

National Collaborative Forum for the Early Years Care and Education Sector
(The Early Years Forum)

Minutes of the first meeting – DCYA, Mespil Road

Wednesday 28th September 2016 at 11am

1. Opening Remarks by the Minister

Minister Katherine Zappone opened the inaugural meeting of the National Collaborative Forum for the Early Years Care and Education Sector (The Early Years Forum (EYF)). The Minister welcomed everyone and thanked them for agreeing to participate in the Forum. She said that establishing the Forum was one of her first priorities when she was appointed Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Minister reflected upon many of the issues and challenges that the Early Childhood Care and Education sector face. She thanked those present and the people they represented for participating in the Early Years survey she had commissioned recently. She shared her vision for the sector and expressed her hope that the Forum's strong and effective collaboration would enable important progress on key challenges.

2. Terms of Reference – Purpose of the Group

The draft Terms of Reference were discussed with the group. It was recognised that they were designed to place a focus on Early Years providers. The Forum was given an opportunity to suggest any amendments. It was agreed that the terms of reference might be amended further in the future to reflect changing needs and priorities in the Early Years sector. (Agreed terms of reference attached at Appendix 1.)

3. Introductions and Priorities

Each member of the Forum was invited to introduce themselves, outlining briefly the priorities of the organisations they represented. In summary, these priorities included: - development of quality services for children and families, retention of graduates and experienced staff in the sector, giving early years providers a voice, sustainability of the sector, and the affordability of childcare. All members welcomed the opportunity provided by the Forum to address concerns within the Early Years sector at a high level, and hoped they could make an important and effective contribution to the sector through the Forum.

4. Results of the Early Years Consultation Survey 2016 – Presentation

Lisa Ann Kennedy (Centre for Effective Services), Clare Farrell (Research Unit, DCYA) and Ciaran Madden (Early Years Unit, DCYA) presented the "Initial Findings and Overview" of The Early Years Consultation Survey 2016 (survey slides attached at Appendix 2). The DCYA-commissioned survey was designed by the Research and Evaluation Unit, in conjunction with the Early Years Unit and the Minister's Office, and the results are currently being analysed by the Centre for Effective Services. Minister Zappone, on behalf of the Forum, thanked the contributors for the presentation. The

numerous difficulties raised in the survey were acknowledged by the Minister, and she appreciated that they echoed many of the problems that the membership of the Forum themselves had raised.

5. Workshops

DCYA officials invited the Forum members to divide into four workshop groups to discuss three key questions (attached at Appendix 3) which had been circulated in advance, and to offer three responses to each issue.

One member of each group reported back to the Forum on their discussion and findings. The responses to each question were documented by officials. Some general discussion took place.

It was agreed that the workshops proved useful in allowing the members to propose solutions to many of the problems that had been raised. The Minister expressed her gratitude at the group's willingness to collaborate, remarking that this commitment would be essential in the Forum's ability to attempt to address the sector's concerns. Officials undertook to collate the feedback and propose a set of actions with regard to main themes in advance of the next meeting (see attached at appendix 4).

6. Next Steps and Close

The dates of the next three meetings were provisionally agreed, as follows:

28th November 2016 – 2.30 pm

6th March 2017 - 2.30 pm

19th June 2017 – 2.30 pm

All meetings will take place in the DCYA's offices at Mespil Road.

The Minister thanked everyone for participating.

The meeting was then closed.

Appendix 1-

National Collaborative Forum for the Early Years Care and Education Sector (*The Early Years Forum (EYF)*)

Terms of Reference

Introduction

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone, is establishing a forum for the early years sector where issues of relevance can be discussed among key stakeholders. The Minister proposes to chair the first meeting of the Forum in September 2016 and to play an on-going and active role with the forum.

The forum will enable consultation and engagement between the Minister, key Department of Children and Youth Affairs officials, and key representatives of the sector.

Role of the EYF

Terms of reference (TOR) will be agreed by the members of the Forum at the first meeting. Proposed TORs are as follows:

EYF will

- Provide a forum within which issues of concern to providers can be raised, discussed and, where feasible, resolved;
- Provide a forum for exchange of ideas in relation to early years care and education policy and operational issues, and priority of actions;
- Ensure that the implications of policy proposals being considered by the Department for the early years care and education sector are examined and understood;
- Advise the Department on, and inform future policy development in relation to, the early years care and education sector.
- Assist in effective communication with the wider early years care and education sector; all members of the group will communicate effectively with their constituents on the work and content of NCFEY.

The Terms of Reference will be reviewed in 12 months and expansion considered at that point

Governance

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs will establish the Forum and chair its inaugural meeting to agree its Terms of Reference. Thereafter, meetings will be chaired by Ms Bernie McNally, Assistant Secretary General, although the Minister may attend part of these meetings. Where the Minister is not in attendance, detailed briefing will be provided to the Minister after the meeting.

Proposed membership of EYF

To ensure an interactive forum, with appropriate opportunity for important dialogue and engagement, the membership of the group has been focused on national organisations representing early years providers, and NGOs, Government Departments, Agencies and organisations that assist the DCYA in fulfilling its duties under its Early Years agenda.

Membership is decided by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and has been designed, reflecting the objective stated above, to represent the whole early years sector, including the national early years representative organisations, early years pedagogy representatives and representation of staff in early years services, the policy makers, the inspection authorities and the quality support services. The stakeholders will be represented as follows:

DCYA	Minister Bernie McNally, Laura Slevin, Laura McGarrigle Mary Hogan Adam Gunning
Department of Education and Skills	1 rep
Better Start	
The National Quality Support Service	1 rep
The City/County Childcare Committees	2 reps
The National Voluntary Childcare Organisations	
ECI	2 reps
National Childhood Network	1 rep
Barnardos	1 rep
Childminding Ireland	1 rep
Nominee St Nich, Steiner and HighScope	1 rep
Private Early Education Providers	1 rep
National Forum for Community Childcare Services	1 rep
PLÉ (Pedagogy, Learning and Education Association)	1 rep
Tusla	1 rep
Pobal	1 rep
Gaelscoileanna	1 rep
Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta	1 rep
Association of Childhood Professionals	1 rep

(Any Trade Unions currently or in the future representing the sector will not form part of this group but the Minister will arrange for an alternative formal structure for communication.)

Frequency and Duration of Meetings

It is proposed that the Forum would agree to meet three / four times annually in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and that each meeting would be of approximately two hours duration. (The first meeting may require additional time.) The Chair may establish sub-committees or action groups and separate TORs will be established where appropriate for these.

Agenda

The agenda for the meetings will be set by the Chair, having consulted via the Secretary of the group with the other members of the Forum in advance of each meeting. Agenda items will where possible have relevance to the majority of members.

Support for meetings of the EYF

The Chair will be supported by a secretariat from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Date of First Meeting

It is proposed that the first meeting of the Forum be held on Wednesday 28th September at 11am.

Appendix 2-

Survey Slides on EY Consultation attached in email.

Appendix 3-

Workshop Questions

- 1.) The Government is committed to providing access to high quality, affordable early years care and education. What do you believe should be the top 3 investment priorities over the next 24 months?

- 2.) What 3 improvements could be made in the next 12 months that do not require investment or significant resources?

- 3.) Three suggestions that would allow this forum to be more engaging and effective.

Appendix 4-

Issues raised during the Workshop Sessions of the inaugural Early Years Forum, Sept 28, 2016.

	Issue Raised	Response and Action
1	Garda Vetting (length of time taken to obtain vetting disclosures; possibility of carrying vetting disclosures from employer to employer)	DCYA will arrange a meeting with the Department of Justice in the first instance to discuss the rationale behind the requirements of the 2012 Act.
2	Commercial Rates	Given the concerns raised, the Minister and her officials will pursue this matter further with DPER.
3	Payment for Non-Contact Time	€14m has been provided under Budget 2017 to support the non-contact time needed for providers to administer the programmes, plan the curriculum, communicate with parents etc. The additional funding will enable ECCE providers to be paid for an additional 7 days where no children will be attending the service and they can concentrate on the administrative workload. The additional funding will be paid on the basis of 1.4 weeks multiplied by the number of children in the service. For example, a service on standard capitation with 25 ECCE children will receive €2,257.50 for non-contact time (€64.50 X 25 X 1.4). An equivalent payment will be made in respect of the CCS and TEC programmes.
4	Improvements to pay in the sector	DCYA acknowledges that staff feeling valued is an important component of delivering high quality services, and remains committed to seeking additional investment over a series of budgets to improve the quality and affordability of early years care and education. The Early Years Strategy will reinforce this message.
5	Continued investment in training to support professionalisation of sector	Whilst DCYA must maintain a focus on the small number of staff still to complete Level 5, and ensuring sufficient supply of Level 6 Room Leaders, DCYA is also considering how staff can be supported to upskill to Level 7 and 8, and will work with the Department of Education and Skills in relation to this. The Early Years Strategy will contain a focus on this issue.
6	Increased affordability for parents, both universally and on a targeted basis.	The Single Affordable Childcare Programme which is currently being developed will replace the existing targeted schemes with a single, streamlined scheme which will be more user-friendly for both parents and providers. The new scheme will enhance affordability, providing both universal and targeted subsidies for parents towards their childcare costs. Funding provided in 2017 marks a first step. The scheme will provide an infrastructure from which further investment can be administered in the coming years.

7	Improved communication with the sector by DCYA, Tusla etc.	It is envisaged that the Early Years Forum will facilitate better communications. This matter will be discussed at the next meeting with a view to establishing a sub-group to make specific recommendations within three months for implementation in 2017.
8	Ensure that all inspection and information services, and publications, are available through the medium of Irish	This matter will be discussed at the next Forum meeting with a view to establishing a sub-group to make specific recommendations as to how the issue can be addressed.
9	Publication of the Early Years Strategy	The Early Years Strategy will be finalised by the end of the year. EYF members to be invited to Open Policy Debate and date for same will be provided as soon as possible.
10	Value for money review of the State's funding of the early years sector	DCYA will discuss a VFM Review with the Research and Evaluation unit of the DCYA and will report to the Forum at the next meeting.
11	Amendment of the QQI Level 5 requirements to facilitate childminders undertaking the work experience component.	The Working Group on Childminders recently established by the DCYA has been asked to consider this issue and make recommendations. The Group is due to submit a report to the Department by May 2017.
12	Introduction of registration and regulation of all childminders	The Working Group on Childminders recently established by the DCYA has been asked to make recommendations to the Department on this issue. The Group is due to submit a report to the Department by May 2017.
13	Increase the ECCE programme capitation payment	DCYA remains committed to seeking additional investment over a series of budgets to improve access to high quality and affordable early years care and education. The Early Years Strategy will reinforce this message.
14	Incentivise providers to provide care for 0-3 year olds	The Single Affordable Childcare Scheme will include a universal subsidy for children between the ages of 6 months and 36 months (or until the child qualifies for the ECCE programme if later) who are receiving childcare in a Tusla-registered childcare service. The Scheme will reflect the real cost of provision and will involve different maximum subsidy rates reflecting the additional costs of caring for younger children (higher ratios). DCYA will monitor supply and demand issues for 0-3 services.
15	Implement National Standards and the Early Years Quality Frameworks	When the Quality and Regulatory Framework (which will be used by Tusla to inform its inspections) is finalised, the development of National Quality Standards for pre-school services will be considered.

		Development of National Quality Standards for School Age Services will commence immediately.
16	Carry out a quality audit of early years education-focused inspections	A review of the Quality Framework and Inspection Model for the education-focused inspections was built in to the implementation phase which covers the first year following approval by the Ministers for Children and Youth Affairs and Education and Skills. This period will conclude in April 2017. A number of quality assurance activities have been planned during this phase, including moderation of inspection reports, implementation of the framework in diverse early years settings and continuing consultation with stakeholders and partner organisations. The current model cannot be revised until the end of this first year of implementation. Outcomes of these quality assurance activities will not therefore impact on inspection activity until September 2017.
17	Establish a professional register of Early Years Educators	Unfortunately, the establishment of a professional regulator is a major task requiring legislation and resources. Hence, this may need to await attention in 2018 business plans.
18	Support Irish-medium childcare services outside of Gaeltacht areas	This matter will be discussed at the next Forum meeting with a view to establishing a sub-group to make specific recommendations as to how the issue can be addressed.
19	Streamline the inspection processes	The inspection processes will be kept under review by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills through the Operations and Systems Alignment Group, with a view to further streamlining the systems.
20	Ensure the PIP system is fit-for-purpose	A Programmes, Policy and Operational Planning Group, comprising representatives from DCYA, Pobal and Childcare Committees Ireland, meets regularly to discuss issues raised relating to the operation of PIP. Any technical issues that arise are referred to the PIP Project Management Team for resolution. The inclusion of the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme within the PIP system will be subject to significant planning and design to ensure that it is fit-for-purpose.
21	Introduce quality assessment, and make quality a contractual requirement, linked to funding	The Department of Children and Youth Affairs intends to enter into contract before the end of the year with an external provider for the design of an Audit Tool that can be used to measure the quality of early years provision. Following the implementation of the Audit Tool, consideration will be given to the aligning funding with quality. Update on progress in relation to the tender process will be provided at next EYF meeting.
22	Additional Funding for State Inspectorate (Tusla)	Additional funding of €1.1m was provided for Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate in 2016 and a further €0.68m is being provided in 2017 to enhance and extend the Inspectorate. This will fund additional inspectors and staff for the Registration Office.