



**An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige**
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

Public Consultation on the Workforce Development Plan for the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Sector in Ireland

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As set out in First 5, the whole-of-Government strategy for babies, young children and their families, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) has committed to developing a Workforce Development Plan for the early learning and care (ELC) and school age childcare (SAC) sectors.

The Workforce Development Plan will set out plans to raise the profile of careers in the sector, to establish role profiles, career pathways, qualifications requirements, and associated policy mechanisms along with leadership development opportunities, and to work towards a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce.

First 5, through the Workforce Development Plan, aims to achieve:

- An appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.
- A graduate-led early learning and care workforce, with at least 50% of staff (i.e. all room leaders, assistant manager and managers) working directly with children in centre-based early learning and care settings holding an appropriate degree-level qualification.
- Access to high-quality initial training and CPD opportunities to ensure the staff involved in delivering early childhood supports and services are fully prepared for the demands of their professional roles.

Submissions in relation to the Workforce Development Plan are now invited from interested parties. There are a numbers of open questions below in this regard

Respondent Profile

Are you a (tick all that apply):

- Parent
- Practitioner
- Community not-for-profit provider
- Private for-profit provider
- Childminder
- Nanny / Au Pair
- Childcare Committee Representative
- Employer Representative
- Employee Representative
- Advocacy Organisation Representative
- Government Department or Agency Representative
- Academic/ Academic Institution Representative
- Student
- Other

Please state your name and the name of the organisation you represent (if any) in making this submission:

Name:

David Joyce

Organisation (if any):

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Vision for the Workforce

What is your vision for the workforce for early learning and care and school-age childcare by 2028?

1500 character(s) maximum

The vision of the trade union movement is for a professionally recognised and rewarded workforce that delivers high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to children of all ages. Professional recognition includes an agreed name for the profession and the roles within it; that the voice of ECEC professionals is not excluded from decision making bodies (such as the Early Years Forum and the Professionalisation Sub Group) and that ECEC is recognised as part of the wider education system. A rewarded workforce means an end to poverty pay and a move to negotiated pay, terms and conditions that reflect the qualifications, experience and importance of ECEC professionals. All children deserve access to high quality ECEC delivered by qualified professionals; there should be no fragmentation or division of the profession based on a child's age.

Naming of the Profession

What do you think the job title should be for a qualified (NFQ Level 5) practitioner in an early learning and care service?

100 character(s) maximum

Early Years Educator

What do you think the job title should be for a graduate (NFQ Level 7 or 8) room-leader in an early learning and care service?

100 character(s) maximum

Early Years Teacher

What do you think the job title should be for someone who has the role of pedagogical leader for a whole early learning and care service?

100 character(s) maximum

Early Years Leader

Policy Challenges

What are the main barriers to attracting and retaining more workers in the sector (both early learning and care and school-age childcare)?

1500 character(s) maximum

Poverty pay and conditions are the key obstacles in attracting and retaining workers into ECEC. In terms of existing ECEC workers, by far the biggest issue is low pay (84%). 94% have difficulty or great difficulty in making ends meet while 84% are unable to cope with unexpected expenses like replacing a washing machine (SIPTU Early Years Professionals Survey. 2019). In terms of pay and conditions a majority of Early Years Educators (60%) earn below the Living Wage of €12.30 per hour (DCYA, 2020) while basic conditions such as sick pay and pension are virtually non-existent (16% and 4% respectively). Simply put, many Early Years Professionals cannot afford to stay in their profession.

What are the main barriers to achieving a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services, by 2028?

1500 character(s) maximum

In relation to undergraduates, the situation is similarly bleak. A degree in ECEC will result in one of the lowest levels of income after graduation (CSO). Only 1 in 3 Early Years students intend to work in the profession once they graduate. 87% of those surveyed expressed that low pay is the main obstacle to working in the early years sector (SIPTU / USI Student Survey 2020). Despite some positive outcomes, interventions by the state to increase the level of graduate employment are deeply flawed. Additional funding (via higher capitation) is directed to providers and often will not increase

the pay of graduates. Furthermore, a high turnover of graduate staff undermines the quality agenda, many graduates are given just 1 year contact, only 51% of employees have permanent, full-time jobs (Labour Force Survey).

What are the main barriers to practitioners' ongoing professional development?

1500 character(s) maximum

There are two key barriers to engaging with CPD. Firstly, Early Years Professional often under take CPD at their own expense. Either directly by paying for the course / qualification or indirectly by doing the training on their own time. Secondly there is little or no financial incentive to upskill, achieve higher qualifications or conduct CDP. Only 30% of Early Years professionals believe that higher qualifications result in higher wages (SIPTU 2019). Despite having qualification and training, early Years educators find themselves stuck in low paid jobs with little prospect of career progression.

Policy Solutions

How could working in the sector (both early learning and care and school-age childcare) be made more attractive for those considering entering into it?

1500 character(s) maximum

Poverty pay and conditions are preventing many from choosing a career in ECEC. To improve the attractiveness of the working in ECEC there needs to be negotiated pay and conditions that recognise the qualifications, experience and responsibility of ECEC professionals. ECEC graduate positions should have a pay scale equivalent to primary school teachers. Level 5 ECEC practitioners should have a pay scale equivalent to Special Needs Assistants. ECEC managers should have a pay scale equivalent to primary school principals. All ECEC workers should have negotiated basic conditions such as sick pay, pension, maternity pay. The commitment in the programme for Government to introduce a Joint Labour Committee for the sector is a potential way forward. Supporting the establishment of an autonomous professional body, to oversee training, qualifications and continuous professional development could also be an important step.

How can retention of staff be improved?

1500 character(s) maximum

Poverty pay and conditions are preventing many from continuing their career in ECEC. Apart from improving the pay and conditions of all ECEC staff as outlined above there are other measures that could be taken including:

- Develop a clear career path that is accessible to all ECEC workers
- Pay staff to undertake CDP (i.e. training during work hours or equivalent pay if undertaken outside of work hours)
- Improve pay for staff who upskill

What policies would best support achievement of a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services by 2028?

1500 character(s) maximum

Poverty pay and conditions are preventing the achievement of a graduate led workforce.

In order to improve the pay and conditions, the level of state funding must be considered along with the how it is spent. Currently Ireland has a low level of ECEC state investment when compared to other countries in the EU. This has resulted in high fees and low pay. In addition the current mechanism of state funding supports a "market model" approach to ECEC. The market model of ECEC has failed to achieve the policy goals of high quality and affordability in any county when it has been implemented.

A policy of funding pay and condition of ECEC professions, similar to primary schools, would allow the state to improve pay, raise quality and ensure state resources are spent effectively.

These references back up this point:

* Oireachtas Library and Research Office (2020) Public provision of early childhood education: an overview of the international evidence https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2020/2020-06-16_I-rs-note-public-provision-of-early-childhood-education-an-overview-of-the-international-evidence_en.pdf

** Journal of European Social Policy (2018) Creating capabilities: Childcare policies in comparative perspective
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0958928718808421>

How should practitioners' ongoing professional development be supported through defining occupational roles and establishing career pathways within the sector?

1500 character(s) maximum

As part of the Workforce Development Plan consideration could be given to measures by which the Government ensures that early childhood educators are socially valued, fairly remunerated and supported in their professional development. This could include funding the establishment of a professional representative group and providing additional funds for an agreed wage setting mechanism.

The development of defined roles and job descriptions will help to focus professional development and enable the development of a career pathway as a number of clearly defined roles can be developed. This would include the setting of salary scales for professionals working within the sector.

How should practitioners' ongoing professional development be supported through training?

1500 character(s) maximum

The vast majority of personnel are only paid for face to face contact. We need to develop a system similar to that of teachers where time off for study is facilitated and encouraged.

Staff should be paid to undertake CDP (i.e. training during work hours or equivalent pay if undertaken outside of work hours)

Improve pay for staff who upskill, only 30% of staff believe that higher qualifications result in higher pay.

Further Comments

Do you have any further comments to make on the workforce development plan for the early learning and care and school-age childcare sector?

1500 character(s) maximum

The workforce development plan is a 'cornerstone' of the move towards quality affordable and accessible system. It needs to contain a commitment to sustained public funding of salaries and an immediate move towards ensuring a sustainable wage for all early childhood educators. This could be achieved by

introducing a salary scale with an agreed 'living wage' as entry point, and a clear upward trajectory in line with qualification, experience, and role.

Submission

Please indicate whether you would like to be kept informed of future consultation events on this topic.

at most 1 choice(s)

- Yes
 No

If yes, please provide your email address. Your contact information will only be used for the specified purpose, in line with all relevant data protection legislation.

david.joyce@ictu.ie

Please indicate which of the following topics you would be interested in engaging with:

- Recruitment and attractiveness of the sector.
 Retention of the workforce
 The development of a graduate-led workforce
 Professional development, occupational roles and career pathways
 Training and continuing professional development opportunities

Submissions are subject to Freedom of Information legislation, and may be released in response to Freedom of Information requests. DCYA may seek to engage with people or organisations on the basis of their submission for further discussion. By making a submission you agree to DCYA reserving the right to publish your submission in part or in full. This website does not collect any personal data, apart from information that you volunteer, when submitting your form.

Any information you provide in this way is used only for its specified purpose.

Thank you for your input!

Contact

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-children-and-youth-affairs/>

