ireland. Development and design of the programme was financed by the Department of Education and Skills from dormant accounts funding, while the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will fund up to 900 places per annum on the programme. Graduates from the programme will be able to take on a new leadership role of Inclusion Co-ordinator within their pre-school setting which will attract an increase of €2 per child per week in the rate of ECCE capitation payable to that setting. This programme is part of a broader package of education and training supports to upskill the early years workforce in relation to inclusion and disability.

- A new national service is open for business from today. Through this service, which is based in the Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service, expert advice, mentoring and support is available to pre-school providers from a team of 50 specialists in early years care and education for children with disabilities.

- A new national scheme is open from Friday, 24th June providing specialised equipment, appliances and minor alterations which are necessary to support a child’s participation in the ECCE programme.

- A new national scheme is open from this Friday, 17th June providing additional capitation to pre-school providers where this is critical to fund extra support in the classroom and enable a child’s participation in pre-school. It is estimated that only 1 to 1.5% of children in pre-school will require, and therefore be eligible for, this scheme of additional capitation.
A new dedicated website on AIM is being launched today. This contains comprehensive information on the model and on how to apply for the new schemes and supports. The website also contains the new Inclusion Charter and Guidelines, as well as a range of other resources.

**Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) - Information and Contact Leaflet**

**Access Inclusion Model website**
http://www.preschoolaccess.ie/

**Department of Health**

*Minister Harris welcomes additional €500 million for health*

Health Minister Simon Harris today welcomed the Government approval of a Revised Estimate for the Department of Health of €500 million, saying that it would allow Programme for Government commitments to be met while also addressing financial pressures in the health service.

http://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/News/Minister_Harris_welcomes_additional_€500_million_for_health.html

**Department of Finance**

*Summer Economic Statement published*

Finance Minister Michael Noonan and Public Expenditure and Reform Minister Paschal Donohoe have published the Summer Economic Statement for 2016 which forms the basis for political discussions on the revised budgetary process for Budget 2017 and increases transparency in the Government’s approach to planning for the provision of key public services.

The Summer Economic Statement outlines the broad parameters that will underpin discussions of economic and fiscal policy over the medium term. The analysis contained in the document is based on the macroeconomic assumptions that were set out in the Stability Programme Update in April 2016 and were endorsed by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council at the time.

The Summer Economic Statement sets out the Government’s economic and fiscal priorities against a background of the economic recovery which is now firmly established with impressive growth of 7.8% and an acceptable deficit of just 2.3% in 2015. This Statement facilitates an open discussion about options and priorities well in advance of the October budget.

The Summer Economic Statement can be accessed via the link below:

The full press release can be accessed by clicking below:
http://www.merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/News/Ministers_Noonan_and_Donohoe_publish_the_Summer_Economic_Statement_.html
**Department of Public Expenditure and Reform**

*Minister Donohoe announces increase of €540 million in Government Expenditure*

Public Expenditure Minister Paschal Donohoe has welcomed Government approval for an increase of €540 million in the proposed Government Expenditure for 2016.


**Department of Justice and Equality**

*Fitzgerald and Varadkar mark Father’s Day with publication of Paternity Bill*

Tánaiste Frances Fitzgerald and Social Protection Minister Leo Varadkar marked Father’s Day by confirming publication of the Paternity Bill to provide fathers with two weeks of paternity leave and two weeks of paternity benefit.

The two Ministers visited Farmleigh today to promote the Bill to families.

When enacted, the legislation will allow new fathers to start the combined package of paternity leave and paternity benefit at any time within the first six months following birth. It will also apply to the fathers of newly adopted children.


Please also feel free to share this briefing with colleagues, staff, members and parents/carers. For any further information, comments or suggestions in relation to any of the above items please feel free to contact: Noel McAllister (noelmc@early-years.org).