

National *Childcare* Strategy

*Report of the Partnership 2000
Expert Working Group on Childcare*

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
ARNA FHOILSIÚ AG OIFIG AN tSOLÁTHAIR
Le ceannach díreach ón
OIFIG DHÍOLTA FOILSEACHÁN RIALTAIS
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FOILSEACHÁN RIALTAIS, AN RANNÓG POST-TRÁCHTA,
4-5 BÓTHAR FHEARCHAIR, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2
(Tel: 01 6613111 - Fo-líne 4040/4045; Fax: 01 4752760)
nó tríd aondíoltóir leabhar

DUBLIN
PUBLISHED BY THE STATIONERY OFFICE
To be purchased directly from the
GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS SALES OFFICE
SUN ALLIANCE HOUSE, MOLESWORTH STREET, DUBLIN 2
or by mail order from
GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS, POSTAL TRADE SECTION,
4-5 HARCOURT ROAD, DUBLIN 2
(Tel: 01 6613111 - EXT 4040/4045; Fax: 01 4752760)
or any other bookseller

£5.00
(PN No. 6747)
© Government of Ireland 1999
ISBN: 0707667208

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Foreword

Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness, in the context of equality, provided for the establishment of an Expert Working Group on Childcare. The Expert Working Group operated under the aegis of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on foot of its responsibility for equality matters.

The working process of the Expert Working Group was guided by the "spirit" of the Partnership 2000 agreement:

- "Partnership through this national agreement involves, in particular, a shared understanding of the key mechanisms and relationships in the formulation and implementation of policy.
- The partnership process reflects interdependence between the partners.
- The partnership is necessary because no party can achieve its goals without a significant degree of support and commitment from others.
- Partnership is characterised by a problem-solving approach, in which various interest groups address joint problems. Partnership involves trade-offs both between and within interest groups.
- The partnership process involves different participants on various agenda items, ranging from principles of national macro-economic policy to specifics of local development.
- All Social Partners accept that the benefits of economic growth be shared by all citizens in a manner that reflects this country's commitment to social solidarity and a better quality of life for all our people."
(Partnership 2000, Ch.11).

This spirit enabled the Expert Working Group to work through the many tensions which arose when it became clear that devising a National Strategy for the development of the childcare sector was a complex matter.

I would like to thank all the organisations who agreed to participate in the process and in particular all the members for their time and patience. Particular thanks is due to the chairpersons of the eight policy subgroups without whose dedication the task would have proved nigh impossible.

The work of the Expert Working Group could not have run so smoothly without the excellent service provided to it by the Secretariat which was supported by Area Development Management Limited and the Centre for Social and Educational Research, DIT.

Finally, I would like to thank John O'Donoghue, T.D., Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, for his personal interest in and support for the activities of the Expert Working Group.



Sylda Langford

Chairperson

EXPERT WORKING GROUP ON CHILDCARE

Executive Summary

Introduction

Childcare provision in Ireland has, until now, been left entirely to parents to arrange for themselves. **There is now a virtual crisis in childcare supply.** As female labour force participation increases, childcare places are dropping, partly because childminders are opting for alternative employment in the formal economy, partly because of the impact of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996 and partly because larger childcare centres are experiencing difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified childcare staff.

The **Expert Working Group** was established under Partnership 2000 to develop a strategy which integrates the different strands of the current arrangements for the development and delivery of childcare and early educational services. The Group, chaired by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, had wide ranging terms of reference and over seventy members, representing the relevant Government departments, social partners, statutory bodies, non-governmental organisations and parents. The term 'childcare' (See full definition section, p.xxii) as used by the Group means services providing care and education. The large membership of the Group required a multi-level working process involving plenary sessions attended by all members, eight subgroups, each focusing on a particular issue and a steering group.

The Expert Working Group was faced with a complex and challenging task. Its terms of reference were wide ranging and multi-faceted. Among the key considerations which shaped the Expert Working Group report were:

- agreement that the needs and rights of children should be a primary consideration;
- recognition that the terms of reference of the Expert Working Group were not

directed to parents who choose to care for their own children and that the needs of such parents may require a different policy solution;

- the need to meet EU requirements for Employment Guidelines and Structural Funds;
- the desirability of building on existing structures and services for delivery of childcare services, in a cost efficient partnership approach; and
- the need to develop childcare as a legitimate business and the consequent concept of "receipted expenditure" which is fundamental to the Expert Working Group's recommendations for development of the sector.

Chapter 1 : Social Context of Childcare Provision

The Expert Working Group has examined the social context of childcare provision, ie:

- Pressure for the development of childcare has been on the national agenda for the past two decades and this is reflected in the number of national reports, legislation and initiatives since the early 1980's.
- Parents use childcare for a variety of reasons.
- Demographic, social and economic changes in Ireland, in particular the increased participation of women in the workforce, have resulted in increased demand for childcare services.
- The availability and cost of childcare and the difficulties around reconciling employment and family lives are the most significant barriers to women accessing and participating in the labour force.

- As the number of employed parents increases there is a need for a public policy to help parents reconcile employment and caring for their children in a way that ensures quality of life for children, parents and families and equality of opportunities for women.
- Childcare is one of several family-friendly policies which can ensure a stronger balance between work and family life.
- The Expert Working Group considers that such policies should not be seen solely as a 'women's issue' but should be advanced from a broader perspective to include benefits that accrue to men and children.
- The rights of children to equality of care and education are also part of the childcare debate and there has been strong recognition, both nationally and internationally, of the benefit of quality childcare for children, families and communities.
- the most commonly based form of childcare is a formal arrangement (sessional services and full-day care).
- childminding in the minder's home is the most common arrangement among women with paid jobs and the second most common overall.
- on average childcare prices are in the range of €44 to €71 per week for full-time care.
- the prices to parents of childcare (as a proportion of average earnings) are amongst the highest in the European Union. Average full-day care prices in Ireland are 20% of average earnings.

Chapter 2: Childcare in Ireland: Current Provision

Childcare provision is unco-ordinated, variable in quality and in short supply. State expenditure on childcare is largely targeted at children in need or in disadvantaged circumstances and much State expenditure arises as a by-product of other activities. Childcare services take a variety of forms including sessional services (e.g. pre-school playgroups, naíonraí, Montessori schools), full-day care (e.g. nurseries, crèches), childminders, drop-in centres and after school care.

A survey of childcare arrangements indicates that:

- 17% of all children aged 0-9 years avail of paid childcare.
- 58% of mothers in full time work avail of childcare as compared with 16% of mothers on home duties.

Chapter 3: Regulations, Training, Qualifications and Employment

The Expert Working Group has a number of concerns about the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996. The notification system under the Regulations is of limited effect and should be replaced by a registration system; there is confusion about the recommendations on qualifications of childcare personnel; the implementation process is not satisfactory and the Regulations seem to have had an adverse effect on the availability of childcare places.

Childcare training has developed on an ad hoc basis, resulting in a diversity of training courses and qualifications. Many childcare workers have gained skills and knowledge through experience rather than through formal training processes. The Expert Working Group proposes the development of a national framework of qualifications in childcare which could encompass formal and informal training programmes and the accreditation of prior learning.

Childcare as an occupation is generally not well paid or well regarded. The low occupational status accorded to childcare not only deters male participation in the sector, but has implications for the quality

of provision. Low pay has also led to difficulties in the recruitment and retention of childcare staff. There is a wide range of pay in the sector with rates of pay being best developed where there is public funding for projects and lowest among childminders who are paid as little as £1.50 per hour. Many community based childcare services depend on Community Employment Schemes to supply staff, as a source of income to meet running costs and to meet adult/child ratios. The Expert Working Group recommends that a Joint Labour Committee be set up for the industry.

Chapter 4: Childcare Provision in urban disadvantaged and rural areas

In urban disadvantaged areas, childcare services are constrained by lack of financial resources and lack of childcare infrastructure and support systems. Barriers include: prohibitive costs, inability of services to employ trained staff, lack of information and restrictive opening hours. In rural areas, barriers to childcare provision include isolation, transport problems, staff costs and the absence of training programmes adapted to the needs of rural provision. Urban disadvantaged and rural areas require childcare strategies and policies which recognise the diverse range of functions and obstacles which childcare services must address in these environments.

Chapter 5: The National Childcare Strategy: Guiding Principles

The Expert Working Group has agreed a statement of principles which are intended to underpin the National Childcare Strategy and guide all childcare services. There are 12 principles in total which have been organised under the following headings: (1) needs and rights of children, (2) equality of access and participation, (3) diversity, (4) partnership and (5) quality. The Expert Working Group sets the needs and rights of children as the primary consideration in the strategy of childcare.

Chapter 6: Rationale for a National Childcare Strategy.

Quality childcare benefits children, their parents, employers and communities in general. Studies show the **social benefits** of early education in children's cognitive and social development, particularly for children from disadvantaged areas. The positive impact of out of school programmes on the social and personal development of children has also been demonstrated. Quality childcare also benefits parents and the wider community and has an important role in combating family stress and social exclusion, particularly within families experiencing poverty and disadvantage. **Economic benefits** of investing in quality childcare are shown at a number of levels: social benefits to children leading to gains in human capital, increased employability of parents combating skill and labour shortages, improving the capacity, profitability and sustainability of childcare provision and job creation in the childcare sector. **Demand for childcare** is likely to increase by between 25% and 50% over the period to the year 2011. Future demand for childcare is also relevant to the national strategy.

Chapter 7 : Stimulating supply and supporting demand

The Expert Working Group recommends six supply side measures and five demand side measures which will improve the availability and affordability of childcare in Ireland. **These are interconnected measures, all of which need to be implemented as a package in order to be successful.** The concept of **recepted expenditure** features in most of these recommendations as the Expert Working Group considers it essential that childcare be brought out of the informal economy and developed as a legitimate business within the services sector. A seven year time frame is envisaged for the development of childcare as a sustainable sector.

The recommended measures are:

SIX SUPPLY SIDE MEASURES

- Capital grants/relief for providers
To upgrade premises to increase quality and quantity of supply
- Tax allowance for childminders
To support private childminders in transition to formal economy
- Employment encouragement grants
To encourage increased employment of trained childcare staff
- Tax relief for employers investing in childcare
To support and stimulate employer involvement
- Funding for local level measures
To develop after school and childcare networks
- Improve local authority planning guidelines
To ensure consistency in local authority planning permissions for childcare services.

FIVE DEMAND SIDE MEASURES *

- Childcare subsidies
To support low income families not in tax net to access quality services
- Improvements to FIS
To support low earners who would not benefit from tax relief measures
- Increase ceilings for lone parent Payment
To remove disincentives for lone parents earning over ceiling
- Personal Tax relief
To support parents in tax net at standard rate based on receipts
- Remove treatment of childcare as Benefit in Kind
To support and stimulate employer involvement

Chapter 8: Local Planning and National Co-ordination

The Expert Working Group recommends local planning and national co-ordination mechanisms to deliver childcare policies. It proposes the establishment of county childcare committees, a national childcare management committee and an interdepartmental policy committee on childcare. **The County Childcare Committees** would comprise local childcare providers, the NGO/childcare sector, statutory bodies, social partners and parents. Each Committee would develop a seven year county childcare plan which would be submitted to the National Childcare Management Committee for approval.

The **National Childcare Management Committee** would support, appraise, resource and monitor the county childcare plans, co-ordinate national developments in the childcare field and inform national policy development. The Committee would reflect the same cross sector representative as the County Childcare Committees and would have independent status.

The **Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform** would be the designated **lead department** for the National Childcare Strategy and would chair the **Interdepartmental Policy Committee on Childcare** which would act as a link between Government and the National Childcare Committees.

* These measures relate to receipted childcare expenses

Recommendations of the Expert Working Group on Childcare

The Expert Working Group believes that it is essential for Government to take a strategic role to secure high quality services which will be accessible to all children, to secure an adequate childcare workforce, and to develop the conditions which will optimise their work. The development and implementation of a National Childcare Strategy is recommended as the first step in such a process. The National Childcare Strategy should consist of a seven year integrated strategy comprising the recommendations contained in this Report.

RECOMMENDATION 1 (p.24):

- The present system of notification should be developed and lead to an amendment of the Child Care Act, 1991, which would provide for a system of registration of facilities and childcare workers.
- All those providing childcare services for one or more children, in addition to their own, including persons employed by the parent/s of the child, either in the child's home or in the childminder's home, should be required to register.
- Relatives (parent, grandparent, siblings, uncles, aunts and step-parents) and guardians or foster parents should be exempt from the requirement to register.
- All childcare providers who offer services to children aged 0 to 12, as defined by the Expert Working Group on Childcare, should be obliged to register under the proposed system of registration.

RECOMMENDATION 2 (p.26):

The existing notification system and the proposed system of registration should require adherence to national minimum standards, encouraging 'best practice' which will be developed in consultation and partnership with the NGO sector.

A common induction and training programme should be provided for inspection teams to ensure that there is standardisation of implementation

In addition, it is recommended that one member of the inspection team should be trained in the area of Early Childhood Care and Education.

RECOMMENDATION 3 (p.27):

A Garda clearance procedure at central level, which communicates effectively with local levels, should be put in place to provide clearance information in respect of all personnel working in childcare in whatever capacity.

RECOMMENDATION 4 (p.29):

- An occupational profile (such as the model in Appendix 3.2) and appropriate qualifications should be agreed by the proposed National Childcare Management Committee within 12 months.
- A national framework for qualifications in childcare should be developed in consultation with the proposed National Childcare Management Committee.
- The national qualifications framework for childcare should provide progressive pathways of awards, which can be achieved through formal and informal education and training programmes or through the accreditation of prior learning.
- The future development of the childcare sector should aim to achieve the following target:

A minimum of 60% of staff working directly with children in collective services should have a grant eligible basic training of at least three years at a post-18 level, which incorporates both the theory and practice of pedagogy and child development. All training should be modular. All staff in services (both collective and family day care) who are not trained to this level should have right of access to such training including on an in-service basis. (Target 26 of the European Commission Network on Childcare action programme-Quality Targets in Services of Young Children, 1996).

RECOMMENDATION 5 (p.30):

The Expert Working Group considers it desirable that children should have contact with both men and women in childcare services and that the childcare sector should aim to achieve the following target:

Twenty per cent of staff employed in childcare in collective services should be men (Target 29 of the European Commission's Network on Childcare action programme, Quality Targets in Services for Young Children, 1996). Measures for achieving this should be examined by the National Childcare Management Committee.

RECOMMENDATION 6 (p.30):

Employment procedures should be guided by the following target:

Services should adopt employment procedures which emphasise the importance of recruiting employees who reflect the ethnic diversity of the local community (Target 36 of the European Commission Network on Childcare Quality Targets in Services for Young Children, 1996).

RECOMMENDATION 7 (p.32):

A national pay scale should be established to reflect the social and economic value of the work undertaken by childcare workers. The mechanism proposed is a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) which will be required to set a JLC rate for the industry.

RECOMMENDATION 8 (p.33):

- FÁS should prioritise its Community Employment resources towards providing a dedicated childcare training and work experience initiative.
- FÁS should continue to develop childcare training initiatives within Community Employment in consultation with the National Childcare Management Committee.
- The proposed National Childcare Management Committee should explore and support the development of other routes for those who wish to work in the childcare sector.

RECOMMENDATION 9 (p.40):

Within the National Childcare Strategy, the needs of children and families experiencing poverty, disadvantage or social exclusion should be prioritised and resources targeted accordingly.

RECOMMENDATION 10 (p. 59):

- The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme should be expanded so that the supply of quality childcare in disadvantaged areas can continue to be physically upgraded and have enhanced staffing support.
- An additional £3.5m budget should be allocated to the Programme for each of the first three years of the National Childcare Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION 11 (p.59):

Enhanced capital allowances should be provided to group-based childcare services/businesses.

RECOMMENDATION 12 (p.59):

- A new grant scheme should be established for small scale private providers and self-employed childminders not eligible for other supports, towards the capital upgrading of premises to comply with the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996.
- This scheme would operate through the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.
- A budget of £2 million should be allocated in 1999 in order to respond immediately to the demand.

RECOMMENDATION 13 (p.60):

- A special tax allowance in respect of childminding earnings should be provided.
- Childminding income should be disregarded when eligibility is being determined for social welfare and ancillary benefits, for example, medical cards.
- These measures would be subject to review after three years.

RECOMMENDATION 14 (p.61):

- Employment grants of up to £5,000 for each additional new staff member employed in private and community childcare facilities, including social economy initiatives, to be operated through County Enterprise Boards.
- A budget of £5m per annum should be devoted to this purpose which would be ringfenced specifically for childcare.

RECOMMENDATION 15 (p.62):

- Employers should be allowed to offset in their tax returns expenditure incurred in relation to childcare for their employees. This expenditure could take the form of provision of childcare facilities, vouchers for childcare, or direct subsidisation of childcare places for their workers.

RECOMMENDATION 16 (p.62):

In 1999 and subsequent years, the Government should allocate £1 million:

- towards the development of after school childcare provision at local level which would include a specific training dimension, and
- towards the setting up of local childcare networks which would offer educational and training support and advice to childcare providers at local level.

RECOMMENDATION 17 (p.62):

- The Department of the Environment and Local Government, in consultation with the proposed National Childcare Management Committee, should set and publish national guidelines for the granting of planning approval for childcare facilities.
- As a matter of urgency, planning Authorities should include in their Development Plans, Planning Control Guidelines for the provision of a range of childcare facilities. These Guidelines should take account of such matters as the changing pattern of work, family structure and the range of childcare facilities that are now necessary. The Guidelines should also take account of the desirability of having such facilities located in the areas, including housing

developments, close to where the users of such facilities live.

RECOMMENDATION 18 (p.65):

- A scheme to support the childcare costs of low income parents participating in all training or education programmes provided by State agencies should be put in place, on the lines of the existing pilot scheme applicable to VTOS, Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Programme. The subsidy would be administered by the relevant training or education authority.
- A childcare subsidy on similar lines should be also paid to parents on development and adult literacy and community education courses. The guidelines and eligibility for such subsidies should be developed by the National Childcare Management Committee, and the subsidy should be administered locally on the basis of receipted expenditure provided to the Local Childcare Committees or its agents.

RECOMMENDATION 19 (p.65):

In recognition of the value of quality childcare provision, the Expert Working Group recommends that the current practice of subsidising childcare for disadvantaged children under the current Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme be broadened to enable parents, who cannot afford childcare and who are undergoing training and do not qualify for any of the above subsidies, to purchase childcare places for their children.

RECOMMENDATION 20 (p.66):

The specified income limit for Family Income Supplement should be raised on a case by case basis where families incur receipted childcare costs.

RECOMMENDATION 21 (p.67):

The One Parent Family Payment scheme should be expanded to increase the ceiling of earnings to £16,000 on a case by case basis where lone parents incur receipted childcare costs.

RECOMMENDATION 22 (p.68):

A tax relief measure at the standard rate is proposed which would grant:

- relief on receipted childcare expenses of up to £4,000 per child to all family units in respect to children aged 0 to 12 years.
- allowances in respect of each child, with the allowance for first child under 5 years at £4,000 per annum, and subsequent children at £3,200.
- allowances for children 5 years and over (school going children) at £2,000 per annum.

RECOMMENDATION 23 (p.69):

Free or subsidised workplace childcare should no longer be treated as benefit in kind for income taxation purposes.

RECOMMENDATION 24 (p.70):

If a tax credit system is introduced, the Expert Working Group's recommendations in relation to tax, FIS and other demand side subsidies should be replaced by Refundable Tax Credits.

RECOMMENDATION 25 (p.75):

- County Childcare Committees, consisting of representatives from all the relevant cross sector local stakeholders be established.
- The primary focus of the Committees would be the development, implementation and monitoring of a seven year County Childcare Plan.
- The County Childcare Committee should co-ordinate the new and existing services within the area and monitor implementation of the Plan against agreed targets, which should be set by all the stakeholders.
- A budget of £2million should be allocated for the establishment, development and implementation of county structures.

RECOMMENDATION 26. (p.76):

- A National Childcare Management Committee be established with the same cross sector representation as the County Childcare Committees.

- The key objective of the Committee would be to support, appraise, resource and monitor County Childcare Plans in addition to the co-ordination of existing national developments in the childcare field, and informing national policy development.
- A budget of £0.5 million should be allocated for 1999 for the establishment, research and development costs of the National Childcare Management Committee.
- A budget of £0.5 million should be allocated for 1999 for national/regional childcare organisations of a voluntary nature, who can demonstrate a capacity to support the implementation of the National Childcare Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION 27 (p.76):

- The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, should be the designated Lead Department with respect to the National Strategy for Childcare.
- This remit would be to facilitate the co-ordination of the range of childcare services across departments, to strengthen and enhance the interface between all departments with a direct and indirect role in childcare.
- An Interdepartmental Policy Committee on Childcare be established which will operate as a link between Cabinet and the National Childcare Management Committee.
- The Interdepartmental Policy Committee should also consider the recommendations of other relevant reports including the Report of the Commission on the Family (1998) and the Report on the National Forum for Early Childhood Education (1998).

Achoimre Feidhmiúcháin

Réamhrá

Go dtí seo, fágadh soláthar chúram leanaí in Éirinn faoi na tuismitheoirí, go huile is go hiomlán. **D'fhéadfá a rá go bhfuil géarchéim anois ann i dtaca le soláthar chúram leanaí de.** Ar na cúiseanna atá leis sin tá méadú ar lucht saothair ar mná iad, malairt fostaíochta á lorg ag feighlilthe leanaí sa gheilleagar foirmiúil, an éifeacht a bhí ag na Rialúcháin um Chúram Leanaí (Réamhscóile), 1996, agus deacrachtaí a bheith ag mórionaid chúram leanaí foirne cáililthe chúram leanaí a earcú agus a choinneáil.

Bunaiodh an **Sainghrúpa Oibre** faoi Chompháirtíocht 2000 chun straitéis a fhorbairt a dhéanfadh comtháthú ar na codanna difriúla a bhaineann faoi láthair le forbairt agus le soláthar chúram leanaí agus sheirbhísí luathoideachais. Feidhmíonn an Grúpa faoin Roinn Dlí agus Cirt, Comhionannais agus Athchóirithe Dlí (cathaoirleach); tá téarmaí leathana tagartha aige agus breis is seachtó ball. Tá ionadaíocht ann ag na ranna Rialtais cuí, na compháirtithe sóisialta, comhlachtaí reachtúla, eagraíochtaí neamhrialtais agus tuismitheoirí. Baineann an Grúpa feidhm as an téarma 'cúram leanaí' chun seirbhísí cúraim agus oideachais a chur i gcéill. Toisc ballraíocht mhór a bheith ag an nGrúpa bhí gá le próiseas oibre il-leibhéil ina raibh seisiúin iomlánacha agus na baill i láthair, ocht bhfoghrúpa agus a chúram féin orthu go léir agus grúpa stiúrtha.

Ba chasta agus ba dhúshlánach an tasc a bhí le déanamh ag an Sainghrúpa Oibre. Ba leathan agus ba ilghnéitheach iad na téarmaí tagartha aige. I measc na bpríomhnihte a mhúnlaigh tuairisc an tSainghrúpa Oibre bhí:

Ba chasta agus ba dhúshlánach an tasc a bhí le déanamh ag an Sainghrúpa Oibre. Ba leathan agus ba ilghnéitheach iad na téarmaí tagartha aige. I measc na bpríomhnihte a mhúnlaigh tuairisc an tSainghrúpa Oibre bhí:

- gur aontaiodh go gcaithfí tús áite a thabhairt do riachtanais agus do chearta leanaí;

- go n-aithneofaí nach dírithe ar thuismitheoirí a thugann aire dá bpaistí féin iad téarmaí tagartha an tSainghrúpa Oibre agus go bhféadfadh réiteach polasaí eile a bheith de dhíth ar na tuismitheoirí sin;
- gur gá teacht le forálacha an AE maidir le Treoirlínte Fostaíochta agus cistí struchtúracha;
- go mba inmhianaithe é tógáil ar na struchtúir atá ann cheana chun seirbhísí chúram leanaí a chur ar fáil agus sin ar bhonn na comhpháirtíochta costéifeachtaí; agus
- an gá atá le cúram leanaí a fhorbairt mar ghnó dlísteanaigh agus an coincheap a leanann é, is é sin "caiteachas agus admháil", bunmholadh de mholtaí an tSainghrúpa Oibre maidir le forbairt na hearnála seo.

Caibidil 1: Comhthéacs Sóisialta Chúram Leanaí

- Tá iniúchadh déanta ag an Sainghrúpa Oibre ar chomhthéacs sóisialta sholáthar chúram leanaí,
- Le scór bliain anuas tá brú ar an gclár gnó náisiúnta chun cúram leanaí a fhorbairt agus is léir sin ó líon na dtuarascálacha náisiúnta, ón reachtaíocht agus ó thionscnaimh eile ó thús na 1980.
- Baineann tuismitheoirí leas as cúram leanaí ar chúiseanna éagsúla.
- Tá éileamh breise ar sheirbhísí chúram leanaí in Éirinn de bharr athruithe déimeagrafacha, sóisialta agus eacnamaíochta go háirithe breis den bhantocht a bheith sa lucht saothair.
- An rud is mó atá ag cur isteach ar mhná atá ag iarraidh teacht ar an lucht saothair agus a bheith páirteach ann ná infhaighteacht agus costas chúram leanaí agus na deacrachtaí a bhaineann le cúrsaí fostaíochta agus cúrsaí an teaghlaigh a thabhairt le chéile.

- De réir mar atá líon na dtuismitheoirí fostaithe ag dul i méid tá gá le polasaí poiblí a chabhródh le tuismitheoirí chun fostaíocht agus cúram leanaí a thabhairt le chéile ar shlí a dheimheodh cáilíocht na beatha do pháistí, do thuismitheoirí agus do theaghlaigh agus comhdhiseanna do mhná.
- Polasaí amháin de pholasaithe atá cairdiúil le teaghlaigh is ea cúram leanaí agus d'fhéadfadh sé cothromaíocht níos láidre a dheimhniú idir cúrsaí oibre agus cúrsaí an teaghlaigh.
- Ní dóigh leis an Sainghrúpa Oibre gur cheart féachaint ar na polasaithe sin mar "cheist do no mná" amháin; ba chóir bonn níos leithne a bheith fúthu chun na sochair a bhainfeadh fir agus páistí as a chur san áireamh.
- Cuid den díospóireacht i leith chúram leanaí is ea cearta na leanaí chun a sciar cothrom féin de chúram agus d'oideachas a fháil agus tá aitheantas tugtha go feilmeanta, ar bhonn náisiúnta agus idirnáisiúnta araon, don tairbhe a bhaineann páistí, teaghlaigh agus pobail as dea-chúram leanaí.

Caibidil 2: Cúram Leanaí in Éirinn: An Soláthar Reatha

Is neamh-chomhordaithe é soláthar chúram leanaí, ní d'aon chaighdeán amháin é agus is tearc a líon. Díritear caiteachas an stáit i leith chúram leanaí ar pháistí atá i ngátar nó faoi mhíbhuntáiste agus eascraíonn a lán den chaiteachas sin as seachtháirge d'imeachtaí eile.

Tá saghsanna éagsúla seirbhísí chúram leanaí ann agus seirbhísí seisiúin san áireamh (mar shampla grúpaí súgartha, naíonraí, scoileanna Montessori), cúram lán lae (e.g. naíonlanna, créiseanna), feighlithe leanaí, an t-ionad buail isteach agus cúram iarscoile.

Léiríonn suirbhé a rinneadh ar shocruithe chúram leanaí:

- go bhfuil 17% de leanaí uile na tíre idir 0-9 mbliana d'aois a n-íoctar as cúram leanaí dóibh.
- baineann 58% de mháithreacha atá ag obair go lánaimseartha leas as cúram leanaí i gcomparáid le 16% de mháithreacha atá i mbun dualgas sa bhaile.
- an cineál chúram leanaí is coitianta ná socrú foirmiúil (seirbhísí seisiúin agus cúram lán lae).
- an socrú is coitianta a dhéanann mná a bhíonn ag obair agus a fhaigheann íocaíocht ná an cúram leanaí ag tarlú i dteach an fheighlí agus is é sin an socrú atá sa dara háit san iomlán.
- is é an meánréimse praghsanna ná idir £44 agus £71 in aghaidh na seachtaine - cúram lánaimseartha.
- Tá na praghsanna seo (mar chodán de theacht isteach meánach) ar chuid de na praghsanna is airde san AE. Is ionann praghsanna chúram lán lae in Éirinn agus 20% den mheánioncam.

Caibidil 3: Rialúcháin, Oiliúint, Cáilíochtaí agus Fostaíocht

Bheadh roinnt ceisteanna ag an Sainghrúpa Oibre i dtaobh na Rialúcháin um Sheirbhísí Chúram Leanaí (Réamhscoile), 1996. Ní lánéifeachtach é an córas fógra atá ag feidhmiú faoi na Rialúcháin agus ba chóir córas cláraithe a chur ina áit; tá mearbhall ag baint leis na moltaí a thagraíonn do cháilíochtaí phearsanra chúram leanaí, ní sásúil é an córas cur i ngníomh agus dhealródh sé gur toradh diúltach a bhí ar na Rialúcháin i dtaca le hinfhaighteacht ionaid chúram leanaí de.

Is ar bhonn ad hoc a forbraíodh oiliúint chúram leanaí agus dá dheasca sin is iomaí saghas cúrsa oiliúna agus cáilíochta atá

ann. Tá go leor oibríthe chúram leanaí ann a bhfuil scileanna agus eolas acu a fuairéadar trí tháithí seachas trí phróisis fhoirmiúla oiliúna. Molann an Sainghrúpa Oibre go gcuirfí frámaíocht náisiúnta cáilíochtaí sa chúram leanaí ar bun a chuireadh clár oiliúna ar bhonn foirmiúil agus neamhfhoirmiúil araon agus creidiúnú i dtaca le foghlaim roimhe sin de.

Gairm is ea an cúram leanaí nach bhfuil ardmheas air agus ní íoctar na hoibríthe go maith. Baineann stádas íseal gairme le cúram leanaí agus seachnaíonn fir an earnáil seo; tá impleachtaí ansin maidir le cáilíocht an tsoláthair. Cúis eile a mbíonn deacrachtaí ann maidir le foirne chúram leanaí a earcú agus a choinneáil is ea pá íseal. Tá réimse leathan pá san earnáil seo agus baineann na rátaí is fearr leis na tionscadail sin a fhaigheann airgeadú poiblí agus é chomh híseal le £1.50 san uair in áiteanna eile. Bíonn go leor seirbhísí pobail san earnáil seo ag brath ar Scéimeanna Fostaíochta Pobail chun foireann a sholáthar, mar fhoinsé ioncaim chun déileáil le costais reatha agus chun teacht leis an gcóimheas aosach/leanaí a mholtar. Molann an Sainghrúpa Oibre go mbunófaí Comhchoiste Saothair don tionscal seo.

Caibidil 4: Soláthar Chúram Leanaí í gceantair uirbeacha faoi mhíbhuntáiste agus í gceantair faoin tuath

I gceantair uirbeacha faoi mhíbhuntáiste, bíonn bac ar sheirbhísí chúram leanaí toisc na hacmhainní airgeadais a bheith in easnamh nó bonneagar chúram leanaí agus córais tacaíochta a bheith in easnamh. I measc na mbacanna tá: costais ró-ard, na seirbhísí gan a bheith in ann foireann oilte a fhosú, easpa eolais agus uaireanta oscailte a bheith sriantach. Ar na bacanna a áirítear i gceantair faoin tuath tá: iargúlacht, fadhbanna iompair, costais foirne agus easpa clár oiliúna a oireann do thimpeallacht na tuaithe. Tá gá le straitéisí agus le polasaithe i leith chúram leanaí a d'aithneodh an réimse éagsúil feidhmeanna agus bacanna is gá do na seirbhísí chúram leanaí díriú orthu sna

ceantair uirbeacha faoi mhíbhuntáiste agus i gceantair faoin tuath faoi seach.

Caibidil 5: Straitéis Náisiúnta i leith Chúram Leanaí: Treoirphrionsabail

Tá an Sainghrúpa Oibre aontaithe sa ráiteas prionsabal a bheadh mar bhonn le Straitéis Náisiúnta i leith Chúram Leanaí agus mar threoir do na seirbhísí chúram leanaí go léir. 12 prionsabal ar fad atá ann agus iad eagraithe faoi na ceannteidil a leanas: (1) riachtanais agus cearta leanaí, (2) infhaighteacht agus rannpháirtíocht ar bhonn cothrom, (3) éagsúlacht, (4) comhpháirtíocht agus (5) caighdeán ard. An gad is gaire don scornach, dar leis an Sainghrúpa Oibre, ná straitéis i leith chúram leanaí a bheith bunaithe ar riachtanais agus ar chearta leanaí.

Caibidil 6: Réasúnú i leith Straitéis Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí

Baineann páistí, a dtuismitheoirí, fostóirí agus an pobal i gcoitinne tairbhe as cúram leanaí den scoth. Léiríonn staidéir na **buntáistí sóisialta** a bhaineann le luathoideachas maidir le forbairt chognaíoch agus forbairt shóisialta an linbh, go háirithe leanaí ó cheantair faoi mhíbhuntáiste. Léiríodh freisin an tionchar dearfach a bhíonn ag clár lasmuigh den scoil ar fhorbairt phearsanta agus ar fhorbairt shóisialta an linbh. Baineann tuismitheoirí agus an pobal i gcoitinne leas as cúram leanaí den scoth agus tá ról tábhachtach aige mar le dul i ngleic le strus teaghlaigh agus eisiámh sóisialta, go háirithe an teaghlach atá i ngleic le bochtaineacht agus le míbhuntáiste. Léirítear na **buntáistí eacnamaíocha** a éiríonn as infheistiú i gcúram leanaí den scoth ar roinnt leibhéal: buntáistí sóisialta ag páistí as a dtagann breis chaipitil dhaonna, fostaíocht bhreise do thuismitheoirí a théann i ngleic le ganntanas scileanna agus lucht saothair, feabhas ar chumas, ar bhrabúsacht agus ar chothbháil sholáthar chúram leanaí agus cruthú jabanna san earnáil chúram leanaí. Is dócha go mbeidh ardú ar an **éileamh ar chúram leanaí** de 25% go 50% as seo go dtí

an bhliain 2011. Baineann an t-éileamh seo a shamhlaítear leis an straitéis náisiúnta chomh maith.

Caibidil 7: Soláthar a spreagadh agus tacú le héileamh

Molann an Sainghrúpa Oibre sé cinn de sheach-chéimeanna soláthair agus cúig cinn de sheach-chéimeanna éilimh a chuirfidh feabhas ar infhaighteacht agus ar shaoire chúram leanaí in Éirinn. **Tá na céimeanna seo fite fuaithe ina chéile, agus ní mór iad go léir a chur i bhfeidhm mar phacáiste chun go n-éireodh leo.** Mar chuid de na moltaí seo go léir, nach mór, tá coincheap iontu de **chaiteachas agus admháil** agus is den riachtanas é dar leis an Sainghrúpa Oibre cúram leanaí a bhaint amach as an ngeilleagar neamhfhoirmiúil agus é a fhorbairt mar ghnó dlisteanach laistigh d'earnáil na seirbhísí.

Samhlaítear frámaíocht ama seacht mbliana chun forbairt a dhéanamh ar chúram leanaí mar earnáil inmharthana.

Is iad na céimeanna atá á moladh ná:

Sé Sheach-Chéim Soláthair

- Deontais chaptitil/faoiseamh do sholáthróirí
Áitreabh a uasghrádú chun an caighdeán a ardú agus cainníocht an tsoláthair.
- Liúntas Cánach d'Fheighlithe Leanaí
Tacú le feighlithe leanaí príobháideacha aistriú go dtí an geilleagar foirmiúil
- Deontais chun Fostaíocht a Spreagadh
Spreagadh a thabhairt chun go bhfostófaí níos mó foirne oilte chúram leanaí
- Faoiseamh Cánach d'fhostóirí a infheistíonn i gcúram leanaí
Rannpháirtíocht an fhostóra a neartú agus a ghríosú.

- Maoiniú do bhearta ar leibheál áitiúil
Lionraí iarscoile agus chúram leanaí

- Feabhsú ar threoirlínte pleanála an údaráis áitiúil
Seasmacht a dheimhniú ó na húdaráis áitiúla maidir le ceadanna pleanála i leith sheirbhísí chúram leanaí.

Cúig Sheach-Chéim Éilimh

- Fóirdheontais Chúram Leanaí
Chun tacú le teaghlaigh ar ioncam íseal agus nach bhfuil sa líon cánach le go mbeadh teacht acu ar sheirbhísí d'ardchaighdeán.

- Feabhsuithe ar Fhorlíonadh ar Ioncam Teaghlaigh
Tacú leo siúd ar ioncam íseal nach mbaineann leas as bearta faoisimh chánach.

- Buaicíocaíochtaí le Tuismitheoirí Aonair a mhéadú
An dídhreasacht a bhaint mar le tuismitheoirí aonair a thuilleann níos mó ná an bhuaicíocaíocht

- Faoiseamh Cánach Pearsanta
Tacú le tuismitheoirí sa líon Cánach ar ráta Caighdeánach bunaithe ar admhálacha.

- Gan déileáil le cúram leanaí mar slá
Rannpháirtíocht an fhostóra a neartú agus a ghríosú.

Caibidil 8: Pleanáil Áitiúil agus Comhordú Náisiúnta

Molann an Sainghrúpa Oibre do na meicníochtaí sin a bhíonn ag plé le pleanáil áitiúil agus comhordú náisiúnta polasaithe chúram leanaí a chur ar fáil. Molann sé go mbunófaí coistí chúram leanaí ar bhonn contae, coiste bainisteoireachta náisiúnta ar chúram leanaí agus coiste polasaí idir-ranna ar chúram leanaí. Is é a bheadh sna **Coistí Contae um Chúram Leanaí** ná soláthróirí áitiúla chúram leanaí, an earnáil

Baineann na bearta seo le costais chúram leanaí le hadmhalacha

chúram leanaí/NGO, comhlachtaí reachtúla, na comhpháirtithe sóisialta agus tuismitheoirí. Dhéanadh gach coiste plean chúram leanaí seacht mbliana don chontae a fhorbairt a chuirfí faoi bhráid an Choiste Bhainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí le faomhadh.

Dhéanadh an **Coiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí** measúnú ar na pleananna chúram leanaí don chontae, tacú leo, iad a acmhainniú agus monatóireacht a dhéanamh orthu, chomh maith le forbairtí náisiúnta sa réimse chúram leanaí a chomhordú agus faisnéis a chur ar fáil ar mhaithe le forbairt an pholasaí náisiúnta. Bheadh an Coiste ag teacht leis an ionadaíocht trasearnálach ar na Coistí Contae um Chúram Leanaí agus bheadh stádas neamhspleách aige.

D'ainmneofaí an **Roinn Dlí agus Cirt, Comhionannais agus Athchóirithe Dlí mar phríomhroinn** maidir leis an Straitéis Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí agus is í a dhéanadh cathaoirleacht ar an **gCoiste Polasáí Idir-Ranna um Chúram Leanaí** a bheadh ina nasc idir an Rialtas agus na Coistí Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí.

Moltaí an tSainghrúpa Oibre i leith Chúram Leanaí

Measann an Sainghrúpa Oibre gur den riachtanas é ról straitéiseach a bheith ag an Rialtas chun seirbhísí d'ardchaighdeán a dheimhniú agus fáil orthu ag ár gcuid leanaí go léir, i dtreo is go mbeadh líon saothair sásúil ann agus chun tosca a fhorbairt inar féidir leis an obair sin barrmhaitheas a bhaint amach. Moltar mar chéad chéim sa phróiseas sin go ndéanfaí Frámaíocht Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí a fhorbairt agus a chur i ngníomh. Ba cheart straitéis chomhtháite seacht mbliana, a chuimseodh moltaí na Tuarascála seo, a bheith laistiar den Fhrámaíocht Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí.

MOLADH 1:

- Ba chóir forbairt a dhéanamh ar an gcóras fógra atá ann faoi láthair chun go ndéanfaí leasú ar an Acht um Chúram Leanaí (1991) a chuirfeadh córas ar fáil chun áiseanna agus oibríthe chúram leanaí a chlárú.
- Is iad na daoine a chaitheadh clárú ná iad sin go léir a chuireann seirbhísí chúram leanaí ar fáil do pháiste amháin nó níos mó, sa bhreis ar a bpáistí féin, agus san áireamh leis sin bheadh daoine atá fostaithe ag tuismitheoir/í an linbh, bíodh sé sin i dteach an linbh nó i dteach an fheighlí.
- Is iad na daoine nach mbeadh orthu clárú ná gaolta (tuismitheoir, seanathair, seanmháthair, sibliní, uncailí, aintíní agus leastuismitheoirí) agus caomhnóirí nó tuismitheoirí altrama.
- Ba chóir go mbeadh iachall ar gach soláthróir chúram leanaí a chuireann seirbhísí ar fáil do pháistí 0 - 12 bliain d'aois, mar atá sainmhínte ag an Sainghrúpa Oibre ar Chúram Leanaí, clárú faoin gcóras clárúcháin atá á mholadh.

MOLADH 2:

Ba chóir go mbeadh an córas fógra mar atá faoi láthair agus an córas clárúcháin atá á mholadh ag teacht le híoschaighdeán náisiúnta agus go spreagadh sé 'an cleachtas is fearr' a ndéanfaí forbairt air i gcomhar agus i gcomhpháirtíocht leis an eanáil NGO.

Ba chóir clár comónta ionduchtúcháin agus oiliúna a bheith ar fáil chun go ndeimhneodh foirne cigireachta go bhfuil caighdeánú déanta ar an gcur i ngníomh.

Anuas air sin, moltar go mbeadh traenáil faighte ag duine den fhoireann chigireachta sa réimse Luathoidreachais agus Chúram Leanaí.

MOLADH 3:

Ba chóir próiseas faofa a bheith ag na Gardaí sa leibhéal láir agus a dhéanamh cumarsáid éifeachtach leis an leibhéal áitiúil chun eolas a chur ar fáil faoi gach duine atá ag obair sa réimse chúram leanaí i ról ar bith.

MOLADH 4:

- Ba chóir don Choiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí atá á mholadh aontú laistigh de 12 mí faoi phróifíl ghairme (dála na léirshamhla in Aguisín 3.2) agus faoi na cáilíochtaí cuí.
- Ba chóir Frámaíocht Náisiúnta i leith cáilíochtaí i gcúram leanaí a fhorbairt i gcomhar leis an gCoiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta
- Ba chóir go gcuirfí an Frámaíocht Náisiúnta i leith cáilíochtaí i gcúram leanaí slite forásacha cáilíochtaí ar fáil agus teacht orthu trí oideachas foirmiúil nó neamhfhoirmiúil nó trí chreidiúnú a fháil ar fhoghlaim roimhe seo.
- Ba chóir an sprioc a leanas a bheith ann agus forbairt á déanamh ar an earnáil chúram leanaí:

Ba chóir go mbeadh íosmhéid de 60% den fhoireann a bheadh ag obair go díreach le leanaí i gcomhsheirbhísí i dteideal deontais le haghaidh bunoilúna ar feadh trí bliana ar a laghad ar leibhéal iar-18, ina mbeadh teoiric agus cleachtadh na péideolaíochta agus fhorbairt an linbh. Ba cheart an oiliúint ar fad a bheith ar bhonn modúlach. Ba chóir don fhoireann go léir sna seirbhísí (comhsheirbhísí agus cúram lae teaghlaigh) nach bhfuil an leibhéal seo oiliúna orthu a bheith i dteideal na hoiliúna sin ar bhonn inseirbhíse. (Sprioc 26 de Líonra Choimisiún na hEorpa ar Spriocanna Cáilíochta Chúram Leanaí i Seirbhísí do Pháistí Óga, 1996).

MOLADH 5:

Tá an Sainghrúpa Oibre den tuairim go mbeadh sé inmhianaithe teagmháil a bheith ag leanaí le fir agus mná araon sna seirbhísí chúram leanaí agus gur chóir don earnáil chúram leanaí iarracht a dhéanamh ar an sprioc a leanas a bhaint amach:

Ba chóir gur fir a bheadh i bhfiche faoin gcéad den fhoireann atá fostaithe i gcomhsheirbhísí chúram leanaí

(Sprioc 29 de Spriocanna Cáilíochta Choimisiún na hEorpa i leith Sheirbhísí do Pháistí Óga, 1996).

Ba chóir don Choiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar na bearta is gá chun é sin a bhaint amach.

MOLADH 6:

Ba chóir an sprioc a leanas a bheith mar threoir agus nósanna imeachta fostaíochta á gcur i ngníomh:

Ba chóir do na seirbhísí glacadh le nósanna imeachta fostaíochta a chuireann an bhéim ar fhostaithe óga a earcú agus a chuireann san áireamh éagsúlacht eitneach an phobail áitiúil

(Sprioc 36 de Spriocanna Cáilíochta Choimisiún na hEorpa i leith Sheirbhísí do Pháistí Óga, 1996).

MOLADH 7:

Ba chóir scála pá náisiúnta a bhunú a bheadh ag teacht le luach sóisialta agus eacnamaíoch obair na n-oibríthe chúram leanaí. Is í an mheicníocht atá á moladh ná Comhchoiste Saothair (CS) a leagfadh ráta CS síos don tionscal.

MOLADH 8:

- Ba chóir do FÁS tosaíocht a thabhairt d'acmhainní Fhostaíocht Phobail ar mhaithe le tionscnamh taithí oibre agus oiliúna a chur ar fáil sa réimse chúram leanaí.
- Ba chóir do FÁS leanúint le forbairt na dtionscnamh oiliúna sa réimse chúram leanaí laistigh den Fhostaíocht Phobail agus i gcomhar leis an gCoiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí.

- Ba chóir don Choiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí atá á mholadh iniúchadh tacaíochta a dhéanamh ar bhealaí eile a fhorbairt dóibh siúd a dteastaíonn uathu a bheith ag obair san earnáil chúram leanaí.

MOLADH 9:

Laistigh den Fhrámaíocht Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí ba chóir tosaíocht a thabhairt do riachtanais na bpáistí agus na dteaghlach úd a dtéann an bhochtaineacht, míbhuntáiste nó eisiámh sóisialta i bhfeidhm orthu agus ba chóir acmhainní a dhíriú ina dtreo.

MOLADH 10:

- Ba chóir an Clár Comhdheiseanna Chúram Leanaí a leathnú i dtreo is gur féidir leanúint le huasghrádú fisiceach sholáthar chúram leanaí den scoth agus tacaíocht mhéadaithe ó thaobh foirne de a chur ar fáil.
- Ba chóir £3.5m a dháileadh ar an gClár agus a buiséad breise sin a bheith ann gach bliain de na trí bliana tosaigh den Straitéis Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaí.

MOLADH 11:

Ba chóir liúntais bhreise chaipitil a chur ar fáil do sheirbhísí/ghnólachtaí chúram leanaí atá bunaithe ar ghrúpa.

MOLADH 12:

- Ba cheart Scéim Dheontas nua a bhunú do sholáthróirí príobháideacha ar scála beag agus d'fheighlithe féinhostaithe nach bhfuil i dteideal tacaíochtaí eile, i dtreo is go ndéanfaí uasghrádú capítíl ar áitreabh chun go mbeifí ag teacht leis na Rialúcháin Chúram Leanaí (Seirbhísí Réamhscoile).
- Bheadh an scéim seo ag feidhmiú tríd an Roinn Dlí agus Cirt, Comhionannais agus Athchóirithe Dlí.
- Ba chóir buiséad de £2m a dháileadh air in 1999 d'fhonn freagairt go pras don éileamh.

MOLADH 13:

- Ba chóir liúntas speisialta cánach a bheith i bhfeidhm maidir le hioncam ar fheighlíocht leanaí.
- Moltar nach n-áireofaí ioncam ar fheighlíocht leanaí agus duine á mheas le haghaidh íocaíochtaí leasa shóisialta agus sochair theagmhasacha, cárta leighis cuir i gcás.
- Dhéanfaí athbhreithniú ar na céimeanna seo tar éis trí bliana.

MOLADH 14:

- Deontais fostaíochta go dtí £5,000 do gach ball breise ar an bhfoireann a fhostaítear in áiseanna chúram leanaí, príobháideach agus ar bhonn pobail araon, agus tionscnaimh shóisialta eacnamaíocha san áireamh, iad á noibriú trí Bhoird Fiontraíochta Contae.
- Buiséad de £5m in aghaidh na bliana ar mhaithe leis an gcuspóir sin agus é dírithe go sonrach ar chúram leanaí.

MOLADH 15:

Beidh fostóirí in ann caiteachas ar chúram leanaí a bhfostaithe a dhíscriobh ar na foirmeacha cánach. D'fhéadfadh an caiteachas sin a bheith i bhfoirm áiseanna chúram leanaí a sholáthar, éarlaisí chúram leanaí nó fóirdheontas díreach le haghaidh áiteanna chúram leanaí dá n-oibrítithe.

MOLADH 16:

Molann an Sainghrúpa Oibre go ndáilfeadh an Rialtas £1m in 1999 agus sna blianta ina dhiaidh sin:

- Ar fhorbairt sholáthar chúram leanaí iarscoile ar leibhéal áitiúil ina mbeadh gné shonrach oiliúna, agus
- ar líonraí aitiúla chúram leanaí a bhunú a chuirfeadh tacaíocht oideachais agus oiliúna ar fáil agus comhairle do sholáthróirí chúram leanaí ar leibhéal áitiúil.

MOLADH 17:

- Ba chóir don Roinn Comhshaoil agus Rialtais Aitiúil, i gcomhar leis an gCoiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaf atá á mholadh, treoirlínte náisiúnta a leagan síos agus a fhoilsiú maidir le faomhadh a dhéanamh agus pleanáil ar siúl le haghaidh áiseanna chúram leanaf.
- Ba chóir do na hÚdaráis Phleanála féachaint chuige go práinneach go mbeadh Treoirlínte i leith Rialú Pleanála, mar chuid dá bPleananna Forbartha, ar mhaithe le réimse áiseanna chúram leanaf a chur ar fáil. Ba chóir do na Treoirlínte sin nithe a chur san áireamh ar nós patrún na hoibre a bheith ag athrú, struchtúr an teaghlaigh, agus an réimse áiseanna chúram leanaf a bhfuil gá leo anois. Ba chóir do na Treoirlínte a chur san áireamh chomh maith a inmhianaithe is a bheadh sé na háiseanna sin a bheith lonnaithe i gceantair atá gar do lucht úsáidte na n-áiseanna sin, eastáit tithíochta san áireamh.

MOLADH 18:

- Ba chóir scéim a chur i bhfeidhm chun tacú le costais chúram leanaf i gcás tuismitheoirí ar ioncam íseal atá páirteach i ngach clár oiliúna nó oideachais a chuireann áisíneachtaí Stáit ar fáil, dála na scéimeanna píolóiteacha atá ag feidhmiú cheana i gcás VTOS, Youthreach agus an Clár Oiliúna don Lucht Taistil Sinsearach. An t-údarás oiliúna nó oideachais cuí a riarfadh an fóirdheontas.
- Ba chóir fóirdheontas chúram leanaf ar an dul céanna a íoc le tuismitheoirí atá páirteach i gcúrsa forbartha agus lítearthachta d'aosáigh agus oideachais phobail. Ba chóir don Choiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanaf na Treoirlínte le haghaidh na bhfóirdheontas sin a fhorbairt agus cé a bheadh i dteideal dóibh, agus an fóirdheontas á dháileadh go háitiúil ar bhonn caiteachais le hadmháil a chuirfeadh na Coistí Áitiúla Chúram Leanaf nó a ngníomhairí ar fáil.

MOLADH 19:

Chun aitheantas a thabhairt don luach a bhaineann le dea-chúram leanaf a sholáthar, molann an Sainghrúpa Oibre go ndéanfaí leathnú ar an nós atá ann faoi láthair chúram leanaf faoi mhíbhuntáiste a bheith ag teacht faoin Scéim Liúntas Leasa Forlíontach chun cur ar chumas na dtuismitheoirí sin nach acmhainn leo íoc as chúram leanaf, agus atá i mbun oiliúna agus nach bhfuil i dteideal na bhfóirdheontas thuas, áiteanna chúram leanaf a cheannach dá gclann.

MOLADH 20:

Ba chóir an teorainn ioncaim shonraithe i gcás Fhorlíonadh ar Ioncam Teaghlaigh a bheith ardaithe, ag féachaint ar gach cás ar leith ina bhfuil costais á n-íoc, agus admhálacha leo, ag teaghlaigh ar chúram leanaf.

MOLADH 21:

Moltar go leanfaí leis an scéim Tacaíocht Teaghlaigh an Tuismitheora Aonair agus go ndéanfaí leathnú uirthi chun an buaicioncam de £16,000 a mhéadú, ag féachaint ar gach cás ar leith ina mbeadh costais le hadmhálacha á n-íoc ag tuismitheoir aonair i leith chúram leanaf.

MOLADH 22:

Moltar beart faoisimh chánach ar an ráta caighdeánach a thabharfadh:

- faoiseamh ar chaiteachas ar chúram leanaf, le hadmhálacha, suas go dtí £4,000 in aghaidh an pháiste do gach aonad teaghlaigh i dtaca le leanaf idir 0 agus 12 bliain d'aois de.
- liúntas i dtaca le gach páiste de, an liúntas don chéad leanbh faoi 5 bliana ar £4,000 in aghaidh na bliana agus £3,200 i gcás gach páiste eile.
- liúntas do pháistí 5 bliana agus os a chionn (páistí scoile) ar £2,000 in aghaidh na bliana.

MOLADH 23:

Ná meastar cúram leanaí sa láthair oibre feasta - pé acu saor in aisce nó le fóirdheontas - mar shochar le hábhar maidir le cúrsaí cánach.

MOLADH 24:

- Má chuirtear córas chreidmheas cánach ar fáil ba chóir Creidmheasanna Cánach In-aisíoctha a chur in áit mholtaí an tSainghrúpa Oibre maidir le cáin FIT agus fóirdheontais láithreán éilimh eile nach iad.

MOLADH 25:

- Go mbunófaí Coistí Contae um Chúram Leanai ar a mbeadh ionadaithe ó na coimeádaithe geallta áitiúla cuí trasearnálacha go léir.
- Príomhfhócas na gCoistí ná forbairt, feidhmiú agus monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar Phlean Chúram Leanai 7 mBlia na don Chontae.
- Ba chóir don Choiste Contae um Chúram Leanai na seirbhísí atá ann faoi láthair agus na seirbhísí nua a chomhordú laistigh den cheantar agus feidhmiú an Phlean a iniúchadh ar bhonn monatóireachta agus na spriocanna a bheith ar aigne i gcónaí, spriocanna a leagfaidh síos na coimeádaithe geallta go léir eatarthu.
- Ba chóir buiséad de €2m a dháileadh ar mhaithe le struchtúir chontae a bhunú a fhorbairt agus a chur i ngníomh.

MOLADH 26:

- Go mbunófaí Coiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanai agus an ionadaíocht chéanna thrasearnálach is a bheadh ar na Coistí Contae um Chúram Leanai.
- Príomhfheidhm an Choiste ná tacú le Pleananna Chúram Leanai na gContaetha, iad a mheas is a acmhainniú agus monatóireacht a dhéanamh orthu chomh maith le comhordú a dhéanamh ar a bhfuil

d'fhorbairtí náisiúnta cheana féin ar an réimse chúram leanai agus faisnéis a chur ar fáil ar mhaithe le forbairt ar pholasaí náisiúnta.

- Ba chóir buiséad de €0.5m. a dháileadh in 1999 ar chostais bhunú, thaighde agus fhorbairt an Choiste Bhainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanai.
- Ba chóir buiséad de €0.5m a dháileadh in 1999 ar eagraíochtaí náisiúnta/réigiúnda chúram leanai a fheidhmiú ar bhonn deonach agus a chruthaíonn go bhfuil siad in ann tacú le cur i bhfeidhm na Frámaíochta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanai.

MOLADH 27:

- Ba chóir go n-ainmneofaí an Roinn Dlí agus Cirt, Comhionannais agus Athchóirithe Dlí mar Phríomh-Roinn maidir leis an bhFrámaíocht Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanai.
- Is é an dualgas a bheadh uirthi comhordú a dhéanamh ar réimse na Rann atá ann cheana, an comhéadan idir na Ranna go léir a neartú agus a mhéadú, na Ranna sin a bhfuil ról díreach nó indíreach acu i leith chúram leanai.
- Go mbunófaí Coiste Polasaí Idir-Ranna a d'fheidhmeodh mar nasc idir an Chomh-Aireacht agus an Coiste Bainisteoireachta Náisiúnta um Chúram Leanai.
- Ba chóir don Choiste Polasaí Idir-Ranna machnamh a dhéanamh chomh maith ar na moltaí a fuarthas ó Thuarascálacha ábhartha eile chomh maith leis an Tuarascáil Dheiridh ó Choimisiún an Teaghlaigh (1998) agus an Tuarascáil ar Fhóram Náisiúnta an Luathoideachais Óige (1998).

INTRODUCTION

Why Ireland needs a Childcare Strategy

The approach taken to childcare in Ireland up to now has been to leave it almost exclusively to parents to arrange for themselves. This approach worked while we had a high rate of unemployment and while the majority of women opted to leave the workforce to care for their own children.

Changed social and economic conditions and expectations have resulted in more women opting to combine work and family responsibilities at a time when the availability of childminders and places in childcare centres are contracting. The bulk of childminding has been carried out in the informal economy, mainly by women who left the workforce to care for their own children. With the growth in job opportunities many of these women are opting for alternative employment in the formal economy, where they command higher rates of pay than can be earned through childminding in the informal economy. This change has resulted in a significant drop in the availability of childminders.

The second reason for the drop in the availability of places is the impact of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996, under the Child Care Act, 1991, which commenced in January 1997. Health boards have been carrying out inspections of childcare centres. Many childcare centres are not meeting the standards required under the Regulations and are opting to close rather than make the investment required. Their profit margins are often too narrow to meet the costs of increased staff ratios and of the physical improvements required. The majority of these are small scale providers who provide the service in their own home.

The third reason for the drop in places is the difficulty which the larger childcare centres are experiencing in recruiting and

retaining qualified childcare staff. Childcare staff have traditionally been low paid workers and in a buoyant economy these are being attracted away from childcare to higher paid employment.

Fourthly, parents in need of childcare for babies and parents in need of childcare places on a part-time basis have difficulty accessing childcare. This is largely due to the fact that the Regulations require higher staff ratios for babies, which increases the cost for the provider. Likewise, a part-time place increases cost for the provider when the place could be allocated to a parent seeking full-time care.

Finally, many parents are not entirely happy with the quality of the childcare service they use for their children but continue to use it because of lack of alternative provision.

The interactions of the increase in the number of women with children choosing to combine work and family life with the decrease in the availability of childcare places has caused a virtual crisis in childcare. The crisis is further exacerbated in that with the improvements in the quality of childcare, the price of childcare is increasing. As a result, many women who would like to combine work and family life cannot afford to work except those in higher income groups.

Expert Working Group on Childcare

The Expert Working Group on Childcare¹ was established in July 1997 as a result of a commitment in Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness, to devise a national framework for the development of the childcare sector in Ireland. In placing the development of a national framework within the context of gender equality it is recognised that "childcare is clearly an important issue in promoting equality for women and especially in promoting equal opportunities in employment". (Partnership 2000, par. 5.6.)

¹Throughout the report, the term 'Expert Working Group' will be used to refer to the Expert Working Group on Childcare.

The aim of the Expert Working Group, as set out in Partnership 2000, was to develop a strategy which integrates the different strands of the current arrangements for the development and delivery of childcare and early educational services.

Responsibility for chairing the Group was assigned to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department also provided the Secretariat. In addition, Area Development Management Limited (ADM) provided technical, operational support and advice to the Department on the implementation of the process and the Centre for Social & Educational Research (CSER) were engaged for editorial support. While Partnership 2000 refers to the development of a national childcare framework the Expert Working Group has decided to refer to a national childcare strategy, as the word 'framework' could be interpreted as meaning the delivery mechanisms only.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the Group were drawn from Partnership 2000 and were as follows:

"The Group will consider the conclusions of the Working Group on the Job Potential of Childcare, and the ESRI survey of childcare arrangements currently being undertaken on behalf of the Commission on the Family, as well as the following specific issues:

- quantification of the job potential of the childcare sector;
- implementation of Part VII of the Child Care Act, 1991, which provides for the introduction of regulations governing safety and health standards in pre-school services and accompanying guidelines;
- the establishment of a national registration system for childcarers;
- the establishment of a nationally recognised system of certification and accreditation for childcare workers providing for an appropriate minimum qualification;
- subject to the evaluation of the current

pilot project², the implications of the phased extension of the Early Start Programme to all areas with continuing priority being given to areas of disadvantage;

- the financing of childcare provision by a variety of means in the interest of affordable and accessible childcare." (Partnership 2000, para.5.7).

Membership of the Expert Working Group

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform decided that membership of the Expert Working Group should be as inclusive as possible, representing all the stakeholders with an interest in the development of childcare. This strategy was adopted to ensure the development of a comprehensive national strategy which would meet the needs of all children and parents and take into account the views of as many childcare interests as possible. The 80 members represented the relevant Government departments, social partners, statutory bodies, non-governmental organisations and parents. A full list of the membership can be found in Appendix 1.1.

Definition of childcare

The Expert Working Group agreed that the term 'childcare', as used by the Group would refer to services providing care and education, which are viewed by the Expert Working Group as being complementary and inseparable. This is to distinguish the use of the term from its use within the wider health sector, where the term 'Child Care Services' refers to the variety of services for children up to the age of 18 years in need of the care and protection of the State.

The following was agreed:

- the term childcare is used by the Expert Working Group to describe daycare facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours.

²: The Evaluation of the Early Start Programme carried out by the Educational Research Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, although complete, was not made available to the Expert Working Group

- it includes services offering care, education and socialisation opportunities for children to the benefit of children, parents, employers and the wider community. Thus, services such as pre-schools, naionraí, daycare services, crèches, playgroups, childminding and after-school groups are included, but schools (primary, secondary and special) and residential centres for children are excluded.

The Expert Working Group also agreed that the age-group to be considered would be children aged 0 to 12 years inclusive.

Submissions

The Expert Working Group sought written submissions from the public on their views as to what should be considered as essential elements in the development of a national strategy for childcare. A total of 135 were received and the common issues arising are represented below in order of frequency:

- High quality training of childcare workers is essential **34%**
- Need for State support for childcare provision **24%**
- Quality childcare provision must be available and affordable to all **16%**
- Equality of access and participation for all children **16%**
- Registration of childcare workers and facilities **16%**
- Need for co-ordination of policy **16%**
- Recognition of accredited prior learning (APL) **10%**
- Needs and rights of children must be foremost consideration **7%**
- Needs and rights of children with special needs **5%**
- Call for involvement of men in childcare services **5%**
- Employers have responsibilities in providing for childcare **5%**.

The issues raised were incorporated in the deliberations of the Expert Working Group. A complete list of the organisations and individuals who made submissions can be found in Appendix 1.2.

Working Methods

The large membership and work process required that the Expert Working Group operate at three levels. These were:

- Plenary sessions attended by all members,
- Eight subgroups, each focusing on a particular policy issue,
- A Steering Group which comprised the Chairperson, Secretariat, chairpersons of each of the subgroups, and representatives from ADM and the Department of Education and Science.

The following subgroups were established:

- Group 1 considered the financial and employment implications of an integrated approach to the provision of childcare facilities in Ireland.
- Group 2 considered the registration, training and qualifications of childcare workers.
- Group 3 considered the resourcing and sustaining of childcare within urban disadvantaged areas.
- Group 4 considered the resourcing and sustaining of childcare within rural areas.
- Group 5 considered regulations and standards.
- Group 6 considered the educational aspects of childcare services.
- Group 7 considered the needs and rights of children in relation to a national framework.
- Group 8 considered equality of access and participation in relation to a national framework.

Terms of reference and detailed objectives were agreed for each subgroup (see Appendix 1.3).

Two of the subgroups had particular links with other initiatives. Group 5 had been established by the Department of Health and Children to monitor the implementation of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996 and was incorporated into the Expert Working Group. The aim of the Early Education Subgroup (Group 6), was to co-ordinate the views of all members of the Expert Working Group in relation to early childhood

education and to make these known at the National Forum for Early Childhood Education, which took place in March, 1998. A copy of the Expert Working Group's statement to the National Forum is at Appendix 1.4.

Appendix 1.5 presents a diagrammatic representation of the working methods of the Expert Working Group.

The Expert Working Group also commissioned a number of research projects, the results of which have informed this report (see Appendix 1.6).

Other developments

Contemporaneous with the work of the Expert Working Group on Childcare during 1997 and 1998, was the work of the Commission on the Family (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs) and the National Forum for Early Childhood Education (Department of Education and Science).

Some considerations which shaped the Expert Working Group's Report

The Expert Working Group was faced with a complex and challenging task. Its terms of reference were wide-ranging and multi-faceted and its membership large. It had to address a diverse range of issues including the needs of children, the acute problem of childcare supply, affordability of childcare, regulation and standards, the number of childminders in the informal economy and the particular problems faced by urban disadvantaged and rural areas. Its large membership brought together a wealth of experience and knowledge on childcare but it also showed how disparate the perspectives on childcare can be, depending on the background of the persons concerned. For example, some members saw childcare as being essentially about enabling women to enter the labour market; others were mainly concerned with the needs of disadvantaged areas; and others saw the quality of childcare as being

the key issue. There were many complexities and tensions which needed to be addressed and difficulties to be overcome in the development of the strategy.

The Group agreed that the needs of children and their right to access quality services, regardless of their social and economic background, should be the primary consideration in the development of a National Childcare Strategy. Throughout all the deliberations of the Expert Working Group, the needs and rights of children were placed centre stage.

One of the issues which emerged for the Expert Working Group at an early stage was that of support for parents who choose to care for their own children. It recognised that the essential difference between the needs of parents who care for their own children and those who avail of childcare services is that the use of childcare necessarily involves third parties who provide a service for the parent(s) - Parents who use childcare are service users who rely on having an adequate provision of good quality service available to them at a price they can afford. The Group recognised the desirability of bringing forward measures to assist parents who work outside the home as well as measures for parents who choose to care for their own children. It considered that these were two different policy objectives, and therefore two different policy solutions should be applied. If the two situations are treated as one policy issue, e.g. by increasing child benefit for all or by universal tax credits, the impact on the development of childcare services could be negligible. Universal policies, at the level at which the Exchequer could afford them, are unlikely to result in improving either the quality or quantity of childcare services.

The Expert Working Group was, under its terms of reference, directed towards considering childcare for parents in the labour force, or trying to access the labour force. The Expert Working Group did not,

therefore, extend its recommendations to parents who work in the home. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that improving the quality and quantity of childcare will also have a positive impact on parents who choose to care for their children at home since 16% of children with parents who work full-time in the home avail of paid childcare.

An important consideration which influenced the deliberations of the Expert Working Group was the need to develop a childcare strategy to meet European Employment Guidelines and Structural Fund criteria. The 1999 European Employment Guidelines call on Member States "to design, implement and promote family friendly policies, including affordable, accessible and high quality care services for children as well as parental and other leave schemes". In its comments on Ireland's National Employment Plan for 1998, in relation to childcare the EU said that "the policy focus must now shift towards a more effective implementation of the reform process". Ireland's childcare infrastructure is much weaker than that of our EU counterparts. The Expert Working Group was conscious that if a national childcare strategy is not developed the result could be criticism of Ireland's National Employment Action Plans and in addition, forfeiture of Structural Funds for 2000 - 2006 because of failure to satisfy the equal opportunity policy requirements of the regulations for structural funds under a key criterion for childcare infrastructure support.

The strategy put forward by the Expert Working Group represents a consensus of the views of the Expert Working Group.

The Group sought to develop a balanced package of measures which would take into account the needs of all sectors of society and would deal with both the supply and demand sides of childcare. The Expert Working Group has developed an interdependent package of measures which it believes addresses all the dimensions of childcare in an appropriate and balanced way.

The Expert Working Group did not seek to put forward an ambitious and costly 'wish list'. It sought to develop a workable strategy which would not entail extreme costs.

The Group took the view that its strategy should build on existing structures and services. It was felt that it would not be cost-efficient to try to establish an entirely new childcare service. The Group also recognised that childcare could not be compartmentalised (e.g. as a labour market measure, an education measure or a care measure) and agreed that harnessing and co-ordinating of the services which already exist in various Government Departments, State Agencies and the voluntary sector represented the best way forward for development of the sector.

The Expert Working Group recognised that, given the multiplicity of policies and tasks involved, a childcare strategy would take some time to develop. It envisaged that the strategy would have a seven year time-span, which would coincide with the time-frame of the next National Development Plan. It believes that the structures for co-ordination and delivery of childcare at national and local levels could be brought to maturity in that time. A seven year period would be needed to develop a quality workforce. A seven year period would also be appropriate for the operation of tax incentives and schemes outlined in Chapter 7, it is envisaged that such incentives would taper off towards the end of that period.

Central to many of the measures being put forward by the Expert Working Group for the development of the childcare sector is the concept of receipted expenditure. The Group concluded that demand side supports should be tied to receipted expenditure in order to bring childcare out of the informal economy and facilitate its development as a legitimate business within the services sector and contribute to the overall quality of childcare. It was considered that this was necessary in order to give childcare workers and childminders

the recognition and value they deserved in Irish society. What has been developed, therefore, is a set of interdependent measures, which must be put in place together and which the Expert Working Group considers will not work if implemented in an isolated way.

In conclusion

This report is the culmination of a lengthy consultative process which has been supported by national and international research. It presents a seven year strategy for the development of the childcare sector, including policy recommendations and the structures and mechanisms for a needs-led planning approach at county level, within a national framework. It has been developed in consultation and partnership, and proposes a shared vision for the future of childcare in Ireland.

As a society we will be failing to meet the needs of many children and parents if we fail to develop a strategy for good quality, affordable and accessible childcare. Families are the core of our society, but many of them are under pressure trying to combine work and family life. We must support them in new ways which reflect the new challenges which they face in a rapidly changing society. This Report sets out how this can best be done.