

LEEF Early Years Sub-Group
Minutes

Tuesday 16th October 11.30am
DCYA, Block 1 Miesian Plaza, Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2

In attendance:

Dr. Laura Bambrick, Social Policy Officer & Legislative Officer, ICTU

David Joyce, Equality Officer/Development Officer/ Global Solidarity Officer and Social Policy, ICTU

Michael Taft, Economic Research, SIPTU

Emma Kerins, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Chambers Ireland

Jeanette Mair, Economic & Policy Research Executive, Construction Industry Federation

Bernie McNally, Assistant Secretary General, Early Years Division, DCYA

Anne-Marie Brooks, Principal Officer, Early Years Policy, DCYA

Laura McGarrigle, Principal Officer, Early Years Projects, DCYA

Paul Fay, Principal Officer, Early Years Operations & Communications, DCYA

Eugene Waters, Assistant Principal Officer, Early Years Operations & Communications, DCYA

Apologies: Dr. Kara McGann, Senior Labour Market Policy Executive, IBEC

1. Budget 2019

DCYA provided an overview of Budget 2019 provisions relevant to early learning and care, which included:

- €89m increase in funding, representing overall increase of 117% in early years spending in the past 5 years;
- Measures to be put in place to support the registration of childminders and after school services;
- Increases to the Affordable Childcare Scheme thresholds to provide for enhanced support from €47,500 to €60,000 net income, meaning that some families with gross incomes up to €100,000 will qualify for enhanced supports. The scheme's lower income thresholds have also been adjusted, meaning that maximum subsidy rates

will now be paid to all families with a net annual income of up to €26,000 (the previous proposed threshold stood at €22,700). The maximum subsidy available for an infant whose mother is returning to work is in excess of €800 per month.

2. The Affordable Childcare Scheme

Laura McGarrigle (PO, Early Years Projects) updated the meeting on the on-going development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme and its expected impact on both poverty and female labour market participation. Legislation underpinning the scheme has been passed (Childcare Support Act 2018) and contractors are in place building the IT infrastructure supporting the scheme.

Both ICTU and the Employer Groups welcomed the update whilst noting challenges that the sector faces regarding pay and availability of staff and any likely impact these may have on availability of the scheme.

ICTU and the Employer Groups committed to raising awareness of the scheme as part of the overall communications and engagement strategy; citing the large volume of members that they regularly communicate and the obvious benefits that the scheme may have for this cohort.

3. The National Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families

Anne-Marie Brooks (PO, Early Years Policy) gave a comprehensive presentation on the forthcoming 10 year strategy for babies, young children and their families, which is a cross departmental in nature and will launch in November. Of particular interest to the group were plans for a review of the funding model for childcare; proposed targets regarding extended parental leave and the introduction of targeted 'DEIS-style' funding for early years services in marginalised areas.

4. Independent Review of the Cost of Delivery of Quality Childcare

DCYA provided an update setting out that while significant work has been undertaken the report has not yet been finalised. The meeting discussed the scope of the report, its likely influence on policy and on the benefits and availability of certain outputs of the project such as the costing tool.

5. Work plan for LEEF Early Years Subgroup

Bernie McNally facilitated a discussion regarding the future work programme for the group. It was agreed that the group should produce tangible outputs and provide a forum for robust discussion of relevant policy matters. Subsequently, the following areas of focus were agreed upon:

- a) The advancement of measures to support healthy work/life balance and flexible working conditions; an agenda that stalled upon the onset of the recession.

- b) Measures that can be supported by employers regarding the availability of childcare in support for the above.
- c) Ways in which the participants can raise awareness of the availability of childcare supports to families, in particular once ACS has launched.

ICTU committed to lead on item A whilst the Employer Groups committed to meeting to discuss item B.

DCYA committed to inviting representatives from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and from the Department of Justice and Equality to become members of the Early Years sub-group, where items for discussion might touch on their areas of responsibility. This is designed to allow for fully inclusive and productive discussions.

ICTU and the Employer Groups all expressed a willingness to support the rollout of ACS through promotion of awareness materials through their memberships. David O'Brien (DCYA to progress).

AOB:

SIPTU Rep noted that only through a fundamental change to the funding model would the issues regarding cost to parents and conditions of workers be addressed.

Bernie McNally noted that First 5 will commit to a review of the funding model, but that the introduction of the ACS was necessary in meantime to improve affordability for parents both lower income and middle income families.

Next meeting Spring 2019.