



## **Fianna Fáil Consultation Session**

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

#### ***'Listening to the Voice of the Early Childhood Sector'***

A number of early childhood service providers, educators and parents took part in a consultation session hosted by Deputy Robert Troy, Fianna Fáil Spokesperson on Children in the Roachestown Park Hotel, Cork on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2014. The session successfully captured the views and thoughts of participants and will inform Deputy Troy's forthcoming updated edition of *Investing in Tomorrow*, the Fianna Fáil Discussion Paper on Early Childhood Care and Education.

Marian Quinn, Chairperson of the Association of Childhood Professionals provided a motivating opening speech framed around encouraging people to get involved in having their say about early childhood care and education. This was followed by a highly interactive discussion centred around 3 main themes – Quality and Professionalism, Sustainability of Services and Cost and Accessibility which was facilitated by Avril McMonagle, Early Childhood Expert.

Feedback following the session was both insightful and informative in terms of some of the pressures facing the early childhood sector currently. A range of practical solutions were put forward during a full group discussion and a various topics were discussed. Deputy Troy's consistent submission of meaningful parliamentary questions and questions to the Minister on early childhood care and education received positive acknowledgement from participants.

***A summary of the main points as follows:***

#### **Theme 1: Quality and Professionalism**

##### **Suggestions/Recommendations:**

- An audit or cost benefit analysis of how much it costs to run a regulated early childhood service that meets quality standards.
- Administration costs (to manage various funding schemes) needs to be built into capitation levels.

- A cohesive national structure for the implementation of Síolta/Aistear through Better Start. A fully supported roll out is needed.
- A professional workforce is needed to achieve quality. Staff need to be paid for the work that they do including planning and documentation time.
- The Learner Fund should support professional upskilling to graduate level – not basic qualifications to meet minimum requirements.
- Following increased investment, a baseline audit of quality should be carried out to measure improvement.
- Continuing Professional Development to be included in capitation
- Special Education Needs – a model that follows the child from pre-school to school

**Threats and Barriers:**

- Lack of Investment.
- Lack of supports for children with special needs.
- Lack of recognition of the work of childcare service providers and their staff.
- The lack of appropriate remuneration for work.
- The Inspection Process – multiple inspections, administration requirements for schemes and compliance is overburdening personnel and taking away from work with children.

## **Theme 2: Sustainability of Service Provision**

**Suggestions/Recommendations:**

- Capitation and funding needs to be increased to realistic levels – current rates will not enable sustainability into the future. These need to be index linked going forward.
- Qualifications and experience need to be recognised through pay otherwise good personnel will not stay in the sector.
- The barrier of cost must be reduced for parents.
- The cost of facilitating the administration of funding schemes needs to be recognised and resourced.
- An annual baseline grant, topped up by capitation of numbers of children should be considered to enable sustainability across years where numbers of children fluctuate.
- Rates need to be equated to schools and educational establishments (water and premises)
- A nationally agreed salary scale needs to be developed for the EC sector – consisting of different levels of qualification and experience and associated pay.
- Funding needs to be quality driven.
- The actual cost of maintaining a regulated service need to be researched and recognised through a national cost benefit analysis/sustainability analysis.
- Planning regulations to grant the opening of new childcare services needs to be reviewed and strengthened to prevent displacement .

**Threats and Barriers:**

- Commercial Rates.
- Non-regulated childcare (Childminders).

- Cost to parents.
- The lack of regulation around new childcare services opening in areas where provision already exists.
- The divide created by DCYA between community and private service provision.

### **Theme 3: Accessibility and Cost**

#### **Suggestions/Recommendations:**

- The CCSS needs to follow the child – not the early childhood service.
- Parental leave needs to be extended to one year.
- Tax relief/tax credits need to go hand in hand to support parents and services.
- All early childhood services need to be regulated on an equal footing – childminders have an unfair advantage.
- Maintenance and administration grants are needed.
- Capitation needs to allow for children when they are ill
- The cost of childcare is simply unaffordable for a high number of parents.

#### **Threats and Barriers:**

- Policy needs to ensure that children don't start school too early – investment needs to go to early childhood services
- Rates – equality with other forms of educational provision.
- The absence of a national conversation/consultation about the future of early childhood services.
- The limitations of the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme.

**-Ends-**

**30<sup>th</sup> November 2014.**