

Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF)
Early Years Sub-Group
Minutes

Monday 4th March 10am

DCYA, Block 1, Miesian Plaza, 50-58 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2.

In attendance:

Paul Fay, Principal Officer, Early Years Operations & Communications, DCYA (Chair)

Dr. Laura Bambrick, Social Policy Officer, ICTU

David Joyce, Equality & Global Solidarity Officer, ICTU

Darragh O'Connor, SIPTU

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

Ciarán Nugent, Economist, NERI

Shane Conneely, Chambers Ireland

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

Aoife Conduit, Principal Officer, Early Years Education Policy Unit, DES

Eimear Carron, Assistant Principal Officer, Early Years Operations & Communications, DCYA

Apologies: Minister Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
 Bernie McNally, Assistant Secretary General, Early Years Division, DCYA
 Emma Kerins, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Chambers Ireland
 Jeanette Mair, Economic & Policy Research Executive, Construction Industry
 Federation

The group acknowledged the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families– First 5 was launched since the last meeting and welcomed this development.

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- The Minutes of the previous meeting agreed.

2. DCYA update

- Early Years Forum was held in early February. At the Forum the Minister gave a strong statement regarding a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO). The Minister is very supportive of

the sector in progressing a SEO and indicated that she will seek necessary resources in the event of a SEO being agreed through formal channels.

- National Development Plan (NDP) – Significant funding has been ear marked for early years developments as part of the Ireland 2040 NDP. Work is ongoing in DCYA to plan for necessary expenditure once the funding comes on stream in 2022. The group welcomed this investment and highlighted the importance of considering what the sector will look like for any future planning (sessional, full day care, etc).
- Independent Review of the Cost of Delivery of Quality Childcare - DCYA provided an update, setting out that the report has been received and will now undergo peer review before a decision is made to publish.
- As part of First 5 there is a commitment to review early years funding model. This will take a number of years to develop. In the first year it is envisaged that work will comprise of the establishment of an expert working group to oversee and compiling evidence.

3. Work life balance/ Flexible working conditions

Discussions led by the trade union and employers groups were held on healthy work/life balance and flexible working conditions along with measures that can be supported by employers regarding the availability of childcare in support for these by all. Provisions currently in place, challenges experienced by some sectors and those with atypical working hours were outlined. It was noted that EU Council and EU Parliament are progressing a proposal for paid paternity leave of 10 days, paid parental leave for 1½ months and unpaid Parental leave of 2½ months. Two weeks paid Paternity leave and unpaid Parental leave (of 26 weeks) currently exists in the Irish context. As outlined in First 5, Government's Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families there are plans for a new paid Parental Leave Scheme to be incrementally introduced from later in 2019. First 5, sets out Government's commitment that by 2021 parents will each have an individual entitlement to seven weeks of paid Parental Leave.

Data provided by IBEC from annual member's survey was presented. This looked at balance of work/social life along with attraction and retention of people.

DCYA provided connectivity with commitments in First 5 relevant to work life balance, which included:

- facilitate mothers and fathers to care for their child at home during their first year
- enhance access to family-friendly flexible working

DCYA is currently in the process of developing the implementation plan for First 5 which will be published in May. There is an opportunity to operationalise the work life balance objectives of First 5 within their own organisations or realms of interest.

It was highlighted by the group that there is good international evidence based research available which should be utilised in the Irish context. This also leave an opening for robust Irish research on what parents want in a boarder policy context which will inform debate of the coming years.

DCYA emphasised commitment as part of First 5 to undertake a review of existing policies and research to build knowledge in this area.

4. The Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS)

The first announcement of ACS will take place on 11th March.

ICTU and IBEC again 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. Any comments and/or questions arising from members will be brought back to DCYA via LEEF or through ACS team.

5. Work plan for LEEF Early Years Subgroup

Group agreed future meetings will focus on and discuss issues related to:

- ACS
- First 5 implementation plan
- Childminding action plan
- School Age regulation and action plan

AOB:

Next meeting Summer 2019.