



Association of Childhood Professionals
The Professional Body Representing Practitioners in
Early Years and School Age Care & Education

School Aged Childcare Scheme (CETS 2)

17th May 2013

Dear Minister,

The Association of Childhood Professionals is the professional body encompassing all practitioners in Early Years and School Aged Care & Education in Ireland. Our Association works to ensure childhood professionals are an integral part of early years and School Aged Childcare provision.

We welcome the introduction of the new School Aged Childcare scheme or CETs 2 which has recently been announced. Childcare costs can be a financial burden on families and this scheme is a positive step forward in supporting families and children in need of school aged care. However, as the professional body representing professionals working within the Childcare sector, it would be remiss of us if we didn't voice the reservations and concerns our members have regarding this scheme. Our concerns are as follows:

Financial Viability

The Association of Childhood Professionals is concerned that the proposed School Aged Childcare grant and parental contribution is not enough to maintain and run a quality School Aged Childcare programme. This scheme puts a cap of €55 per week for the running of a sessional service. This equates to €3.67 per hour contact time based on a 3 hour session. From our experience of working in this sector, most school aged services operate on average 4.5 to 5 hours per day to meet the needs of parents and provide pick-up from the local schools. School aged childcare services presently provide a range of services to support children and their families including providing hot meals, collection service, homework support and extracurricular activities. Using the realistic figure of 4.5 hours per day the School Aged Childcare payment of €55 per week would contribute just €2.44 per hour to these services for contact time. This does not take into consideration the non-contact time needed to plan and set up the programmes or the additional cost of providing the equipment or materials needed to run a quality service.

In contrast, under the ECCE scheme early year's childcare services receive €62.50 to €73 to deliver a sessional service based on a staff ratio of 1:11 or €4.17 – €4.86 per hour. In common with the School Aged Childcare scheme the ECCE scheme does not meet the true running costs of providing a quality service. We would like an explanation behind the rational, budgeting and consultation process undertaken to establish the School Aged Childcare scheme budget and how the rate would cover the true overheads of running an School Aged Childcare service.

We are concerned that the limited funding provided under the School Aged Childcare scheme would put an additional financial burden on a sector which is already struggling to remain viable. There is a danger some services could find themselves trading recklessly if running this scheme.

Currently services use the fees payment policy to calculate the running costs of services but it is unclear how this new set charge is meant to be incorporated into this policy. We would also be concerned that

this cap on charges could be viewed as anticompetitive or price fixing, especially if the budgeted cost of providing similar services is greater than the CETS 2 income. The fees policy and funding provided under the original CETS scheme would, in our opinion, be a truer reflection of what is needed to develop and support this new CETS 2 scheme.

Of further concern is that fact that contracts issued to providers who are participating in the School Aged Childcare scheme contain an addendum to the services' CETs contract which includes the following:

'Service providers are also required to comply with guidelines in relation to the provision of School Age Childcare as may issued from time to time by the Department.' (Addendum to CETs service contract, April 2013)

Do we take from the above statement that the department are looking for a "blank cheque" to alter guidelines/ contractual obligations to services to follow arbitrarily? This type of clause would not be accepted by any other sector or business so why does the department feel it acceptable for childcare services to agree to this.

Delivery of the Service

The Association of Childhood Professions is concerned about the practicalities of delivering this scheme if services have to run it over 50 weeks per year, especially if services which are already operating early years services over the summer months participate, as staffing numbers and the physical space needed would become an issue if these two unique programmes were running side by side. We would question whether this increase in numbers and the resultant strain on services could be interpreted as a breach of childcare regulations.

Smaller services that operate for less than 50 weeks a year would not be deemed eligible for the scheme thus limiting the parental choice of services they could avail of. If services were given the same option of contracted weeks on a pro rata basis similar to CETS 1, parents could choose from a greater range of services providers. Parents could have the option of a transfer to another service similar to the one used in ECCE transfer scheme or the option to avail of parental leave under the Framework Agreement on parental leave in line with EU Council Directive 2010/18/EU to help a more family/ child friendly work balance.

The Association of Childhood Professionals is committed to strengthening the childcare sector in Ireland in collaboration with all stakeholders. We believe that childhood professionals are an integral part of quality early years and after-school provision in Ireland and as such must be part of all processes where childcare and education is discussed, planned and decided. We would encourage you to take into consideration our concerns and would welcome a meaningful dialogue to help develop and strengthen this scheme and the childcare sector in general. We would appreciate a response from your department in relation to our member's concerns.

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