

National Collaborative Forum for the Early Years Care and Education Sector

Minutes of meeting – Wednesday 7th March 2018, Farmleigh House

Attendance list: See Appendix 1.

Welcome and Minutes from the EY Forum of 6th November 2017.

Laura McGarrigle introduced herself and explained that the Minister and Bernie Mc Nally would attend later in the day due to other commitments. Laura welcomed all members of the forum and introduced the new members; Aine Lynch & Tanya Ward representing the National Parents Council and the Children's Rights Alliance respectively.

The change in the format of the forum was explained and feedback was sought from all attendees.

Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes were agreed. Matters arising included a question on three years paid experience being a requirement in order to be eligible for higher capitation. DCYA provided clarification over the course of the day on the historical policy position which has remained unchanged, the work the Department of Education and Skills was leading to review the quality of courses, and the Focussed Policy Assessment on Higher Capitation being conducted by the Research Unit of the DCYA.

Crowe Horwath Presentation on ACS Governance

Crowe Horwath made a presentation and led a round table consultation to inform their research, commissioned by DCYA, relating to the proposed governance procedures for the ACS. The round table discussion focused on 3 topics. These being:

- Financial guidelines,
- Compliance and recording,
- Training needs.

The top three issues raised at each table were fed back to the Forum after lunch. In summary terms, stakeholders called for the following:

- A principled approach to compliance. Giving notice, clarifying terminology, assumption of compliance and respect for providers.
- A departure from the current perceived assumption of malfeasance and the search for proof.
- Scheduling of compliance visits to minimise disruption to services and the requirement for staff to remain with inspector beyond the opening times of the service.
- A commitment from Government to introduce a principled approach to inspections.
- The compliance process and documents to be available in both languages.

These points and the wider discussion were noted and will inform the final report prepared for DCYA by Crowe Horwath.

Roundtable on staffing and recruitment issues

The afternoon consisted of a second round table discussion on the topic of staffing and recruitment in the EY sector, with a particular focus on short, medium and long-term suggestions for the sector

Notes of the discussion at each table were collected, as were the key points of feedback from Stakeholders. These included the following observations and suggestions:

- A policy change to extend ECCE from the current 38 weeks to 41 or 44 weeks would improve staff conditions and permanency of their positions.
- A liaison with DSP to help create a more streamlined approach to the requirement for staff to sign on during July and August.
- The provision through contracts that additional capitation payments must be made to staff.
- Remove the requirement for 3 years paid experience to avail of higher capitation for ECCE.
- Extension of higher capitation to an entire service not just for ECCE rooms.
- Recognition of the importance of the EY sector. Promoting it as a career. Learn from other jurisdictions and acknowledge EY sector as important.
- The creation of a clear career progression path. Currently career progression leads childcare practitioners out of childcare and into administrative roles.
- Evaluate value for money in training and college courses.
- Higher pay based on skills and qualifications. Introduction of a progressive scale for pay.

The above points will inform DCYA and DES's actions in relation to staffing and recruitment issues.

Minister's opening remarks

Minister Zappone joined the Forum and spoke about the progress made in the last number of years for the EY sector. She also spoke about the work that remained and the fact that this takes time as well as sustained investment and commitment. Minister Zappone spoke of the need to ensure that we use our experiences to inform us. She said she was looking forward to hearing from the remaining speakers.

Key issues presented by stakeholders to the Minister

Crowe Horwath

Crowe Horwath provided a summary of the feedback received and said that today's engagement has been very useful.

Early Childhood Ireland

Frances Byrne, Director of Policy and Advocacy, of ECI spoke about the staffing crisis in the EY sector. Whilst there were a number of actions required to address this, they wished the Minister and DCYA to consider in particular extending the hours of and duration of the ECCE scheme.

ECI also raised the idea of providing higher capitation for all children with a childcare setting not just ECCE classes.

Frances also requested the sector receive greater recognition from the Government and Department through recognising the competency and qualifications of the childcare workers.

The extension of the date for response to the Capital grant application was welcomed but frustration was expressed at the delay to last year's funding release. ECI urged DCYA to consider more strategic planning with regards to Capital Grants. It was also felt the sector would benefit from a CPD structure and the establishment of a bursary/ training fund.

In response to the ECI statement Minister Zappone said that the DCYA is committed to investment in the sector and insuring the equity of investment, respecting the status of the workforce.

The Minister also noted that work was on going with regards to planning for future capital and CPD investment and looks forward to engaging with the sector regarding these plans once they are ready.

Children's Rights Alliance

Tanya Ward spoke on behalf of the Children's Rights Alliance. She insisted that children should be at the centre of all childcare policies. She welcomed the forthcoming Early Years Strategy and suggested that DCYA should set out a clear vision for the next 10 years and have a strong implementation plan to achieve it.

Tanya also stated that children benefit from well-paid and professional staff and the retention of these staff benefit the entire sector. Staff retention is also beneficial in minimising risks to children.

Tanya said it is a positive step to link funding to quality as proposed in the new ACS scheme. She raised the concern for undocumented children and the need to grant all children access to the same opportunities.

Finally she raised child hunger as a real issue and that the EY sector could provide an opportunity to alleviate the issue by providing access to meals for children. This last point was noted by Minister Zappone, who has spoken with An Taoiseach about the matter.

Code of Ethics

The final speaker of the afternoon was Heino Schonfeld from Barnardos. He sought for the Code of Ethics provided to DCYA and included in each Forum member's pack to be officially recognised and published. Laura McGarrigle suggested the inclusion of a reference to the national Inclusion Guidelines for the Early Years Sector which were published in 2016 as part of the development and implementation of the AIM programme and its recognition of diversity and inclusion. Bernie McNally agreed that after this final change it should be published.

Minister Zappone's closing statement

Minister Zappone spoke of the importance of the sector and her desire to see it grow and be resourced. She spoke of her commitment to meet proactively with the Minister for Finance and to negotiate the best possible budget for early years care and education. She also commented on child hunger and poverty and that the issue had been raised by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadker. Minister Zappone closed the forum by thanking everyone for their time and contribution to the day.

Appendix 1 Attendance List

Name	Organisation
Teresa Heeney	Early Childhood Ireland
Frances Byrne	Early Childhood Ireland
Louise Kilbane	Early Childhood Ireland
Helen Carey	Early Childhood Ireland
Denise McCormilla	National Childhood Network
Heino Schonfeld	Barnardos
Bernadette Burke	Childminding Ireland
Siobhan Fitzpatrick	High Scope Ireland Institute
Ian McKenna	St Nicholas Montessori College
Linda Grant	Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association
Marie Daly	National Forum for Community Childcare Services
Sinead Duignan	Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association
Mary Moloney	Pedagogy, Learning & Education Association
Fiona McDonnell	Tusla
Sinéad McKeon	Pobal
David Burke	Pobal
Clare Spáinneach	Gaelscoileanna Teo
Suzanne Nic Géidí	Comhar Naíonraí naGaeltachta
Marian Quinn	Association of Childhood Professionals
Aine Lynch	National Parents Council
Tayna Ward	Children's Rights Alliance
Regina Bushell	Seas Suas
Alan Davidson	Crowe Horwath
Shane McQuillan	Crowe Horwath
Catherine Rogers	Crowe Horwath
Aoife Conduit	Dept. Education & Skills
Margaret Rogers	Better Start
Claire Woods	Childcare Committees Ireland
Rose Murphy	Childcare Committees Ireland
Tricia McLaughlin	County Childcare Committees
Gillian Martin	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
Oonagh Fleming	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
Mary Hogan	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
Roisin Barr	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
Hazel O'Byrne	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
Magdalena Hayden	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
David O'Brien	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
Myles O'Reilly	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
Lisa Walsh	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
Stephen Cahill	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs
Fergus Atkinson	Dept. Children & Youth Affairs