

Minister Fitzgerald, Mary McLoughlin and William Lavelle respond to concerns raised by the ACP at meeting in Leinster House on 26th Sept 2013

1. Regulation and Inspection

- There was an acknowledgement that there are deficiencies within the present inspection process.
- Need to build stronger link between centres and the inspectorate
- Takes our point on board re the need for an early years professional on the inspection team
- Reiterated the need for inspections to ensure high quality care and education for the children.
- Agreed that the inspection teams need to be more available to discuss issues with centres and to carry out regular inspections
- Talked about introducing a standardised national inspection system that would be based on Siolta and Aistear.
- Acknowledged that inspections have been carried out using a deficit model but that the new standards will require a new style of report with evidence and narrative required from inspectors & this will commence in January 2014.
- Agreed that the ACP should be involved in consultations on improvements in relation to the inspection process and invited us to submit a proposal as to how we feel it should operate.
- Will begin work on developing regulations for out-of-school services in January 2014 and committed to consulting with childhood professionals on this
- No current plan to regulate childminding

2. Qualifications, pay and conditions

- Minimum qualifications required in new services from Sept 2014 and in existing services from Sept 2015. Minimum of level 5 for assistant and level 6 for leader in room.
- No scope for increasing capitation to improve terms and conditions of childhood professionals at present time. Agreed that societal change is needed to prioritise investment in early years
- ECCE Scheme capitation will not be cut in this year's budget
- Working towards a requirement of early years qualification for all those working with, or supporting, children in early years services

3. Training and Mentoring

- Imminent announcement of training fund to allow existing practitioners to meet new qualification requirements. Announcement will be made once the amount is agreed upon.
- Agreed that timeframe for achieving new requirements is tightening and that allowances will be made for people who have almost finished their qualifications by the deadline.
- Plans to have 40 mentors around the country to support the implementation of Siolta and Aistear.
- Invited the ACP to submit a paper on how this mentoring process could work

- Working on a system of Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) to support those with experience and some relevant qualifications to meet new minimum requirements. This will be through the Education Training Boards (ETB) formally VECs
- Need to standardise quality of training across the country
- Wants ACP to submit a paper on the issues that are affecting the quality of training

4. Capitation and subvention for early years and out of school care and education

- Acknowledged issues but cited financial constraints
- Still interested in introducing a two year ECCE Scheme but talked about quality issues that need to be addressed first. Listened to examples of how sustainability will be an issue if the 2nd year is introduced at the same rate of capitation as the present one.

5. Commercial rates

- Minister has already asked for exemption of rates for early years centres but no imminent changes as there isn't enough funding to make up the shortfall that local authorities would experience as a result of loss of revenue.
- Agreed that it is a sustainability issue and agreed that it is something that will have to be worked on with TDs
- Consultation and collaboration with the Association of Childhood Professionals
- Agreed that it is appropriate for the ACP to be invited to all relevant consultation and briefing meetings.
- Agreed that ACP would be invited to the consultation day on the Early Years Strategy when it is ready. Unfortunately this consultation will be of a very short duration.

6. Consultation and collaboration with the Association of Childhood Professionals

- Agreed that it is appropriate for the ACP to be invited to all relevant consultation and briefing meetings.
- Agreed that ACP would be invited to the consultation day on the Early Years Strategy when it is ready. Unfortunately this consultation will be of a very short duration.

7. AOB

- Asked how practitioners are coping with regards the issue of SNAs in early years centres.
- Minister said if child will need an SNA in primary school then he/she should have it in preschool.
- Minister Quinn set up committee/taskforce to look at this issue and DCYA is represented on it.