



ACTION PLAN ON SCHOOL AGE CHILDCARE





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FOREWORD

by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Building an accessible, high quality, sustainable and affordable childcare service in Ireland is a key priority for me as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. This Action Plan focuses specifically on school age childcare, and recognises the unique needs of this age group. The pragmatic plan reflects my commitment to get the fundamentals right as quickly as possible. The Plan sets out the infrastructure my Department and others will put in place, over the next two to three years, that can be built on over the following years. This infrastructure will assist in opening up accessible, high quality, affordable school age childcare for all children in Ireland.

Many parents actively choose to care for their children themselves, but for others, the cost of childcare, concerns about the quality of childcare, or the limited availability of accessible options, prevents them from gaining employment, remaining in employment, or enrolling in education and training. For those who continue to work outside the home, the cost of childcare can impact significantly on the family's quality of life. This Action Plan recognises that parents who cannot care for their children after the school day and in school holidays need a variety of options to meet their childcare needs; options that are affordable, accessible and assure their child's well-being.

Ireland is far behind its OECD counterparts with regard to investment in the subsidisation of childcare. Lack of sustained investment has also impacted on the quality of the care provided. However, the actions from this plan, which I am committed to seeing implemented, will deliver tangible improvements. The plan recognises that a sizeable proportion of parents in Ireland have traditionally opted for informal care (childminders) for their school age children and hence the actions in this plan cover both formal/centre-based school age childcare and childminders.

The Action Plan was heavily informed by consultations over the last 18 months with children, parents, providers and representative groups. Children who were consulted about what they wanted from school age childcare made a deep impact on the plan and their rights and wishes were placed firmly at the centre of all considerations. The finding that for many children, going home after school was their preferred option, was critical. Hence, the plan seeks to ensure that where going home is not possible, children are instead nurtured by services that simulate many of the characteristics of a healthy home environment, the relationships experienced there, and the comforts and activities children enjoy there.

I am delighted that my Department and the Department of Education and Skills engaged so collaboratively on this Plan and that they have agreed to actively monitor its implementation over the next two to three years. I also welcome the actions in Chapter 7 and look forward to working with my colleagues in Government to progress them.

Finally, I want to thank most sincerely all those who gave their time to contribute to this report.

Dr. Katherine Zappone, TD

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

FOREWORD

by the Minister for Education and Skills

I believe that the availability of high quality affordable school age childcare for children in Ireland is of great importance for many reasons. I know that for parents who are studying, in the workforce or hoping to re-enter the workforce, good childcare outside of school hours is essential.

Parents wish their children to be happy, safe and stimulated during these hours. While convenience of location, cost and transport are, of course, very significant considerations for parents, the well-being and development of their child is also critically important. That is why we need to provide a wide range of activities for children outside of their formal learning in school that will complement their educational experiences during the school day. These activities should be facilitated by people who are properly equipped to foster children's creativity and social development through play-based and other activities during this critical time.

Ireland's education system plays a key role in the education of the professional workforce in all areas of childcare and early years education. I recognise that there are unique requirements outside of current education and training provision, that will be necessary to equip those working in school age childcare to provide the best possible service for the children in their care. My Department will work with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and with the further education and training sector to develop a qualification at the appropriate level for these personnel. Access to high quality training for staff who will deliver school age childcare will give them the confidence and skills they need to provide children with enjoyable, high-value learning opportunities in a less formal context than in school.

The collaborative work of both Departments and my own engagement with education partners in the last number of months has clearly shown that the physical environment for children in school age childcare contributes hugely to the quality of their experiences. The Programme for Government commits to the wider use of school buildings, which in many areas are already the locus for a myriad variety of uses by their communities. I fully support the use of school buildings for school age childcare where schools can provide a high quality and appropriate environment for that purpose. My Department will work closely with education partners in the school sector so that we can help them to facilitate this kind of service for the children in their school, where there is demand from parents and where this can be facilitated by the school patron/trustees.

I welcome this report, which signals the close engagement of two Government Departments strongly committed to the well-being of our children. I know that in delivering the actions set out in this plan, that close collaboration and mutual support will underpin the development of a high quality school age childcare system for Ireland.

Richard Bruton, TD

Minister for Education and Skills

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- The 177 children who participated in the consultation;
- Members of the Advisory Group on the voice of the child;
- University College Cork;
- Early Childhood Ireland and individual Early Years/School Age Childcare providers;
- The National Childhood Network;
- Barnardos;
- Quality Development of Out-of-school Services (QDOSS);
- Irish Primary Principals Network;
- National Parents Council (NPC);
- Members of the Department of Justice and Equality 2005 Working Group on SAC;
- Irish Episcopal Conference;
- Catholic Primary Schools Management Association;
- Educate Together;
- An Foras Patrúnachta;
- Church of Ireland Board of Education;
- The thousands of parents, providers and agencies who responded to the following consultations:
 - The IDG on Future Investment in Early Years and School Age Childcare (2015);
 - The National Parents Council school after-school survey (2016);
 - DCYA Early Years Providers survey (2016);
 - The development of Statements of Strategy for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



BACKGROUND

Many parents in Ireland choose to care for their school age children themselves. The remainder choose a variety of options, the most preferred option being care by relatives, followed by care from childminders, and formal/centre-based care (in that order). Research tells us that many parents have been prevented from entering the workforce, have had to give up their jobs, or have to work limited hours because of problems with the cost of childcare, concerns about the quality of childcare, or inadequate access to preferred childcare arrangements. These concerns regarding cost, quality and access are also regularly shared by those currently using school age childcare services.

A number of national and international reports have criticised Ireland for its lack of investment in early years and school age childcare and education. Ireland has been found by the OECD to be the most expensive country for childcare for single parents and the second most expensive for couples. Ireland has also been found by the European Commission to be in need of significant investment to improve the quality and affordability of childcare.

The Programme for a Partnership Government (2016) acknowledges *that higher levels of public investment in social and economic infrastructure, skills, childcare, and community empowerment are needed for more inclusive, fairer and sustainable patterns of economic growth*. While recognising the clear necessity for sustained investment in childcare, this Action Plan, initiated on foot of a number of commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government, sets out a diverse range of measures to address the many challenges that exist. The actions contained in this Plan can be implemented in the short term within existing resources. At the same time, the introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, discussed in more detail elsewhere in this report, will provide a means from which any future investment available can be delivered.

The Action Plan covers formal or centre-based care and informal care/childminders. It deals with three main themes; access, quality and affordability. The Action Plan seeks to identify immediate or fundamental requirements in the area of school age childcare, and to have these needs addressed in a relatively short time frame, thereby enabling further development in the medium term once this basic infrastructure is in place.

A working group was established comprising officials from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills. The Group considered existing practice and research and took an evidence-based approach to its work.

Consultation

The Action Plan was heavily informed by consultations with various groups over 2015 and 2016.

The DCYA conducted detailed consultations with 177 children between the ages of five and 12 to discover what they liked and disliked about after-school care. The findings from the consultations indicate that children want to be able to relax and feel comfortable after school. Outdoor and indoor play was identified as the most popular after-school activity by children of all ages. Relationships with family, extended family, friends, childminders and other carers were noted as being very important to children. Eating and cooking were also identified as important activities for children in the after-school period of their day. Children expressed a dislike of being in structured environments with rules. Other dislikes include not being treated appropriately for their age and lack of food choice.

Thousands of parents and providers (early years services and schools) responded to surveys and online consultations. They provided information on their current experiences and their views on how a school age childcare system should be developed. This was added to by presentations

to the working group from key representative organisations over the course of summer 2016. Parents and providers collectively identified a need for children to be happy in whatever school age childcare service they attend, a need for choice of service provision that crosses formal and informal settings, a need for State subsidisation of childcare costs, a need for strong assurances regarding the quality of services, and a need for investment in the childcare workforce which would in turn improve quality, as their main concerns.

The findings from the consultation with children, together with the findings from the consultations with parents and providers, greatly influenced the content of the Plan.

As part of the consultative process, there was engagement with education partners, including school management bodies, patrons and principals, on the use of school buildings for school age childcare. All parties indicated their strong support for this where demand exists and where the school facilities can provide an appropriate physical environment for a high quality experience for children. In many schools, there is already extensive use of the facilities outside of school hours and schools form an essential hub for various activities within their communities throughout the country. Many schools partner with childcare providers to provide a school age childcare service in their school building and there are both challenges and benefits for schools who do this. There was consensus among partners that not all schools have the appropriate environment for school age childcare and that a diversity of options for parents in relation to location of services is very important.

The findings

The working group found that national and international research and opinion converged regarding the need for certain fundamentals to be in place to deliver a range of high quality and affordable options that meet the needs of children and parents.

These options must include both formal/centre-based school age childcare and informal care by childminders. Access to a range of options, preferably in the local community, will allow parents make choices that meet both the needs of their children and their family/working life.

Ireland needs to continue to invest in early years and school age childcare to catch up with its OECD counterparts in terms of affordability and quality. The Programme for a Partnership Government states that higher levels of public investment in social and economic infrastructure, skills, childcare, and community empowerment are needed for more inclusive, fairer and sustainable patterns of economic growth and that the Government will seek to alleviate pressures affecting household budgets including childcare. The DCYA will continue to work with Government on the development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) (Heads of Bill for the new scheme were approved by Government in January 2017). The new scheme will provide an infrastructure through which any future investment available to subsidise early years and SAC costs can be delivered. Under policy development for the ACS, the DCYA has costed various options for varying levels of subsidy to families on a range of incomes and has considered costs for subsidising formal settings only and for expanding subsidisation to the informal sector. The annual estimates process should be utilised to assess proposals for further investment in EY and SAC.

Families who require non-parental or non-relative childcare must be able to access it without experiencing undue financial hardship in doing so. Investment in school age childcare will help to deliver best outcomes for children and encourage parents to enter or remain in the workforce if they wish to do so, potentially benefiting all families, disadvantaged families in particular. Parents and families should also be supported by their employers through the extension and development of family-friendly and flexible work practices in the workplace.

Ongoing capital investment by DCYA will be required to ensure a high quality infrastructure and physical environment, together with sufficient capacity to meet demand (both in informal and formal settings). Existing services may need support to maintain a high quality environment and growing demand may require investment by DCYA in new services.

The quality of the school age childcare is critical and a robust system of quality assurance/regulation must be developed over time to assure the safety and well-being of children. This system should cover both formal/centre-based care and informal/childminding options and help to inform parents about what a good quality service looks like. Such a system should include a comprehensive set of quality standards and be accompanied by a compliance regime against these standards.

The quality and capacity of the school age childcare workforce is critical and efforts must be made to ensure that school age children are cared for by adults suitably qualified and valued to meet their varied needs. The preference to date of Irish working parents to opt for more informal care for their school age children through childminders must be acknowledged and policy must reflect the need for affordability and quality measures to extend to this part of the sector also. A range of options must be available to assist this diverse workforce undertake an appropriate level of continuing professional development.

We must listen to the voices of children and parents in designing and delivering school age childcare. There is agreement on the need to separate school activity from after-school activity and for a focus on rest, relaxation and play. The importance of a physical environment that meets children's varied needs at various times (for example, activity versus quiet time, privacy versus group activity, structure versus non-structure, and autonomy versus rules), that in many ways simulates a healthy home environment, is highlighted. The quality assurance/regulation system developed for the school age childcare sector, and the accompanying training developed for the workforce, will ensure that a truly child and family-centred approach is taken to delivering high quality services.

The Action Plan sets out the actions that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills can immediately progress to address the needs identified. Progress on the Action Plan will be monitored and independently reviewed after three years. The following diagram represents, in summary, the essential components of an effective system of SAC.

A model for school age childcare in Ireland



Action Plan

No.	Area	Action	Agency	Deadline
1	Q	Establish a working group to develop a comprehensive set of Quality Standards for SAC. These standards should cover, for example, the programme of activities in SAC, the physical environment, adult/child ratios, the provision of appropriate food and nutrition, access to outdoor play, inclusion, and the health, well-being and protection of the child. The working group will have regard to work already undertaken at national and international level on best practice. The group will have regard to the voice of children and parents in the development of the Quality Standards.	DCYA	Mar 2017 (to report in Sept 2017)
2	Q	<p>DCYA will approve and introduce a robust quality assurance system for SAC services. Expert working group(s) to be established to recommend a quality assurance system for SAC services to the DCYA. This will be divided into two components given the diversity and complexity of the task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → a robust quality assurance system for childminders → A robust quality assurance system for setting-based SAC services, whether those eligible for current childcare schemes (given that part of their service is in an early years service registered with Tusla), or those that are stand alone and currently ineligible for registration by Tusla. <p>Both groups will make recommendations for the establishment of a national register of quality assured SAC services.</p> <p>Statutory regulation, similar to that provided by the Tusla EY Inspectorate, to be considered by DCYA in the longer term with phased reforms for consideration in the immediate term.</p>	DCYA	Dec 2016 Dec 2016 (to report in May 2017) and Mar 2017 (to report in Dec 2017)
3	Q	A variety of supports for the childminding sector will be examined and costed for consideration in the 2018 estimates process.	DCYA	July 2017
4	Ac	DCYA will assign resources to establish a specialist function to work with the Central Statistics Office, Department of Education and Skills, Pobal and the CCCs to identify demand for SAC and EY services and the supply available. The unit will actively monitor change on an annual basis to inform policy makers. CCCs will play an important role at local level in engaging with providers. The unit will also, over time, monitor access and inclusion generally.	DCYA	June 2017

continued

No.	Area	Action	Agency	Deadline
5	Q	Develop a Workforce Plan for the Early Years and SAC sector that will examine the existing early years and SAC workforce, the entry and career pathways, training needs, current capacity, predicted future demand and available supply.	DCYA DES	March 2017 comp by Q1 2018
	Ac	The development of a CPD infrastructure for EY and SAC workforce will be considered taking into account the recommendations of the Workforce Plan.		Dec 18
6	Ac	Capital grant funding of €3m available in 2017 will be used to provide grants to SAC services, both new and existing, to increase quality options for parents.	DCYA	Open Scheme April 2017
7	Ac	Develop an online information resource for parents containing information on SAC, linked to all CCCs and National Voluntary Childcare Organisations. The dedicated web resource will support parents to understand their SAC options, to ask the right questions when choosing their SAC provider and to access relevant information. Consultation with parents will inform this information resource.	DCYA	Jan 2018
8	Ac	Use of Schools and existing community facilities which have suitable environments available for SAC should be maximised where demand exists and where it can be facilitated by the school patron/trustees. The Department of Education and Skills will consider how increased use of school buildings could be facilitated, taking into account the issues raised to date, and will engage with property owners and school authorities to facilitate increased use of school buildings where feasible.	DES	June 2017
9	Ac	The Department of Education and Skills will engage further with the relevant education stakeholders and school property owners to formulate guidelines for schools to facilitate the use of school buildings out-of-hours.	DES	Q2 2017
10	Q	The Department of Education and Skills will engage with QQI to develop an appropriate qualification for the SAC workforce in the wider context of the review of existing QQI ECEC awards.	DES	Q1 2017
11	Q	The DCYA will establish a dedicated Learner Fund with attractive terms to enable existing staff (both centre-based practitioners and childminders) achieve the qualification in SAC described above.	DCYA	Sept 2017

continued

No.	Area	Action	Agency	Deadline
12	Q	The DCYA will commission an independent review of the cost of providing informal care (childminding). This will inform any future subsidisation.	DCYA	
13	A	The Affordable Childcare Scheme will be designed and introduced with the potential to include subsidisation of suitably quality assured SAC services (formal and informal). Any future subsidisation and eligibility will be explicitly linked to compliance with the prescribed quality assurance system.	DCYA	To begin April 2017
14	A Ac	The Affordable Childcare Scheme as published in October 2016 enables existing beneficiaries of targeted schemes to receive contributions towards transport costs. DCYA will consider how transport needs will be addressed in the future and will agree clear rules for same if critical for access to SAC services.	DCYA	Sept 2017
15	Q	In addition to a standard relating to the provision of food in SAC services, DCYA will ensure that cross-departmental consideration will be given to how SAC services might address food poverty for disadvantaged children.	DCYA	Dec 2018
16	Ac	DCYA will commission research on best practice in the provision of inclusive SAC services, to include children with disabilities and those experiencing social disadvantage. DCYA will continue to work closely with the Department of Health and the HSE to further develop linkages between childcare services and disability services so that where needs emerge they can be responded to in a timely and effective manner.	DCYA	Dec 2018
17	Ac A Q	The SAC Working group will continue its work and monitor progress on actions. An evaluation framework will be put in place. A formal review of progress will take place three years from publication of this Action Plan. This monitoring of progress will be supported by consultations with children and with parents to ensure that their respective needs are being met under the SAC.	DCYA	Ongoing 2019

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND



1.1 INTRODUCTION

Ireland has been criticised by international agencies for under-investment in the provision of accessible, affordable and high quality childcare for both pre-school and school age children. Irish parents have long reported the cost of childcare as being a serious obstacle to participation in the labour market.

Ireland has a strong tradition of childcare being provided by extended family and members of the local community and, whilst in recent years many formal, or centre-based, services have been developed, childminders remain, after relatives, the most popular form of after-school childcare. Demands for improved access to high quality and affordable childcare feature regularly in Irish conversation.

1.2 PROGRAMME FOR A PARTNERSHIP GOVERNMENT

The Programme for a Partnership Government 2016 contained specific commitments related to School Age Childcare (SAC). The Government commits to the introduction of a new system to support and expand quality after-school care for school age children. As part of that new system, the Programme for Government also commits to the utilisation of primary school buildings for after-school care provision for school age children to offer more options and flexibility to parents, where there is demand for such a service, in partnership with community groups and private providers. Also of relevance in realising these specific commitments, the Programme for Government states that school buildings must be utilised outside of school hours if they are to remain at the centre of their communities and this usage should include after-school care, homework clubs and other community activities where demand exists.¹

1.3 INTER-DEPARTMENTAL GROUP (IDG) ON SCHOOL AGE CHILDCARE (SAC)

In view of the commitments in the Programme for Government, in May 2016 the Ministers for Children and Youth Affairs and Education and Skills requested senior officials from their Departments to establish a group to consider how best the commitments could be delivered and to report to them in September 2016. The Inter-departmental Group on School Age Childcare was established in June 2016 and comprised members of the Early Years Units of the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs and Education and Skills.

1.3.1 Terms of reference

Terms of reference for the group were agreed as follows:

- The group will prepare a set of proposals which will enable the introduction of a child-centred, evidence-based and sustainable model of school age childcare from September 2017.
- The September 2017 target does not rule out developments prior to September 2017. For example, a number of outputs to guide the development of the model should be complete in a shorter timeframe, e.g. the Report of Consultations with Children on After-School Care.
- The group will consult with stakeholders including children, early years providers and education partners as appropriate in the course of its work.
- The SAC model will seek to ensure the availability of high quality after-school care to those who need it. The model when developed will also complement any funding model that may be introduced in the future to subsidise the cost of childcare for school age children.

¹ Programme for a Partnership Government (ss. 8.2.8 and 10.4.6), May 2016

The model will have regard to an appropriate quality framework, with standards which will address, for example, the physical environment, the programme of activities on offer to children, the qualifications of the workforce and the provision of healthy and nutritious snacks or meals (in accordance with the Obesity Strategy).

1.3.2 Terminology

For the purpose of the work of this group, the term ‘School Age Childcare’ (SAC) will be used and it is defined as:

‘Childcare which encompasses a wide range of non-scholastic, safe, structured programme offerings for school-going children aged 4–12 years, whether provided by childminders or in formal settings. The service operates outside of normal school hours, i.e. before school, after school and during school holidays, excluding the weekends. The same children attend the service on a regular basis and access to the service is clearly defined by agreement with parents and guardians. The main purpose of the service is to promote children’s holistic development and to care for children where their parents are unavailable.’

1.3.3 Department of Education and Skills specific work

To address the second commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government and to inform aspects of the work of the Inter-departmental Group, the Department of Education and Skills entered into a programme of work to identify a pathway towards the wider utilisation of school buildings for after-school care and for the community from September 2017. This involved an initial scoping exercise and a phase of engagement with management bodies and key partners to identify challenges and constraints and how these could be addressed, as well as existing best practice, contractual and funding arrangements. Relevant findings are reflected in the Group’s conclusion and Action Plan.

1.3.4 Role of each Government Department and governance of the Group’s work

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is the lead Government Department with responsibility for early childhood education and care and school age childcare. The DCYA administers a range of programmes to subsidise the cost of childcare for eligible families at a cost of more than €300m in 2016. The DCYA is also responsible for the regulation of early childhood education and care through Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The DCYA is contracted with almost 5,000 early years and school age childcare providers, some of which are community/not-for-profit operated and some of which are privately operated, to deliver services. The DCYA also funds a number of initiatives to support the development of the quality of the Early Years workforce, including childminders.

The Department of Education and Skills has a key remit in the support of high quality learning experiences for children in the early years sector, through the development and implementation of the national quality and curriculum frameworks, *Síolta* and *Aistear* and, more recently, the carrying out of education-focused inspections in pre-schools on behalf of the DCYA. The Department also actively engages with the further and higher education sectors to ensure that high quality qualifications are available for the continued professionalisation and development of the early years workforce. It also shares responsibility with the DCYA for the professional development of the SAC workforce including the quality of SAC qualifications.

While the majority of school buildings are in private ownership, the school system is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. The Department of Education and Skills also has responsibility for governance of the school system in partnership with patrons, trustees and local school management of schools throughout the country.

In relation to the Programme for a Partnership Government commitments, the Department of Education and Skills plays a lead role on a programme of work and intensive engagement with education partners in relation to its wider remit to promote the use of school buildings for community purposes outside of school hours and to work with the partners to facilitate such uses of school premises. As part of this work, and in parallel with the work of the SAC Group, the Department agreed to work with school property owners, school patrons and management partners to explore and facilitate the use of school premises as locations for school age childcare and where appropriate, to feed into the work of the Inter-departmental Group on SAC.

The DCYA chaired the SAC group and the two Departments agreed to build on their existing collaborative partnership to deliver both of the Programme for a Partnership Government commitments in a coherent way and to align relevant bodies of work under their respective areas of responsibility.

Membership of the Group is detailed in **Appendix 1**.

1.4 INTER-DEPARTMENTAL GROUP (IDG) REPORT ON FUTURE INVESTMENT IN EARLY YEARS AND SCHOOL AGE CARE AND EDUCATION

In July 2015 an Inter-departmental Group (IDG) established by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs published its report on Future Investment in Early Years and School Age Care and Education. The purpose of this Group was to identify and assess policies and future options for increasing the quality, supply and affordability of early years and school age childcare and education services in Ireland. As part of its work, the IDG explored national and international after-school models. The IDG agreed that the child should be at the centre of any policies developed and also recognised the necessity of giving parents additional options for their school age children's care needs. The report set out a number of costed options to be pursued. It also made a number of recommendations. These are outlined in Chapter 4.

1.5 BUDGETS 2016 AND 2017

The Government considered the IDG report in the context of the estimates process 2016 and a number of initiatives relevant to SAC were funded under Budget 2016:

1. Provision of an additional 8,000 Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) places, which can be used to subsidise the after-school care costs of parents;
2. The establishment of a design team to develop a new Affordable Childcare Scheme to replace existing childcare subvention schemes and to provide an infrastructure through which future investment in childcare could be administered;
3. Capital funding of €3m was provided to develop quality after-school services;
4. Funding to support consultation with children regarding SAC;
5. Funding to develop quality standards for school age childcare;
6. Funding to commission the design of a quality audit tool that will enable benchmarking of the quality of service provision across the Early Years sector.

Budget 2017 provided funding of €19m for the phased introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme from September 2017. It provided €14m to community and private services for ‘non-contact time’ recognising the administrative and other responsibilities required to deliver a quality service to children. Budget 2017 also provided a €1m sustainability fund to assist in developing national policy to deal with sustainability issues within the childcare sector.

1.6 EUROPEAN COUNCIL COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATION 2016

In June 2016, the European Commission noted, among other barriers to work and inactivity traps for certain households, that:

‘As a percentage of wages, net childcare costs in Ireland are among the highest in the Union, the second highest for couples and the highest for single parents. Concerns remain over the quality of childcare provisions. For example, in 2014 the percentage of graduates working in the early childhood education and care sector (15%) remained well below the recommended level. Skills mismatches remain and skills shortages have emerged in certain areas, while upskilling and reskilling opportunities remain insufficient, and the decrease in education expenditure could have a negative impact on educational outcomes in the future.’

On 29 June 2016, the European Council endorsed a Country Specific Recommendation (CSR) requiring Ireland to take action to:

‘Expand and accelerate the implementation of activation policies to increase the work intensity of households and address the poverty risk of children. Pursue measures to incentivise employment by tapering the withdrawal of benefits and supplementary payments. Improve the provision of quality, affordable full-time childcare.’

This CSR was targeted at both the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Social Protection and was similar to one made in 2015.

1.7 UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

In 1992 Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12, below, sets out the child’s right to participation and to have a say in all matters that affect them:

‘Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.’

Article 31 of the UNCRC sets out the child's right to play:

'Parties recognise the rights of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts: parties shall respect and promote the rights of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.'

The SAC Group considered that the rights of children warrant central attention in the consideration of a system for SAC.

CHAPTER 2

SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE IN IRELAND IN 2016: DEMAND, SUPPLY, UTILISATION, FUNDING AND REGULATION



2.1 TYPES OF AFTER-SCHOOL SERVICES IN IRELAND

Parental concerns about the gap between school hours and parents' work hours is well documented (Barnett *et al*, 2010). Moloney (2009) notes that, in common with similar patterns throughout Europe and the United States, growth in school age childcare programmes continues to increase in Ireland in response to parental demands for safe, supervised environments for children during their out-of-school time.

There is limited information or research available on access to and use of after-school care in Ireland. In 2009 the CSO published findings which found that 60% of households disagreed with the statement 'I have access to high quality, affordable childcare in my community'. Overall 30% of households reported using non-parental childcare for primary school children. The main types of non-parental childcare used by primary school children were 'Relatives' (12%), 'Childminder/Au pair/Nanny' (7%) and 'Crèche/Montessori/Playgroup/After-school facility' (3%). The report found that the percentages of each type of childcare used have remained relatively static since 2003.

In the DCYA's IDG consultation on Future Investment in Childcare, around a third of respondents stated that their school-going child was cared for by services such as a crèche or community centre. The second most common form of after-school childcare reported was a grandparent, with almost a quarter of parents selecting this option. A small number of parents selected 'Other' for their after-school childcare arrangements. These forms of care included a combination of care such as formal after-school care and an au pair, and a 'specialised one to one special needs childminder'.

There is evidence of an increasing number of private early years services and crèches providing extended services for after-school childcare and a small number of primary schools are also providing after-school care. In addition to private provision there has been an expansion of breakfast and homework clubs by services such as the School Completion Programmes which are predominately linked to DEIS schools.

Growing Up in Ireland data shows that while a small proportion of nine-year-olds (8%) participated in homework clubs, overall, children from more disadvantaged households were more likely to participate in these clubs than others (GUI, 2009). Other forms of provision involve parents accessing after-school privately through an early years settings offering after-school provision.

Summary of types of SAC in Ireland (setting-based and informal)

- **Homework Clubs (HC):** Often operated by primary schools for the purpose of encouraging homework completion and to assist parents where SAC is required for a short period. HC are sometimes provided and supported by the DCYA/Tusla funded Schools Completion Programme. Some community childcare services operated them in the past on a drop-in basis; however the current childcare subvention schemes to subsidise childcare costs for eligible parents (CCS and TEC discussed in section below) require regular attendance and records of same.
- **After-school Clubs (AC):** Services run by community-based or private services, the former often in disadvantaged areas. Some focus on indoor/outdoor sporting activities and (optional) homework support. Some have a wide variety of activities and room options, including homework support. Again, these ACs are often provided and supported by the Schools Completion Programme (*see below*).

continued

- **Breakfast Clubs (BC):** Usually refers to before-school care for school age children, availed of by working parents who need to drop children off earlier than the school's opening time. Breakfast is usually provided. BCs are sometimes provided and supported by the DCYA/Tusla funded Schools Completion Programme. A core objective is often to provide daily nutrition for children in disadvantaged areas who would otherwise be going to school hungry.
- **DEIS schools** are schools which are recognised as experiencing high/dense levels of disadvantage. The Department of Education and Skills is currently reviewing how such schools are identified and resourced. DEIS schools receive a range of additional supports, some of which are relevant to SAC, for example, SCP below.
- **School Completion Programme (SCP):** Local SCP projects provide a range of supports to children identified by Local Management Committees as being at risk of educational disadvantage. Typically, projects offer homework clubs, breakfast clubs, mentoring programmes, learning support, social and personal development programmes, out-of-school supports including music, art and sports and a range of activities during holiday periods.
- **After-school service based in a school premises:** Many schools routinely make facilities available outside school hours/at weekends and during school holidays and work with parent groups, pre-schools, after-school clubs, sports organisations, adult education classes and other activities. Some of these services received capital funding under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) or the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP). Many are initiatives driven by schools' Boards of Management or Parents' Associations. Some schools employ their own staff, others contract in a service provider. Some after-school companies have developed across multiple school sites and some on a franchise basis with shared standards, activity programmes, fee structures, etc. Recently-established schools in some instances have been in a position to provide space which is surplus to school requirements for after-school activities. However concerns exist in relation to the sustainability of such provision because space, which may have been dedicated to SAC, will have to be returned for classroom use when the school's enrolment reaches capacity.
- **After-school service as part of an early years or crèche service:** SAC service offered by community or private service also catering for younger children (part-time or full-time). These may or may not also offer a Breakfast Club service; where they do, they are often referred to as a 'wraparound' service. They usually provide a pick up and drop off service to/from the school using their own transport if they are not within a reasonable walking distance from the school.
- **Stand alone after-school:** SAC service not on school premises and with no pre-school element. They can be either private or community-based. They usually provide a pick up and drop off service to/from the school using their own transport if they are not within a reasonable walking distance from the school.
- **Childminders:** SAC provided, on a paid basis, by a non-relative in the child's own home or in the childminder's home. Childminders often provide drop off to, and pick up from, school. Childminders may be employed directly for one family or may mind a number of school age or younger children. (A group established by the DCYA to report in 2017 will agree a definition(s) of childminders for future quality assurance purposes.)
- **Au pair:** An au pair is a domestic assistant from a foreign country working for, and living as part of, a host family. Typically, au pairs take on a share of the family's responsibility for childcare as well as some housework in exchange for board and payment. Generally au pairs work part-time and study part-time, often focusing on the language of the host country.

2.2 DATA ON DEMAND, SUPPLY AND UTILISATION OF SAC

2.2.1 Numbers of children attending primary school

The number of children currently attending primary school is a critical piece of data from which to analyse current demand for SAC and predict future demand. The table below presents this data for 2014/2015.

Table 2.1: Number of full-time students in institutions funded by the Department of Education and Skills in school year 2014/2015

Level	2014/2015
First Level Total	544,696
Primary Schools	536,747
Special Schools*	7,949

* A special school is for children with additional needs, where mainstream school is unsuitable even with extra resources. There are 138 special schools in Ireland.

2.2.2 Research data on SAC provision and utilisation

It is not easy to assess demand for SAC places. The IDG report states that, on the basis of growing primary school numbers alone, the demand for after-school places is expected to peak in 2019. This is without considering the further impact of the economic recovery and improved labour market participation, and related inward migration, all of which are further affecting demand. This would suggest that we need to be planning to support a growing demand for after-school places. Any data from a number of years ago may reflect recession figures rather than the current or future demand for places.

Drawing on GUI data for nine-year-olds in 2007/8 and CSO data for primary school aged children in 2002, 2005 and 2007, Byrne and O'Toole (2015) noted that the uptake of after-school care for primary school aged children was very stable over that time at around 22%. It found that centre-based care made up a very small portion of this. The table below shows the distribution of childcare types based on GUI data. While 23.1% of nine-year-olds were in 'non-parental care', only 3.3% of the cohort was in centre-based care, including homework and after-school clubs. 19.2% were in relative or non-relative care (including paid and unpaid childminders and au pairs).

In terms of time spent in non-parental care, Byrne and O'Toole found that only 7.4% of nine-year-olds spent more than 15 hours per week in non-parental childcare during term time. Hence, the study showed that of those using non-parental childcare, very few were using it extensively.

Table 2.2: Childcare arrangements in Ireland, at nine months, three years and nine years

Arrangement	% 9-month-olds 2008/2009	% 3-year-olds 2010/2011	% 9-year-olds 2007/2008
% in parental care	61.0	50.3	76.9
% in non-parental care	39.0	49.7	23.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0
A relative in your own home	6.0	3.2	
A relative in their home	9.8	8.2	
A non-relative in your own home	3.9	3.7	
A non-relative in their home	8.8	8.0	
Total relative and non-relative	28.5	23.1	19.2
Centre-based caregiver	11.0	26.6	3.3
Other	–	0.1	0.7
Full-time parental care	61.0	50.3	76.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Byrne and O'Toole (2015) based on wave 1 and 2 of the GUI infant cohort; and wave 1 of the child cohort.

2.2.3 Profile of parents using non-parental childcare

Byrne and O'Toole note that the use of non-parental childcare was marginally higher among infants living in two parent families than lone parent families and that there was no significant difference by family structure at age three. However they note that single parents were more likely to use non-parental childcare at age nine, with 35% of single parents with nine-year-olds using non-parental childcare compared to 20.6% of parents with partners. Income and social class were also found to be associated with use of non-parental care, with higher income and social class groups more likely to use non-parental childcare.

The employment status of the primary caregiver was also found to be associated with the use of non-parental childcare. Those children whose primary caregiver was not in employment had the lowest use of non-parental childcare, and uptake was typically highest among families where the primary caregiver was in full-time employment

The provision of out-of-school care in Ireland, a study conducted by Ursula Barry in UCD, used 2009 data sourced from the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The CSO through the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) reports on families with children 12 years and under availing of childcare services. It covers four areas: type of childcare used during the workday; number of hours children spend in childcare; cost of childcare per child and preferred alternative childcare.

Table 2.3:

Type of care	Pre-school children	Primary school children	All children aged 0–12
Parent/guardian	64	81	75
Unpaid relative	9	9	9
Paid relative	4	3	3
Childminder/au pair/nanny	12	7	9
Crèche/Montessori/playgroup/after-school	19	3	9
Other	1	14	1
Total Children using non-parental care	42	22	30
Unweighted Sample (number of children)	5,095	8,767	13,862

Note: Figures as %. They run to over 100% as some children use two forms of childcare

The report found that the provision of out-of-school services was diverse and fragmented, spread across a childcare sector that was predominantly either family- or market-based. The report found that a significant proportion of parents (around 12%) relied on unpaid and paid family support in order to combine paid employment and childrearing, although an increasing use of paid childminders had become more evident over recent years.

The research found that children of mothers with a third level education were more likely to avail of non-parental childcare (42%) than children of mothers with lower levels of education. This was true for both pre-school and primary school children. Working patterns of parents had a significant effect on whether children availed of non-parental childcare; in particular, where at least one parent was not in paid employment the proportion using non-parental childcare dropped significantly.

2.2.4 Galway City and County Childcare Committee survey of SAC services in 2014

This survey found that:

- 41% of after-school services opened during school holidays (plus a further 26% could open 'depending on numbers');
- Only 82% opened five days;
- Qualifications: 68% had ECCE qualification of Level 5 or above, a further 10% had a degree in a different discipline, 95% of staff were Garda vetted, 100% of services had a child protection policy in place and 98% had a designated child protection staff member;
- Some services only opened for 1-2 hours (26%);
- 39% operated in a school premises, 25% in community centres, and 12% operated in a purpose-built facility;
- 44% of services were managed by an organisation, and 25% by a private provider;
- 55% of services had an open enrolment policy, 29% enrolled by referral from the school.

2.2.5 Pobal data on formal Early Years services currently providing SAC

Pobal is a not-for-profit company that manages programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs Childcare Funding Programmes are administered by Pobal. Pobal uses an IT infrastructure known as the Programmes Implementation Platform (PIP) to carry out its functions in relation to the childcare programmes, and PIP is therefore a useful source of data on service provision.

Pobal seeks data on an annual basis from early years and SAC services that are contracted to provide DCYA programmes. The data supplied to DCYA for the purpose of this report was divided between community-based providers and private providers. It is important to note that services which receive no State funding are not included in this data.

The 2016 survey had a response rate of 79%, but due to larger services being more likely to respond than smaller services, it represents 81% of children registered in services receiving some level of State funding. Extrapolating from the data, Pobal estimates that 34,750 children were enrolled in after-school programmes within early years services in May 2016. This represents just over 6% of primary school children. It also found that there were approximately 5,400 vacancies/ places for SAC and that there were 1,750 children on waiting lists. Pobal believes that the waiting list figure is inflated due to children being placed on multiple waiting lists at the same time.

There appears to be an incongruity between the numbers of children on waiting lists and the number of vacant places. Only one area (Dublin City) has demand which outstrips supply. This data may highlight that after-school places are required only in certain specific geographical areas or amongst certain demographics. It highlights that a more forensic examination at local level is required given that parents often require SAC within a short radius of the child's home or school.

The Pobal survey found that between the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 administration periods, the number of services providing SAC services increased by 20%, from 34% to 54%. Pobal also reports that there has been a year-on-year increase for all the years for which data is available. The reasons for the increase are unclear, but Pobal is of the view that it may be due to diversification of service types due to financial strain/sustainability issues. Whatever the reason, the data suggests a move towards increased SAC provision, and likely accounts for the number of places available being relatively high.

Table 2.4: Summary of Pobal data on percentage of Early Years services contracted to DCYA who provide SAC

SAC provided	2011 (78.1% response rate)	2012 (72.0% response rate)	2013 (61.0% response rate)	2014 (63.6% response rate)	2015 (79.0% response rate)
	27%	28%	30%	34%	54%

It is important to note from the Pobal data that the number of available places versus existence of a waiting list is much lower in community-based/not-for-profit providers, despite community services being disproportionately represented overall. This could be for a number of reasons:

- Community services exist mostly in disadvantaged areas. Many of the families using these services are eligible for existing subsidised childcare schemes therefore SAC services may be more in demand in disadvantaged areas;
- Departmental funding for SAC programmes is primarily targeted at community services, therefore making parents more likely to avail of a formal service or seek it out;
- Private providers may only offer a SAC service if they have the optimal number of children to make business sense, whereas community providers may demonstrate greater flexibility.

Appendix 2 contains a detailed breakdown, by county, of community versus private SAC provision, waiting lists and spare capacity as of May 2016. Again, it is important to note that this data only includes services which are in receipt of some level of State funding for childcare programmes.

2.2.6 Data on SAC services provided by childminders

Table 2.5 below presents estimated numbers of childminders in Ireland and numbers of children cared for. The data is taken from Goodbody Economic Consultants Children 2020: Cost Benefit Analysis (2011) (figures updated for the IDG Report), Tusla and Pobal.

Table 2.5: Data relating to childminding in Ireland (Source: DCYA)

Data	No.
Estimated number of childminders in Ireland	21,000
Estimated number SAC children cared for by childminders	37,000
Number of childminders registered with Tusla	125
Number of childminders voluntarily notified to CCCs	773
Number of childminders availing of tax incentives	660

Section 2.4 contains information on the regulatory requirement for certain childminders to register with the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate. It is evident from the figures presented in Table 2.5 that the vast majority of paid childminders are neither registered nor notified. It is, therefore, impossible to estimate the number of children of school age that are cared for in this informal sector.

2.2.7 Au pairs

The exact number of au pairs working in Ireland cannot be quantified accurately because the industry is not regulated. In 2015, the Migrants Rights Centre of Ireland estimated that there were up to 10,000 au pairs working in private homes across the country. Growing Up In Ireland found that 1% of nine month olds in the study received their main childcare from an au pair or nanny (Williams *et al*, 2010), and that 1% of three-year-olds in the study received their main childcare from an au pair or nanny (Williams *et al*, 2013).

The working conditions of au pairs has attracted much attention over recent years. During an Oireachtas debate in July 2016 the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation stated that au pairs were considered workers in the legal sense and therefore entitled to certain rights such as minimum wage. The debate acknowledged that, due to the high cost of childcare in Ireland, many families had traditionally utilised au pairs for their childcare needs due to the lower cost associated with them versus other childcare options.

2.2.8 Provision by Schools of SAC

A preliminary survey of primary schools was conducted by the Early Years Education Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Skills in March 2016 to determine the provision of out-of-hours services in schools. There were 641 respondents (624 identifiable schools or 20% of the total number of primary schools in the country).

It should be noted that this survey was not mandatory and, given the low response rate (20%), this data may not be entirely representative of all schools. It does, however, give an indication of after-school care provision in a selection of schools. 60% of respondents (374 schools) did not operate an out-of-hours SAC service; of that cohort, 60% (224 schools) said they would like to provide an out-of-hours service. Of the schools that have an out-of-hours service (250 schools, 40% of responding schools), the majority were in urban areas, with Dublin and the commuter belt having the majority.

2.3 COST OF SAC AND STATE FUNDING TOWARDS SAC

2.3.1 Cost of SAC to parents

The cost of after-school childcare has been reported as being very high for parents as there are no tax reliefs or tax credits available, and very limited subsidisation.

In 2009, the CSO reported that the average hourly cost of childcare for primary school children was €6 per hour compared to €4.90 per hour for pre-school children and the average weekly cost for childcare for primary school children was under €144.

The 2014 Pobal Annual Early Years Sector Survey summarised in Table 2.6 below gives some further indication of SAC costs, but only covers early years services in receipt of State funding. Costs are lower than those reported by the CSO in 2009.

Table 2.6: SAC costs as per Pobal Annual Early Years Sector Survey (2014)

	Community	Private	Urban	Rural	Overall	% difference from 2013
Average cost of SAC per child p/w	€64.17	€84.72	€87.07	€70.33	€77.21	+9.3%

2.3.2 Current SAC Subvented Programmes

The State subsidises the cost of SAC for certain eligible families. The various programmes are as follows:

- Community Childcare Subvention (CCS): The CCS programme has a total budget in 2016 of €61 million. (This covers SAC and pre-school care.)
- Training and Employment Childcare (TEC): TEC consists of three different childcare supports: After-School Childcare (ASCC): budget €1.5m; Community Employment Childcare (CEC): budget €7.5m; Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS): budget €17m.

Access to these subsidised programmes is based on strict eligibility criteria, including receipt of certain social protection benefits, or participation in training and education schemes. Each programme has an overall budget. Funding is currently provided on a first come, first served basis for TEC programmes, and through a 'snapshot' week for the CCS programme. The eligible children enrolled in the service during the particular 'snapshot' week are subvented under the programme.

Tables 2.7 and 2.8 below show the approximate spending on after-school subsidisation under CCS and TEC in the 2015/2016 programme year. (A programme year runs from August to July.) These figures are based on the assumption that any registered child aged 6 and over is in SAC. TEC programmes allow for after-school sessions to be 'topped up' to full-time over school holiday periods. These are included in the tables below.

Table 2.7: State funding towards SAC for 2015/2016 programme year (as at 17/08/2016)

After-school 2015	Approved session value €m	Registrations*
CCS (community and private)	10.78	9564
TEC	6.38	7477
Total	17.1	17,041

* Children can be registered in more than 1 session type.

Table 2.8: Breakdown of 2015 TEC SAC funding (as at 17/08/2016)

TEC after-school 2015	Approved session value €m	Registrations*
ASCC	1.4	1473
CEC (AS)	1.37	2978
CETS	3.6	3026
Total	6.39	7477

* Children can be registered in more than one session type within a programme.

2.3.3 Affordable Childcare Scheme

The programmes described in section 2.3.2 are administered by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Pobal. These programmes are very complex administratively and vary widely in terms of the budget allocation, the access and eligibility criteria applied, the rates and maximum duration of childcare subsidisation and coverage (in terms of the type and number of childcare services participating in the programmes). In addition, by stipulating a maximum parental contribution, some programmes apply a price cap for childcare while others do not.

The Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment in Childcare 2015 examined these targeted childcare programmes and made recommendations for reform. Essentially, it was recommended that all of the targeted childcare programmes be merged into one single targeted childcare programme with eligibility for a childcare subsidy under the new programme being determined by income only.

This recommendation of the Inter-departmental Group was considered by Government during the Estimates process for Budget 2016 and funding to create a design team to develop an Affordable Childcare Scheme was allocated.

Work on the Affordable Childcare Scheme began in early 2016, and further funding was provided in Budget 2017 for its introduction on a phased basis in September 2017.

This single scheme will provide a new simplified subsidy programme for both early years care and education and school age childcare and will be available through both community/not-for-profit and private childcare providers which are regulated or quality assured. The programme will also provide a robust platform so that any future investment made available to support the cost of childcare can be efficiently administered, be it on a targeted basis for low income families or universally applied.

The new Affordable Childcare Scheme will:

- provide a system of progressive financial support towards the cost of childcare (progressiveness and affordability);
- ensure that everyone is assessed on the same consistent, equitable basis having regard to their income and their need for childcare (equity);
- be administratively clear and straightforward, leveraging the benefits of technology to enable timely self-assessment to the greatest extent possible (efficiency and responsiveness);
- support parental choice and geographic access in terms of allowing a choice of registered childcare provider (choice and access); and
- be robust, with clear, well-defined eligibility rules set down in primary legislation and strong underlying administrative systems and structures (good governance).

By achieving the above aims, it is intended that the new scheme will provide a strong basis for supporting the higher-level objectives of:

- ensuring that access to affordable childcare is not a barrier to labour market participation, including female labour market participation,
- promoting positive child outcomes,
- narrowing the gap in attainment between more and less advantaged children by enabling all children to access high quality, affordable childcare,
- driving quality across the sector, and, crucially,
- through the above objectives, contributing to poverty reduction in Ireland.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme, be it through universal or targeted measures, will ensure that children who are most disadvantaged will be supported to access high quality and affordable SAC services, thus assisting them and their families to achieve better outcomes.

The annual estimates process should provide the mechanism for Government to consider further investment in childcare, to be delivered through the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

2.3.4 Capital Funding Programmes

Beyond the weekly subsidisation to eligible parents described above, the State has provided capital investment in Early Years and SAC services in the past to support the development of services.

Under the *Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme* (EOCP 2000–2006) a capital grant scheme was included specifically to develop after-schools, for community-based/not-for-profit groups (including school management authorities). Grants were also made available to community/not-for-profit school age facilities in areas of disadvantage to cover staffing costs. The aim was to increase after-school provision. The key criteria agreed during the period 2000 to 2006 were:

- The School Age Childcare Service should provide a comfortable and relaxed environment for the children being cared for, with a range of activities and choice for children;
- Services must cater for the 4–14 age range;
- Services must have a range of organised activities;
- Services meeting the needs of parents by operating outside of term-time were prioritised;
- Hours of operation should be sufficient to facilitate working parents;
- Any service located on a school premises or lands must have a letter of consent from the owners/trustees of the school premises, and have a lease agreement or be prepared to enter into one;
- There was a two year timescale for projects, and eligible projects included equipment purchase, improvement or construction and permanent equipment (e.g. fixtures or fittings);
- Homework clubs that did not have a range of activities were ineligible;
- Running costs, staff costs or consumables were ineligible;
- Retrospective funding was ineligible.

Projects were appraised on the basis of location (in a disadvantaged area), value for money, the number of additional places created, the administrative capacity of the group, consultation with stakeholders and the quality of the proposal. Services were required to operate for at least five years on the basis of a written undertaking that the grant would be refunded on a pro-rata basis should the facility cease to operate as an after-school service within that period.

Overall, more than €230m in capital funding was provided under the EOCP to both community and private operators, for pre-school and school age childcare facilities. Of this €2.75m was allocated to standalone school age services; this does not include funding issued to wraparound services providing school age as well as pre-school care.

The *National Childcare Investment Programme* (NCIP 2006–2010), the successor programme to the EOCP, provided €180m in capital grants, again to both community and private operators, and for both pre-school and school age childcare facilities. It is not possible to establish how much of this funding was provided to school age services. Projects approved under the NCIP were encouraged to include school age childcare as part of the service.

Between 2012 and 2015, €18.25m in minor capital funding was allocated to childcare providers by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. While none of this was specifically for school age projects, it was open to both community and private providers participating in one or more of the Department's childcare programmes to apply for funding to improve quality.

2.4 REGULATION OF SCHOOL AGE CHILDCARE IN IRELAND

2.4.1 Formal settings

School age services are not currently regulated in Ireland. Pre-school services, catering for children from 0–6 years-old who are not attending a recognised school, are regulated under the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. The governing legislation (the Child Care Act 1991, as amended by Part 12 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013) defines school age services and provides for regulations to be made for such services, although work on these has not yet commenced. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is responsible for the inspection of pre-school services to ensure that they are complying with the Regulations. As school age services are not regulated, such services are not subject to inspection by Tusla. However, SAC services based in Early Years settings possibly benefit to some extent from the Early Years Inspection in terms of, for example, the safety of the building, and general management. These services are currently eligible to apply for existing SAC schemes.

School age services that are participating in one of the DCYA's childcare programmes (CCS or TEC) are subject to compliance visits from Pobal, but only in relation to the financial aspects of the provision. The Early Years Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills carries out education-focused inspections of services participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (free pre-school) programme only.

2.4.2 Childminders

Childminders currently provide the highest proportion of paid SAC in Ireland. As previously stated, it is estimated that approximately 37,000 primary school children are cared for by more than 21,000 childminders. Under the Child Care Act 1991, a childminder is only required to register with the Early Years Inspectorate of Tusla where s/he takes care of more than three unrelated pre-school children in the childminder's own home. There is no limit on the number

of school age children that can be minded, although the insurance provided to childminders through Childminding Ireland limits the total number of children minded by a childminder to six. Only 125 childminders are currently registered with Tusla. While it is impossible to gauge how many childminders fall under the ambit of the 1991 Act, Tusla is of the view that there are a significant number of paid childminders who should be registered. Childminding Ireland concurs with this view.

A childminder who is registered with Tusla must comply with the Child Care Regulations, and is subject to inspection by Tusla. Tusla interprets the Regulations in the context of childminders in a different way from formal services (eg. crèches), taking into account the home-based environment. However, children being minded by registered childminders will be assured that standards of health and safety, as well as the developmental and educational aspects of the care, will be met.

Under the Regulations, registered childminders are subject to the minimum qualification requirement. There is no minimum qualification requirement for persons caring for school age children only, as school age services are not currently regulated.

In previous years, childminders who are not required to register with Tusla were invited to notify their local City and County Childcare Committee (CCC) of their existence – 773 are currently voluntarily notified to CCCs.

Childminding Advisory Officers were in place in CCCs for a number of years to support and advise childminders, and to facilitate the voluntary notification process. These posts were funded in a number of ways; some were funded by the HSE, and some through the annual funding allocated by the DCYA. During the economic downturn the majority of the Childminding Advisory Officer posts were abolished due to cuts in funding. This means that there is currently very little active encouragement for childminders to voluntarily notify to CCCs.

The DCYA provides funding on an annual basis to Childminding Ireland to allow it to provide support and advice to its 706 members and to encourage greater membership. In addition, childminders are eligible to apply for a Childminding Development Grant. This is a capital grant for the purchase of equipment to enhance the service, and is available on an annual basis. The State also offers a tax break to childminders that enables them to earn €15,000 per annum tax free. A total of 660 childminders have availed of this tax exemption.

CHAPTER 3

THE VOICE
OF CHILDREN, PARENTS,
EARLY YEARS PROVIDERS
AND SCHOOLS



3.1 THE VOICE OF CHILDREN ON SAC

In March 2016 the DCYA began preparing to consult with children regarding their views on SAC. The Children's Participation Unit of the Department led the work and a team from University College Cork was commissioned to complete a report on the process and findings.

Consultation took place with 177 children on after-school care. Eighty-one of the children are between the ages of five and seven and 96 children were between the ages of eight and 12. They attended primary schools in Dublin, Dundalk, Limerick, Meath, Monaghan, Waterford, Wexford and Wicklow. Consultations were conducted in May and June 2016. The methods used were strengths-based consultative approaches that allow children to identify and explore issues based on what they know and experience in their everyday lives and on what they would like to change or improve on those issues.

Summary of findings 5–7 year-olds

Children's views on what they do, or like to do, after school

Play was extremely important to this cohort of children. It was mentioned in 230 of the responses that children in this age bracket gave as to 'what they do/what they like to do after school'.

In categorising the types of play, children most often mentioned playing outdoors. Going on outings and to activities also featured prominently. This can be divided into organised activities, including swimming, gymnastics, football and so on and other more informal activities such as going to the cinema, going to the park, feeding the ducks, going to the farm and the beach.

Being with family members was also notable in the children's responses (their immediate family including parents and siblings, and extended family, including aunts, grandparents and cousins). Eating and cooking food were mentioned frequently, usually in the context of home. Children also mentioned being able to relax within their homes, in crèches that they attended after school, and when with their childminders. Relaxing was often associated with watching TV. This cohort also referred to doing homework. In relation to homework, some children mentioned that it takes a long time, others that they like to do it early in the afternoon and others do it before going to bed. For a smaller number, being with family pets was noted.

Children's views on things they don't like about their after-school day

The children were asked 'is there anything about your after-school day that you don't like?' Homework was the thing they liked least about their after-school experience, with a general complaint about having to do homework, homework being overly long or having to do homework at a specific time. Rules imposed at home, in after-school clubs, in crèches and by childminders were identified as a dislike by a number of the children. Siblings featured a number of times in the vote. Children generally referred to conflict with older siblings or annoyance with younger siblings. Other people (both staff and children) in after-school clubs/crèche and childminders received some votes also. Inappropriate and limited choice of toys and activities, both in after-school clubs and crèche, were noted. Food, including not being allowed to eat when they would like to and not liking the type of food being served to them in their after-school care settings, was also mentioned. Boredom was noted by a smaller number of children.

Children's views on their ideal after-school activities

Children were asked to design their ideal or imagined after-school care. Play was by far the most frequently-mentioned category. Playing with others, playing outside and 'Tech' play featured most prominently. Significantly, approximately half the references to play in one exercise involved outside play. Although structured/organised activities and outings featured less often in the 5-7 year-old category than in the older age category, when combined with play this indicates a very

significant proportion of young children's time after school. Eating and food was the second most referenced category in the 5-7 year age group. This category features more prominently with the younger children than in the older 8-12 groups. This was followed by the category of relaxation which included sedentary activities such as reading and watching TV as well as changing out-of-school uniform.

Relatives were mentioned many times during the exercise, mainly with references to family members who featured as both playmates and carers. Home was a significant category and was mentioned as both the place the child goes to and the place in which children did things. While Friends was the third highest category in the older age group of 8-12 year-olds, it was referred to significantly less often in the younger age group of 5-7. Almost all references to friends were in the context of play. While homework was mentioned several times, for the most part children included it in one of the exercises without commenting on it to any extent.

Summary of findings 8-12 year-olds

Children's views on different after-school settings

This older age group were asked to identify the settings they most commonly spent time in after school and to talk about their experiences in these settings.

Home: The children's most commonly mentioned favourite feature about being at home after school was their ability to relax and feel comfortable in their own surroundings with their own possessions. Also important to them was being with their family and relations and spending time with them. Children were very positive about their opportunities to socialise with their friends while they were at home after school. In particular, they mentioned food cooked by the adults at home including mothers and childminders. The main issue that children identified as not liking at home included being bored and not being able to socialise with their friends, as well as conflict with siblings.

Relative's house: The main thing that children identified as liking about being with their relatives after school was their relationships with their relatives and the opportunity to spend time with their extended family including grandparents, aunts and cousins. They were also positive about the opportunities for indoor and outdoor play while with their relatives. Other positives about relatives' houses included preparing and eating nice food, feeling relaxed and safe and playing with pets. The children identified boredom and lack of opportunities to play with friends while at their relative's house as a dislike. They also disliked some of the rules and structure and some children identified conflict with siblings and cousins as an issue.

Crèche or after-school setting: Children identified opportunities for indoor and outdoor play as the issues which they most liked about going to crèche or after-school settings. Playing with friends was also frequently identified as something they liked about these settings and food was identified a number of times as 'a like'. The children mentioned a larger number of issues which they disliked about these settings compared to the children participating in the other discussions. The most frequently-mentioned issue they disliked was the food in the settings and in particular the lack of choice about what they ate and the rules surrounding food consumption in the setting. The second most frequently-mentioned issue that they disliked was the rules and structure within the settings. The children felt that they were not treated appropriately for their age and the children in the crèche settings did not like being in a setting they viewed as more suitable for smaller children. They were critical of the number of rules they had to follow and they perceived that some of the settings were very strict. Children were also critical of the activities and equipment available to them including broken toys or not being allowed to go outside to play. The children also disliked the ways they were treated by some of the staff in these settings.

Childminders: The most frequently cited theme which the children liked about going to a childminder after school was the personal relationship which they had with their minder. The second issue identified as something they liked was the opportunity to play and socialise with friends while in the care of their childminder. In relation to issues they did not like, the most dominant issue was the structure and rules such as not being allowed to do things that were allowed by their parents or being treated in age-inappropriate ways. Other issues they did not like included limited activities and play opportunities, not being able to socialise with friends, and being made fun of by other children for having a childminder. These issues indicate that the children in this age group are starting to associate this type of care as something for younger children.

Friends' houses: In one of the regional sessions, a number of children identified their friend's house as a place they visited regularly after school. This was the only location where friend's house was chosen as a topic by the children participating in the consultations. The things they most liked about being at their friend's house were the opportunities for indoor and outdoor play. They also frequently-mentioned that they liked talking together, having secrets and having fun. They also enjoyed the food at their friends' houses. The issues which they identified as disliking at their friends' houses were mainly about the choice of toys and activities as well as the food available there. They also mentioned peer conflicts with their friend's siblings and sometimes with the friends themselves.

Children's views on their ideal after-school activities

Similar to the consultation with the younger children, the older children were asked to describe their ideal after-school care experience.

Of all categories, play appeared most frequently and, when included with organised activities such as gymnastics, art classes, karate and football training, it represented a major preference. It was clear that children aged 8-12 years wished to spend much of their time playing in the afternoons when school was finished. Every child mentioned some form of play or activity that they would like to engage in but these can broadly be categorised into three key aspects or types of play - relational play, tech play and outside play.

Food and eating was also a prominent category in the ideal after-school care scenario. It appeared regularly whether in the context of having a snack straight after school or after completing homework, to having dinner in the evening with their families.

Home was the third most frequently-mentioned category. It was often placed with descriptions of the journey home. In some cases, children provided some detail as to who they would like to go home with emphasising the relational aspect of the journey. With regard to being at home, many referred to home in terms of their ability to relax there, to change out of their clothes and have access to their own things.

Friends was the fourth highest-mentioned category. Children wrote about and drew activities with friends mostly in the context of play but also doing homework together as well as doing organised activities with friends. Lots of children wrote about spending afternoons at their friends' houses or just 'hanging out' with friends.

Homework: A striking fact was the number of children who mentioned homework. Homework was referred to mostly in a negative way, with children indicating that they like to get homework out of the way. 'After school I would like to do my homework and get something to eat so I'm free to go outside' or 'I could go home and have a little break before doing my homework' were typical responses. There was much discussion in the groups about how this was boring and something that had to be done.

Rest/Relaxation usually took the form of watching television, playing music or reading a book. These were all referred to as forms of relaxation or ‘chilling’ in the afternoon.

Relatives: The opportunity to spend time after school with their extended family including grandmothers, aunts and cousins and the positive relationships with their relatives was noted on many occasions by children.

After-school/crèche and homework clubs were mentioned in some instances. In some cases, these children were reporting where they actually go as opposed to their ideal experience.

Pets: As with the younger children some children referred to playing with or walking their pets.

Childminders were rarely mentioned but when they were, it was in a positive light. There was a recognition by the children of the trust placed in the childminder by their parents.

Children’s views on where they would like to be cared for

Overwhelmingly the 8 to 12-year-old children voted for home as the place they would most like to be cared for after school (59%). This was followed by friends’ houses (17%), relatives (13%), an after-school club (6%), childminder (4%) and crèche (1%).

3.2 SUMMARY OF 2015 CONSULTATION WITH PROVIDERS, PARENTS AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Inter-departmental Group on Future Investment in Childcare

The full report of the Inter-departmental Group on Future Investment in Childcare 2015 consultations is available at www.dcy.gov.ie. The report presents the findings from two online consultation surveys concerning future investment priorities in the early years and school age childcare and education sector, including the provision of after-school and out-of-school care. The first gathers the views of stakeholders which included formal and informal service providers, representative groups, advocacy groups and other special interest groups. The second was designed to collect the views of parents. The purpose of the consultations was to identify and prioritise areas for future investment and reform, with a focus on improving the accessibility, affordability and quality of both early years and school age childcare and education provision.

It should be noted that none of the questions in either the public or parent consultation surveys was compulsory and the level of missing data varied considerably from question to question. As a consequence, response rates varied question by question. Additionally the online consultation surveys did not require the respondents to identify which category they belonged to. The majority of respondents (61%) did not do so.

3.2.1 Findings from the Consultation with EY and SAC providers

A total of 384 completed surveys were returned. The current direct investment in childcare was seen by most respondents as insufficient to cover the running costs of services and to ensure quality provision. Respondents were asked to consider how current investment might be redistributed or reformed in the event of no additional or further investment into the sector. A large number of respondents stated that the reform or redistribution of current investment was not a viable option as the sector was insufficiently funded and there was little or no slack in the system to allow for re-distribution or reform. It was suggested that more investment was what was needed.

The most common option for reform or redistribution of current investment reported by respondents was linked to quality and increased professionalisation of the workforce. The predominant view was that investment should be linked to quality and that services that do not provide quality care and education should not receive the same capitation/funding as those that do.

Priorities for investment in school age childcare were direct investment, regulation and inspection, quality, equality and links and transitions. Direct investment into school age childcare and education was identified as both an immediate and long-term priority for improvement. Funding for resources was suggested, particularly equipment and facilities appropriate for this age group and for specialised after-school programmes. Improving accessibility to after-school care also emerged as a priority for investment.

A new regulatory framework and inspection regime was identified in particular as a long-term priority. The current system was referred to as disjointed and the need for appropriately qualified inspectors was raised. Support and regulation for childminders and their inclusion in all strategies developed was also desired by respondents.

Access to training, continuing professional development, and general support for practitioners was raised by a number of respondents. The development of a quality framework unique to school age childcare and education was suggested.

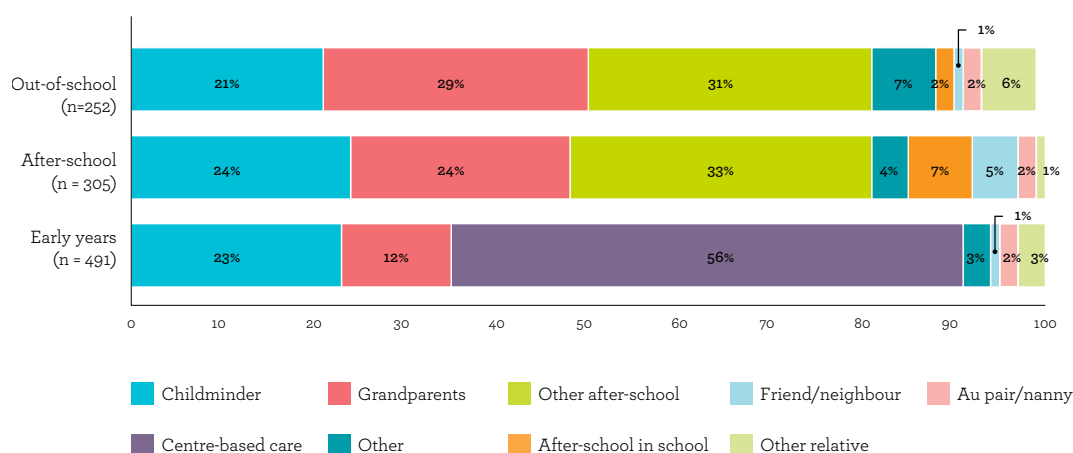
Re-evaluation of the current programme content for SAC was suggested as some respondents expressed concern that school age services are overly focused on academic activities and that there was little emphasis on care or play, which, it was suggested, may affect the overall quality of services. Increased focus on physical activity and more opportunities for outdoor activities were also proposed by many, as was provision of meals for children along with promotion of healthy eating. The introduction of quality standard reports that parents may access was also recommended.

Many respondents spoke about prioritising investment in both the early years and school age childcare and education settings for children with additional needs. Finally, establishing links between primary schools and school age childcare and education was proposed by a number of respondents as a long-term priority. It was suggested these links could ease transitions between the services enabling 'smooth flow' and could also improve services overall.

3.2.2 Findings from the parent consultation

A total of 938 completed surveys were returned. Of that number, a total of 625 (67%) reported that they were currently working in paid employment. Parents were asked to indicate whether or not they had children receiving early years care and education, or children of school-going age participating in after-school and out-of-school care. They were also asked to indicate the type of childcare arrangements they had in place and how satisfied they were with these arrangements.

Of the 938 completed surveys, 510 parents responded that they had school-going children. Of the respondents who reported having school-going children, over half reported that their children are minded by someone else on a regular basis after school and on a regular basis during the school holidays (50% use non-parental care on a regular basis).

Figure 3.1: Childcare arrangements for each group of children when not in parental care

Source Inter-departmental Working Group online consultation with parents

Childminders

Childminders, grandparents, centre-based and ‘other’ were the most popular form of childcare. (It is not clear how ‘other’ was interpreted given the options available.)

Affordability was the most important reason for choosing forms of after-school care and out-of-school care, followed by the quality of care provided. The location of the service was also identified as being important.

Parents were asked to select restrictions or impediments they had experienced from a set list. Of those who responded to this question, the most common restriction experienced by parents was difficulties in arranging childcare or adequate hours of childcare (539 respondents/70%). Almost 40% of parents (390 respondents) reported that they were stopped from taking on some study or training because of difficulties with childcare arrangements.

Satisfaction levels with their childcare arrangements were high among parents. Reasons for parents being dissatisfied with their arrangements included parent’s preference to be at home, limited options available due to cost, and their children being unhappy with the arrangement.

Parents were asked to identify one priority action for future Government investment in the areas of quality, affordability, accessibility and choice. The following summarises the findings:

Quality

- Regular and rigorous inspections and publication of inspection reports;
- Ensuring all staff including childminders are Garda vetted;
- Regulation and inspection of childminders;
- Investment in affordable and accessible training and CPD for all staff, including childminders;
- Minimum qualification levels to practice, with remuneration appropriate to qualifications;
- Increased options for after-school services;
- Links to be established between early years, school services and parents to ease transitions for children between services;
- Direct funding for services to leverage quality;
- Learning to be gained from Scandinavian models of childcare and education;
- Improved quality of food served and stored in services.

Affordability

- Tax relief for working parents and parents seeking to re-enter employment;
- Subsidised after-school care;
- Provision of a 'living wage' to cover costs such as childcare.

Accessibility

- Providing transport to and from childcare facilities;
- Facilities should be on or near school grounds in order to minimise transportation and also to ease transitions and provide continuity for children;
- Funding for services to improve facilities;
- Extended service hours to accommodate working parents;
- Increase in number of community-based services.

Choice

- Tax relief for childcare and/or subsidised childcare;
- Cheaper childcare services.

3.2.3 Common themes from both consultations

A number of common themes and suggestions emerged from both the provider and parent consultation forms:

- The need for greater investment;
- The need for a better-recognised and qualified workforce;
- The need for greater regulation and inspection of services including childminders;
- The need for greater access to wraparound services;
- Lessons can be learned from investment, policy and practice in other countries.

3.3 SUMMARY OF NPC SURVEY

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), with the assistance of the National Parents Council (NPC), conducted a survey of parents' views and needs in relation to the supply and demand of after-school care for school age children with a view to informing the work of the Department in contributing to the after-school commitments contained in the Programme for Government. The purpose was to ascertain the views of parents of children in primary school on:

- The availability of school age childcare in the area;
- The type of school age childcare currently used by the parent;
- The type of school age childcare that would be preferred by the parent.

The survey sought the views of parents on the extent of existing after-school care and the potential demand for same whether in respect of retention or expansion of existing provision or the need for additional provision where none exists. The survey ran from the 5th of September to the 18th of September 2016 and there were 1770 responses received. Results have been rounded to the nearest percentage for the purpose of this summary.

3.3.1 Parents who avail/availed of childcare for their children while at primary school

Of the respondents, 87% of their children had received childcare while attending primary school. 62% of these respondents lived in an urban area (44% in the Dublin area) and 38% in a rural area. Almost 40% had used formal paid childcare (paid for either by the parent or by the Government), either centre-based (crèche), childminders or in a school age childcare service based in a school. 24% had their childcare provided by friends or family member, while 37% had used both formal and informal childcare.

Of those availing of **formal** childcare arrangements either currently or in the past, the majority of these (51%) use or had used childminders, with approximately 43% using an after-school based in a pre-school service², or using an after-school service in a primary school (33%). Almost half of respondents had used summer camps, with a further significant proportion availing of sports clubs, arts or drama classes out-of-school hours (22%). Almost 10% use or had used au pairs.

Of those availing of **informal** childcare, the majority of these use/used family members (70%), with a further 54% using or having used friends or babysitters. In asking for reasons for not using formal childcare, cost factors were cited most often as the reason to not use formal childcare (35%), more than 6% stated a preference to look after their children at home, while more than 13% had made other arrangements with a family member or friend. No suitable location was also cited by 9% of respondents, with transport issues also identified by 5%. Timing difficulties (i.e. no care available at suitable times) were identified by 6%. Inability to get a place due to lack of capacity was cited by less than 3%, with a further 4% identifying a lack of quality provision as the most relevant reason.

Parents were asked whether they had experienced any difficulties in their childcare arrangements that had prevented them from doing paid work or study or from doing paid work or study during their preferred hours. 12% of respondents had been prevented from doing any paid work or study at all, while another 40% had been prevented from doing paid work or study during the hours they would like to. Forty-eight per cent had not experienced such difficulties. When asked to identify those difficulties, the cost of childcare was most cited, by 48% of respondents. A lack of availability of childcare when it was needed was identified by a further 20% of parents and no childcare in a convenient location was identified by more than 13% of parents. Almost 18% cited a lack of availability of childcare outside of term time, during school holidays, with difficulty in finding high enough quality provision identified by almost 10% and a further 10% identifying lack of suitable provision.

Parents were asked which of a list of options of childcare would they most need to be able to access to enable them to do paid work or study and to manage their parental responsibilities. The most common requirement was for after-school care (66%), but also high percentages of parents identifying breakfast club/before school care (30%), holiday club (39%), summer camp (37%) or childminder (22%).

² Almost 15% of respondents cited 'other' arrangements. Of these, 94 referred to after-school care arrangements in a 'crèche' - the term 'afterschool/pre-school' caused confusion in this regard. If these results are added to the response rate of 35% of that category, 43% of respondents availed of formal childcare in a pre-school/crèche after school.

3.3.2 Parents who have not availed of childcare for their primary school children

Thirteen per cent of parents indicated that they have not availed of any childcare for their primary school age children. 58% of respondents were from urban areas with 42% from rural areas. Of these parents, the most common reason identified by them was that they did not need to be away from their child/children or that they would rather look after their child/children at home (over 59%). Another 23% of these parents cited expense/lack of affordability or other cost factors as the reason. Lack of suitable quality care or inability to find childcare was cited by almost 3% of respondents.

When these parents were asked what type of childcare they would use if it was available and affordable, most cited options were after-school club (51%), summer camp (46%), holiday club (19%), and sports club (40%).

When this group of parents was asked had they experienced any difficulties finding suitable arrangements to allow them to take up paid work or to take up paid work during the hours they would like, 25% said they were prevented from taking up paid work at all, and 30% were prevented from taking up work in the hours they would like, with 45% experiencing no difficulties. The most common difficulty that these parents experienced related again to cost (compared to potential earnings), but parents also identified lack of availability outside of school term (9%), nothing suitable to their needs (17%), lack of availability at suitable times (10%) and lack of suitable locations (more than 7%). Some parents (6%) identified lack of quality provision as a difficulty. When asked what they would need to take up paid work or study and manage their parental responsibilities, most often cited was after-school care (49%), with a high percentage identifying before and after-school care (29%) and school holidays (33%).

3.4 SUMMARY FROM SCHOOLS

A survey was conducted in March 2016 with primary schools regarding after-school and out-of-hours childcare – 641 individual responses to the survey were received. It should be noted that this represents fewer than 20% of primary schools and is not a representative sample.

However, the survey demonstrates the range of activities that are taking place out-of-hours in Irish primary schools, and some of the characteristics of those schools. Table 3.1 presents the data:

Table 3.1: Survey of schools on their provision of SAC

SAC	No. of responses	%
Already provides after-school or out-of-hours service	260	40%
Does not provide service currently but would like to	230	36%
Does not provide service currently and does not want to	151	24%
	641	100%

Types of service

Of those 40% of schools who are already providing an out-of-school hours service to children, Table 3.2 represents the types of service provided.

Table 3.2: Breakdown of services provided by schools that do provide some type of after-school service

If you answered yes to the previous question, what form does your service/s take? You can choose more than one answer.

Answer options	Response %	Response Count
After-school service	43.4%	109
Before school	15.9%	40
During summer holidays	19.9%	50
During mid-term breaks	14.7%	37
Homework club	55.4%	139
Breakfast club	29.1%	73
Summer camp	54.6%	137
After-school classes	48.2%	121
Other (<i>please specify</i>)		65
answered question		251

Geographic spread and analysis

The survey received a good geographic spread, with responses from all 26 counties. The breakdown per county showed that Dublin had significantly higher instances of after-school or out-of-hours services (64%), compared with responses from other counties. The highest proportion of school responses per county was from Dublin (31% response rate). Galway, Kildare, Louth and Meath also had high instances of after-school/out-of-hours services. This appears to show a trend of higher instances of services in urban/commuter areas.

Over 70% of the following counties responded that they did not have an after-school/out-of-hours service: Carlow (70%), Cavan (90%), Kerry (70%), Laois (79%), Mayo (88%), Roscommon (74%), Sligo (80%), Tipperary (88%), and Waterford (75%). None of the respondents from Longford and Leitrim identified themselves as having an after-school/out-of-hours service.

Characteristics of schools that responded that they did not have an out-of-hours service

Eighty-eight per cent of schools who did not have a SAC service were non-DEIS schools (only 12% were DEIS schools). The majority of responses came from schools in rural areas and across all 26 counties. Almost half of those schools who responded that they did not have an out-of-school hours service had an enrolment of fewer than 100 pupils.

When asked if they would like to offer an out-of-hours service:

- 60% responded yes
- 40% responded no

Table 3.4 sets out the barriers that were identified by those schools that do not have an out-of-school hours service in their schools.

Table 3.3: The barriers reported by schools to establishing an after-school service

Answer options	Response %	Response Count
Lack of Funding	80.1%	257
Unsuitable Facilities	41.7%	134
Lack of space	38.9%	125
Security issues	26.8%	86
Lack of demand	28.0%	90
Other (<i>please specify</i>)		97
<i>answered question</i>		321

3.5 EARLY CHILDHOOD IRELAND AND EY PROVIDERS

In July 2015 Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) launched *'Footsteps for the Future. Increasing investment in Early Childhood Education.'* The report put forward a programme of out-of-school supports, seeking to subsidise out-of-school care. It advocates for a public subsidy system of out-of-school care, funded similarly to the ECCE programme. ECI also made a formal submission to the Department of Education and Skills Statement of Strategy where it further developed its policy recommendations.*

ECI has stated *"evidence suggests that direct public funding of services brings more effective governmental steering of early childhood services, advantages of scale, better national quality, more effective training for educators and a higher degree of equity in access compared with parent subsidy models."* (Lloyd, 2012:8; Penn, 2012:33)

ECI also draws on the experience of the OECD review which suggests, for the moment at least, that a public supply side investment model, managed by public authorities, brings more uniform quality and superior coverage of childhood populations (1-6 year-olds) than parent subsidy models. The report also references the experience of Norway and Sweden and suggests that a public service model can well accommodate private/not-for-profit providers when they are properly contracted, regulated and supported by public funding.

ECI cautions that neither childminding nor out-of-school settings are currently regulated or inspected. It proposes that a competent, high quality system could regulate both, but that resources are required to enable this.

ECI recommends the introduction of a system of SAC, running along the same lines as New Zealand's OSCAR model, where the household and the State share the cost of high quality services from approved operators. ECI also commended the Australian *'My Time, Our Place'* model which provides a comprehensive framework within which educators can extend and enrich children's well-being and development in school age childcare settings.

* ECI was one of a number of organisations that made a submission to the consultation for DES and DCYA Statements of Strategy

ECI suggests that a new SAC system should:

- Subsidise the costs for parents and therefore increase their disposable income by lowering their contribution on a weekly basis;
- Be developed and integrated within the Affordable Childcare Scheme and responsibility for the rollout clearly vested in the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs;
- Contribute to increasing the sustainability of the system, drive quality improvements by mandating that service providers have adequate qualification levels at levels 6 or 7 as appropriate;
- Ensure these services are inspected and audited as part of an overall policy of continuous improvement;
- Create opportunities for professional staff to find year-round, full-time jobs.

The report also states that an additional benefit of an out-of-school programme is that early childhood professionals could envisage careers that would no longer be part-time and seasonal in nature.

Making better use of educational assets within communities

ECI responded to the Programme for Government commitment to utilise primary school buildings for after-school care provision for school age children. It suggested caution be exercised to ensure that the focus was on children's needs and rights. ECI encouraged a shift in focus from 'after-school' to 'out-of-school' care (by which it referenced the wraparound services of breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and activities during midterm and school holidays).

ECI sought to focus on the out-of-school experience for the child and to listen to the child's voice, as set out in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. ECI expressed concern that by locating SAC services in schools, there was a danger for children of SAC feeling like an extended school day. ECI cautioned that school buildings bring with them a culture of work, discipline and large group activity and that this culture does not necessarily end when the bell rings. ECI said that much could be done with the physical environment to encourage more play and relaxation, but reiterated that many Irish primary schools do not have those facilities. ECI stressed the importance of play and relaxation for children.

ECI acknowledged the pressures of busy parents and their need for high quality, affordable and geographically accessible services but again emphasised that children's needs and rights must remain at the centre of decisions regarding SAC. ECI recommended consultation with children, service providers, early years educators and the adoption of an evidence-based approach to SAC policy development. ECI highlighted the need for a qualified, valued workforce and access to specific and relevant training to at least QQI Level 5. ECI also referenced the School Age Childcare Collaborative Initiative work which developed a full FETAC Level 5 Award in School Age Childcare. It said that appropriate regulation was critical to ensure quality provision. It highlighted the need for sufficient capitation payments to adequately resource a sustainable and quality service delivery. It identified the need for further capital investment and recommended that any additional expenditure in this area needs to be developed and integrated within the Affordable Childcare Scheme, with responsibility for its rollout clearly vested with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and DCYA. It also proposed a strong system of measuring demand and supply and recommended an independent audit of supply versus demand to avoid displacement of services.

3.6 PRESENTATION BY QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL SERVICES (QDOSS) NATIONAL NETWORK

Dr. Paul Downes, Director of the Educational Disadvantage Centre at Dublin City University and member of QDOSS, together with Dr. Michelle Share (Trinity College Dublin) and Ruth Bourke (Mary Immaculate College), made a presentation to the SAC group.

The main points of the presentation were as follows:

The key guiding principles which should be considered in the design of a model include:

→ **Children's rights – play, rest, voice/consultation:**

The emphasis of after-school should be on play and relaxation. SAC services require a combination of structured and unstructured play, and spaces for rest and relaxation (comfortable areas with soft furnishings). While there are some schools that could facilitate this type of SAC environment, there are many others that could not.

→ **Snowball principle – success, failure, like/dislike of school:**

There is a danger of SAC delivered on school premises becoming an extension of the school day which could alienate some children from attending school, or completing school, especially if they are already finding school stressful (PISA 2012).

→ **Child well-being – avoidance of 'warehousing' and 'schoolification':**

Rest, relaxation and play are essential components of quality SAC (Moloney, Higgins and Ryan, 2010). Many school age children are too tired to concentrate after the school day. An evaluation of Doodle Den after-school programme in CDI Tallaght, (Biggart *et al*, 2012), observed concerns that a number of pupils were too tired and were falling asleep before the end of the extra 1.5 hours beyond the school day. A concern with SAC internationally is that large numbers of children can be simply grouped together without concern for meaningful activities and for their individual child-centred needs; this is known as 'warehousing'. Another international concern is that SAC becomes simply more school and children are subjected to a drive for literacy and numeracy outcomes, sometimes with the same personnel they have worked with all day; this concern is known as 'schoolification'.

→ **Concern for individual differences**

It is important not to over-prescribe activities in SAC services, allowing for a diverse range of activities and choice for the children. It is important to allow opportunities for physical activity (if desired), creative pursuits and quiet time for relaxation and reflection (Moloney, Higgins and Ryan, 2010).

→ **Poverty prevention and compensation**

Food poverty is a significant issue for many school age children – 20.9% of school children in Ireland report going to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food at home (Callaghan *et al*, 2010). Ideally there would be central coordination through one person at local school level (where the needs of individual children can be monitored) rather than simply at local area level (such as through the local or regional Schools Completion Programme) for school meals both for in-school and after-school. Adequate planning and resourcing for the provision of appropriate nutrition is critical within SAC.

→ **Child welfare and protection – bullying prevention**

Bullying is a child protection issue (Farrelly, 2007). Collaboration between schools and school-based after-school care services and other local services are needed to target bullying, ensuring consistency and sharing of good practice.

It was noted that school-based after-school care (i.e. until 5.30/6.00pm) is largely untested in Ireland, and vulnerable to the 'Warehousing Principle' and 'Snowballing Principle' of failure, with dislike of school feeding off itself in a cycle to exacerbate problems. However, within a wider range of options, school-based after-school care with funding for dedicated after-school spaces for (a) rest, (b) unstructured play, (c) library resources, (d) physical activity spaces and (e) semi-structured play could be piloted with schools across a particular limited number of sites nationally. This is also an opportunity for targeting schools in areas of high poverty, as well as other school sites nationally.

External inspections of school-based premises and after-school relational environments is an obvious need. The lessons of the early years settings regarding poor safety, quality and relational environments in a number of settings need to be heeded for this sector.

In summary, among the key recommendations and concerns expressed by QDOSS was the need for the child's voice to be heard in designing a system and in the operation of individual services. Dr. Downes highlighted the need for appropriately qualified staff, for access to SAC further education and training programmes and for continuing professional development.

The QDOSS view is that school age childcare, if it is to be provided on the grounds of a school, should not be seen as an extension of school, but a totally separate programme of rest, relaxation, play and activity. This point was reiterated by PLÉ (Pedagogy, Learning and Education) in their submission to both the DES and the DCYA Statements of Strategy.

3.7 PRESENTATION BY THE IRISH PRIMARY PRINCIPALS NETWORK (IPPN)

Two representatives from the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) attended a meeting of the Inter-departmental Group: Mr. Larry Fleming CEO of IPPN, a representative on the Early Years Education Advisory Group to the Minister for Education and Skills, and principal of a non-DEIS primary school, and Mr. Pat Gough, Deputy CEO of IPPN and retired principal of a DEIS primary school.

Both Principals spoke of their experiences of running an after-school programme in their schools. Both schools had autism units attached which provided a space with soft furnishings available for after-school, and a PE hall for sports.

DEIS example: The Programme was funded through DEIS and the School Completion Programme at no cost to parents. It was administered by the Board of Management (BOM) of the school, with the permission of the Patron. Staffing was a mix of teachers and Special Needs Assistants.

Non-DEIS example: After-school provision was instigated by a Parents Association request for an after-school service. There was a fee charged to parents but otherwise the service was similar to the DEIS school in terms of governance and staffing.

The following issues were discussed with regard to schools opting to provide school age childcare:

Essential components of after-school

After-school should be child-led with a diverse choice of activities available, access to an outdoor space and sports hall/gym, providing a mix of play, structured activities and 'chill out' space.

Concerns

- ‘Schoolification’ of children’s time in after-school, a possibility of it becoming an extension of the school day;
- Displacement of existing after-school services;
- Location/space/environment: It was suggested that using classrooms does not work well as furniture needs to be moved and some teachers work after the school day in their classrooms. Space is required for recreational/physical activities;
- Additional administrative work load for principals.

Security Issues

- Keyholder system, where the SAC provider locks up after they have finished after-school activity;
- Insurance/liability;
- Garda vetting of staff and ensuring child protection.

Governance Issues:

- Consideration must be given to expense incurred in running the service, e.g. light, heat. Also if the tenant/club was for profit, like a sports club, the BOM would charge a percentage;
- There must be an ‘opt-out’ clause in any agreement/contract for after-school provision;
- Payment of staff such as cleaners or caretakers who may need to work additional hours;
- Guidance is required around licensing agreements and permission of the patron.

3.8 SUBMISSION FROM POBAL

Pobal’s role in administering childcare funding programmes and capital grants to many early years and SAC services, together with its role working nationally with community, voluntary and statutory programmes, gives it significant insight into high quality service provision.

Pobal has administered funding to various childcare services that are located in schools. It has witnessed sustainability issues with schools having to take back this space when student numbers increase or the needs of its students change. Pobal expresses concern that arrangements to locate a SAC service in a school building are not necessarily sustainable in the longer term, although they may initially appear to be responsive to local needs and to make economic sense. Pobal also suggests that logistical concerns need to be overcome by schools to enable SAC services to meet the needs of parents, for example, the availability of the school during school holidays, appropriate school insurance, enhanced caretaking and security arrangements.

Pobal expresses concern regarding the availability of space for relaxation, as well as activities that will draw a distinction for children attending the SAC service versus the school’s curricular content and culture.

Pobal also noted that it had witnessed excellent services from schools already offering on-site SAC.

While use of school buildings is one option, Pobal suggests that a policy framework for school age childcare should promote provision across a wide range of appropriate settings, to give parents choice, to give due consideration to children’s preferences, and to support existing providers. Pobal highlights data gaps in assessing demand for after-school places and suggests that any investment in the SAC sector will need to consider future demand and supply issues.

CHAPTER 4

PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL AGE CHILDCARE: RESEARCH AND POLICY



4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out a brief overview of some of the national and international literature focusing on non-parental care and after-school. This is not intended as a systematic review but an opportunity to highlight some of the key issues identified across a number of fields relevant to the provision, and experience among children, of after-school care.

It also outlines the Irish policy landscape with reference to the provision of school age childcare focusing on recent high-level policy commitments.

4.2 NON-PARENTAL CARE: EVIDENCE, PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES

4.2.1 Introduction

The provision of pre-school and after-school care have become increasingly important as policy issues. Blau and Currie (2006) note that in the US and across many high-income nations the majority of children are cared for many hours per week by people who are neither their parents nor their schoolteachers. They identify the role of such care as two fold; first, it allows parents to be employed and second, it allows programmes to focus on early intervention and developmental outcomes, particularly with reference to disadvantaged groups.

Broadly, with a focus on these roles, related literature can be sub-divided into two broad strands, one of which focuses on the market for childcare and the factors affecting the supply, demand and quality of care. The second focuses on child outcomes, as well as whether certain types of programmes can mediate the effects of early disadvantage (Blau and Currie, 2006). Other related research relevant to policy and practice in the school age childcare setting is that which focuses on the experiences and views of children.

4.2.2 Quality, outcomes and the experiences of children

Chapter 2 of this report considers issues of supply and demand. This section considers some of the literature relating to the effects of the quality of non-parental care, child outcomes and the experience of children in different after-school settings.

There has been a significant growth in female labour force participation over the last number of decades. Traditionally, interest in childcare and school age childcare, both in the literature and from a policy perspective was in the context of support for female labour force participation. Concomitant with that, arising from an interest in child outcomes, a large body of literature developed focusing on the effects of maternal employment on child outcomes.

In general, maternal employment is shown to have small or negligible negative effects on child outcomes³. As summarised by Blau and Currie (2006: p. 1,171), the most consistent evidence of negative effects of maternal employment are when the mother returns to work before the child is one, where young children spend very long hours in care, where mothers' employment does not raise family income, in one parent families where there are few relative supports/resources, and in instances where mothers' type of work reduces the resource that a mother can bring to parenting (e.g. very stressful work).

³ One reason posited for this is that the increase in income earned offsets the effect of reduced time spent with children, another suggests maternal employment in two parent households is associated with (1) an increase in time fathers spend with their children, and (2) that mothers reduce both leisure time and housework to make time with their children (Blau and Currie, 2006, p. 1,170).

Linked to this question of the effect of maternal employment is the question of the effect of childcare used while parents work, that is, the effect of non-parental care on child outcomes. As such, there has been a significant growth in research focusing on the effects of non-parental care type, quantity, duration and quality on child outcomes. Furthermore, it must also be acknowledged that it is increasingly the case that childcare is also utilised by families with stay-at-home parents. As such, there has been a growing interest in the quality of care in non-parental care situations, as well as a recognition that care with a strong quality agenda can play a strong positive role in enhancing a range of cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes for children.

Unlike in respect of early years, there is a more limited research literature with a focus on after-school care, policy and practice. Hjalmarsson (2011) noted research in this area as scattered and scarce, while Karlsson *et al.* (2016) also highlight that research on parents' perceptions and experiences of after-school care is limited, with even less available in relation to children's experiences.

The first generation of research relating to after-school care was concerned with children left unsupervised for a portion of the day or so called 'latchkey kids'. For children without adult supervision, a number of studies from the UK reported negative effects, although many of these were situated in low income communities (Marshall *et al.*, 1997), while research from the US found evidence of increased risk of truancy, poor grades and risk-taking behaviours (Dwyer, Ron and Daley, 1990; Aizer, 2002).

It was also considered the case that early development of policy in relation to after-school in a European context was prompted by increased participation of women in the workforce. The consequence of this, it is noted, is that in many cases after-school reform in European countries has created no centralised after-school system or new institutional structures. It is also noted that there was a shift from regarding after-school care as time free from school towards integrating it into the school system, such as took place in the 1990s in Sweden and, somewhat later, in Finland. As such, for example in the Finnish case, it was noted that after-school centres were not located in spaces planned exclusively for after-school activities and for spending leisure time, with centres located in buildings planned and equipped for other purposes and where facilities allow the children little activity space and favour quiet activities and sitting still (Strandell, 2013).

The more recent debate on after-school care is situated in the context of modern childhood where children are cared for on different sites – the home, school, community, extended family, private settings and so on. It is also one which, as is the case with the literature on early years, increasingly concerns itself with the quality of non-parental care in different settings and the related effects on child outcomes. The importance of bringing the experience of children to bear on policy development is also underlined (Strandell, 2013).

Research highlights the interaction of after-school care with the development of peer relationships, independence and the opportunities presented for reflection and relaxation. Generally, the literature provides a picture of what children value in after-school provision. They appear to prioritise play, having some freedom, some choice in activities, being with their friends, having private spaces and the availability of supportive and at times non-intrusive adults.

4.2.3 Perspectives on after-school programmes

International research shows that quality school age provision in the form of after-school programmes brings a wide range of benefits for families and for communities, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

Facilitating working parents is only one of the many benefits of SAC provision documented internationally. SAC provision in disadvantaged areas usually has a strong focus on tackling educational disadvantage, school completion, parental support, keeping children safe, supporting personal development and acquisition of new skills, educating about nutrition, and supporting young people's mental health.

The benefits of participation in after-school clubs have been highlighted in a range of studies, with literature on the value of after-school programmes as early intervention (Miller, 2003; Strandell, 2012; Barnardos NI, 2014) showing that pupils who regularly participate in high quality learning opportunities beyond the traditional school day can show improvement in behaviour, attitude and/or achievement. Perspectives on after-school provision in disadvantaged areas are examined in a 2005 report from Combat Poverty Agency⁴. The report notes that Irish parents said⁵ that getting help with homework is 'a major advantage' for families, particularly for parents who are working full-time and cannot begin homework until late in the evening, and also for parents whose first language is not English and others who do not feel competent to help. Parents also cite 'peace of mind' and 'keeping children safe and out of trouble' as beneficial factors.

One comparative study across six EU member states in 2006⁶ looked at the impact of out-of-school care (OSC) in disadvantaged areas, and finds that OSC provision helps address the social, economic and health issues that disadvantaged households face, as well as supporting the social integration of excluded groups. It is noted as providing a useful approach for engaging the most excluded people, and an important tool in reducing poverty:

'... it creates local employment and boosts the local economy. It can reduce problem behaviour in children and young people, promote positive citizenship and help link families with their children's schools.' This report also states that 'where OSC is valued and has been in place for some time, it is more regulated, standards are higher and there is greater investment in it.'

A US study reported on the after-school activities of 216 low-income children across four types of after-school - formal after-school programmes, mother care, informal adult supervision, and self-care - using a time-use interview over a five month period (Posner and Lowe Vandell, 1994). The interviewers asked about children's activities from the time school was dismissed until 6.00pm to 6.30pm in the evening. Attending a formal after-school programme was associated with better academic achievement and social adjustment in comparison with other types of after-school care. Children's activities and experiences also varied in different after-school settings. Children in formal programmes spent more time in academic activities and enrichment lessons and less time watching TV and playing outside unsupervised than other children. They also spent more time doing activities with peers and adults and less time with siblings than did other children. The time that children spent in these activities was correlated with their academic and conduct grades, peer relations, and emotional adjustment.

Literature on the impact of participation in after-school clubs is relatively limited in the Irish context, although teachers involved in studies in Dublin and Maynooth (cited by Hennessy and Donnelly, 2005) have reported benefits to pupils who participate in them. They noted that although participants did no better in school than their non-participating counterparts, the fact that they were equivalent may in itself be an achievement. In addition, both children and families who participated in the study reported other benefits of participation in after-school

⁴ *After-school Care in Disadvantaged Areas: The Perspectives of Children, Parents and Experts*. Hennessy, E. and Donnelly, M., Combat Poverty Agency, 2005.

⁵ Hennessy and Donnelly, *Combat Poverty report*, 2005

⁶ *Out-of-school Care Services for Children Living in Disadvantaged Areas*. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007

clubs, including support and opportunities for improving social and other skills. Moloney (2009) highlights that research indicates that quality school age programmes provide safe, challenging and fun environments for children during non-school hours. Children are said to derive many benefits from attending school age settings such as opportunities to socialise and enjoy time with friends, relax, play, develop new skills and interests, participate in physical activity, participate in both structured and non-structured activities, do homework, improve interpersonal and social skills, build on what they have learned during the school day, learn about themselves and their worlds, and improve academic achievement.

4.2.4 Perspectives on after-school care in the home

A number of studies consider after-school in the home sphere and reflect a flavor of the views and experiences of children in relation to their after-school experience.

Forsberg and Strandell (2007) consider children's experiences of after-school care in Finland. They draw on their study of the experiences and accounts of 31 eight-year-olds living in urban areas of Finland where they found that these children commonly spent their after-school time in and around their homes largely without adult presence. They found that children spent their time inside and outside of their homes, having previously negotiated outside spaces with parents and guardians and they suggest that the children made use of the spaces available to them to maximise their independence and autonomy. The social relationships which the children themselves defined as most important during their after-school hours in the home sphere were relationships with friends. For most of the children in the study, home is an ideal place for spending their after-school time, whether they are on their own, together with peers, siblings, parents, or occasionally grandparents or other people. For children, 'good' after-school hours consisted of ordinary everyday activities, the company of friends and some influence on what to do and how to use the space. At home you could be your own boss and in control of your own use of space and time (Forsberg and Strandell 2007, 404).

In another study on after-school experiences at home, Berman *et al*, (1992) were interested in how children spend their time after-school and whether the care status affects the latitude they had for participating in different activities as well as children's self-esteem. Data was collected on children's after-school experience in a large group of ethnically diverse children in four different after-school care arrangements. The findings indicate that children's freedom was more circumscribed for those at home alone or in older sibling care. Children in self-care were not allowed play outside or visit their friend's homes as often as children in adult in-home care or older sibling care. Fewer children in older sibling care were allowed to visit a neighbour's house than children in adult-in-home care. The authors found no difference in self-esteem for children in self-care or adult care whether that be in-home or out-of-home. An unexpected finding was that children in older sibling care reported lower self-esteem, regardless of age. Negative sibling relationships and the risk of aggression and abuse have been reported in other research. For example, Demircan and Demir (2014) examined the loneliness and social dissatisfaction of elementary school students in relation to type of after-school care. The Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale, and an information form including age and the students' after-school care arrangements, was completed by 358 students. Results indicated that children who were in self or sibling care had greater loneliness and social dissatisfaction compared to their peers under formal centre care.

4.2.5 After-school care outside the home

The importance of a physical environment that meets children's varied needs at various times (for example, activity versus quiet time, privacy versus group activity, structure versus non-structure, and autonomy versus rules) and how that environment shapes after-school activities is highlighted.

Research on other forms of after-school care includes Strandell (2013) who analyses children's experiences of after-school in schools, sports clubs run by voluntary organisations, and play parks in Finland. Since 2004, local municipalities there offer care to seven and eight-year-old school children in first and second grade in primary school. The findings reveal that the leaders of after-school activities in schools understand the activities as a continuation of school and its educational goals with the children regarded primarily as pupils. There was an emphasis on organised activities and students were under surveillance all of the time. The children themselves complained about the crowded space, the strict order and the many restrictions. In contrast, leaders of after-school centres integrated into play parks regarded the play parks as the very opposite of everything that is school-like. Rather they regarded the space as an open place, where children do not have to be supervised all the time. In the play park settings children were encouraged to choose their own activities and make use of the facilities the play park can offer. The leaders regarded their own role as one of guiding the children to become more independent and self-governed (2013: 276). The sports club placed a high value on the physically and mentally strong child. The activities were clearly informed by contemporary health policies and the strategies for preventing obesity. The leaders struggled with whether they should plan activities aimed at developing the children's competences for the future, or if they should just let the children 'be free' and do whatever they like to do. The children, on the other hand, were largely uncritical towards the coaching style of guiding them. Because of the sporty and healthy lifestyle promoted by the club, they regarded it as superior to other after-school centres or to staying at home (2013: 277). However, the sport club in the study was located in the sports organisation's facilities and children less interested in sports had difficulties in finding something to do. This alerts us to the spatial challenges brought about by the after-school reform where single-use buildings are used for multi-purpose activities. The reforms, and how such challenges are addressed and children's views taken on board are indicative of how children are valued.

In other research, Gesell *et al* (2013) conducted analysis in the US to evaluate the difference in the amount of physical activity children aged 5-13 years of age engaged in when enrolled in a physical activity-enhanced after-school programme based in a community recreation centre versus a standard school-based after-school programme. A low-cost, alternative after-school programme featuring adult-led physical activities in a community recreation centre was associated with increased physical activity compared to standard school-based after-school programme.

4.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROVISION

One of the key expectations of the after-school experience for children is play (PLÉ, 2015) and after-school provision must be underpinned by Article 31 of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets out the child's right to play.

The play policy developed by the Irish Government (NCO, 2004) states that 'Play is freely chosen, personally directed intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child'. (NCO, 2004, p. 6). Free choice is clearly mentioned in this 'play is what children do when no-one else is telling them what to do' (NCO, 2004, p. 11). Choice within play has also been highlighted as important by 8-14 year-olds in England (Henshall and Lacey, 2007; Kapasi and Gleave, 2009). A lack of time for children to spend in authentic free play has been highlighted in relation in a range of contexts including out-of-school clubs, the playground and the home (Smith and Baker, 2001).

Interestingly, Howard and King (2014) found that the out-of-school club offered a higher level of choice in play than either the home or school playground environment. The authors looked at children's play in out-of-school clubs in Wales with children between 6 and 11 years self-reporting on play in three contexts: home, school playground and out-of-school club. The out-of-school clubs in the study were set up to provide a play environment for children while their parents

were working, studying etc. They looked at the types of play engaged in, the social aspects of play and choices made within play and considered the presence of five types of play – dramatic, creative, object, physical and static play. Children described the widest range of activities at the out-of-school club and children were more likely to play with a friend there than at home. Howard and King (2014) found that children’s choice in their play was clearly influenced by the activity that was chosen, the space that was available and the supervising adults’ perception of play. The out-of-school clubs were set up to provide a play environment for children while their parents were working, studying etc. The authors looked at aspects of professional practice which may differ from the school playground where choice of play was perceived by children as much more limited and suggest that club settings were staffed by play workers, trained to be sensitive in supporting children’s play process and facilitating choice in play (Howard, 2010).

4.4 POLICY CONTEXT AND HIGH-LEVEL POLICY COMMITMENTS IN IRELAND

The following section outlines the past and current policy context informing the development of policy relating to children and young people more generally, and specifically in relation to SAC. It focuses in particular on outlining guiding principles, recommendations and high level policy commitments. In doing so, it summarises key developments in the Irish policy landscape with reference to the provision of school age childcare across recent years.

4.4.1 *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: current policy context and general principles*

The development of school age childcare policy must be set in the wider and current policy context more generally, acknowledging also current high-level policy commitments in relation to SAC.

In 2014, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014–2020 (BOBF), the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People*. Internationally, it is accepted that all school age childcare services and systems, whether formal or informal, must be guided by a strong set of principles. These principles vary from country to country, and from setting to setting, but there is often a high degree of overlap. The BOBF Framework provides a concise set of principles relevant to the development of policy in relation to children and young people more generally, but which have applicability to SAC.

Ireland’s *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* provides a concise set of principles relevant to the development of policy in relation to SAC.

The first is a **‘Children’s Rights Principle’**, that the rights of children, as outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), are recognised, and that child-centred approaches are adopted. It is acknowledged that children have developmental and age-appropriate needs that change over time, and that children are sometimes vulnerable and largely dependent on adults for their care and needs.

The second is a **‘Family-orientated Principle’**, that the family is recognised as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of children. It is acknowledged that parents have the primary responsibility for their child’s upbringing and development, and that the State has a duty to assist parents in fulfilling their child-rearing responsibilities.

The third is the **‘Principle of Equality’**, a principle which acknowledges the diversity of children’s experiences, abilities, identities and cultures and that the reduction of inequality is promoted as a means of improving outcomes and achieving greater social inclusion.

The fourth is a commitment to the **'Principle of Evidence-informed Policy'** and that such policy is outcomes-focused. To be effective, policies and services must be evidence-informed and outcomes focused.

Fifth is a commitment to an **'Accountability and Resource Efficiency Principle'**. Clear implementation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms and lines of responsibility for delivery are in place to drive timely and effective policy implementation.

Also of relevance are the six transformational goals identified as a means of achieving desired outcomes for children:

- Support parents;
- Earlier intervention of prevention;
- Listen to and involve children and young people;
- Ensure quality services;
- Strengthen transitions;
- Cross-government and-agency collaboration and co-ordination.

In addition to more general principles relating to the development of policy relating to children and young people, BOBF contains a number of clear comments and recommendations on the usefulness of school age childcare, for example:

- It includes a recommendation to remove barriers to employment through increasing the affordability of quality and accessible childcare and after-school services, meeting EU childcare targets and encouraging flexible working arrangements.
- It acknowledged that there is a strong link between parental participation in the labour market, maternal educational attainment and children's living conditions. Tackling disadvantage is most effectively achieved through active inclusion strategies that combine supports for parents to access education, training and employment with adequate income support and access to essential services such as quality, affordable and accessible childcare, quality pre-school education, after-school services, health, housing and social services. This is particularly important in supporting the economic engagement of all women and in helping lone parents to make the transition from welfare dependency to economic independence.
- It also identifies the need to strengthen linkages between schools and other services at key points of transition to ensure better educational outcomes.

4.2.2 Past policy-related developments in relation to school age childcare

The development of school age childcare policy must also acknowledge, and be set in the context of, previous recommendations and high-level policy commitments with a focus on school age childcare.

In the mid-2000s a Working Group of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee, Childcare Directorate, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, published a report on Developing School Age Childcare. The remit of this Working Group was to:

- Review existing provision for school age childcare in Ireland and in other jurisdictions;
- Develop guidelines of quality standards for school age childcare;
- Make proposals for the development of school age childcare services, on an all year round basis, taking into account the diverse forms of such childcare; and
- Report to the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee on these issues.

In this respect, the Working Group identified a wider set of principles, but principles specific to the development of policy in relation to the provision of school age childcare are as follows:

- Children and adults have rights and responsibilities within the service;
- The work and ethos of the service should be underpinned by the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child;

- Access and participation in any formal service is open to all stakeholders;
- Children learn and develop in the context of a caring community which values their individual and combined strengths;
- Links with and between the child, family, service and wider community promote a sense of identity and belonging;
- Mutually respectful relationships are fostered and recognised as being central to the life of the service;
- Children, staff and parents engage in meaningful dialogue;
- The voice of the child is heard, respected and contributes to the service;
- Interactions are sensitive and responsive;
- The ethos and practice of the service values diversity and promotes equality;
- The programme is culturally and socially appropriate to the children, families and staff participating in the service;
- Staff and children work together in ways that are respectful and inclusive;
- Children are protected from bullying and abuse;
- The environment provides opportunities for rest, relaxation, play and learning;
- The service provides opportunities for positive experiences which support well-being, learning and development for all;
- The service promotes healthy life choices;
- The service offers opportunities for challenge and risk;
- The service is recreationally and educationally beneficial to the children;
- Service providers are valued for the knowledge, expertise and life experience they bring to the service;
- The professionalisation of service providers is supported;
- Programmes, policies and procedures are responsive to the needs of children, families and staff.

The group made a number of recommendations, including the following:

- In evaluating school age childcare projects for any financial assistance, the appraisal process should focus on the provision of a high quality service in accordance with agreed guidelines, the provision of a year round school age childcare service to meet the needs of parents to combine their childcare and employment (or training and education) responsibilities, and the economic sustainability of the project.
- That certain groups be actively encouraged to develop SAC facilities: community-based/not-for-profit groups, schools and work-based childcare facilities.
- Provision should be made within the EOCP Childminding Initiative to encourage childminders to provide quality childcare for school-going children. Supports should be provided to enhance the skills of childminders, thereby increasing the provision of quality childcare for school-going children by childminders.
- Groups which have received grant support for sessional childcare services should be encouraged to further expand the range of services they provide, thereby maximising use of the premises.
- Groups be given initial support to cover the cost of the additional capital items needed to cater for the older age group.
- Private childcare providers who have already received a grant for one property be permitted to submit an application for further support to cover the cost of developing a school age childcare service.
- Financial support should only be made available to childcare providers who are prepared to deliver a comprehensive school age childcare programme which addresses the social, physical, developmental, recreational and creative needs of the child in a happy and caring environment.
- SAC services must be underpinned by sound principles which support inclusion and participation. These include: respect for all children's rights, mutually respectful relationships, healthy life choices, opportunities for children to experience challenge and risk, balance of recreational and educational activity, the professionalisation of staff should be supported within the service.

Additional recommendations of the Working Group included the following:

- The Working Group recognised the UNCRC and fully endorsed the view that play is central to the healthy growth and development of children. As a result, the Working Group concluded that a strong focus on play must be a core principle and indeed a distinguishing characteristic of school age childcare.
- The Working Group recommended that the school age childcare service should plan and provide a range of play opportunities and activities to foster the development of children's social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional capabilities.
- The Working Group made recommendations in regard to the physical design of a school age childcare facility including that the facility offer a bright, warm environment, be accessible by children with disabilities, have a range of rooms or areas to facilitate more than one activity by a child or group of children at a time, including a quiet area for reading, table-based activities and homework, have access to an outside play area, include a kitchen area to facilitate the preparation and storage of food and hot drinks for children.
- The Working Group recommended that a voluntary code of standards be drawn up and a voluntary notification process be put in place. The Working Group developed guidelines to be used as a quality standard against which applications for grant assistance might be evaluated and recommended that these be further developed for use as a voluntary standard for the school age childcare sector.
- The Working Group recommended that a specific training strand be developed to equip childcare practitioners to provide a high quality service to meet the particular needs of the older age group of 4-12 year-old children who are likely to avail of school age childcare. The regular exchange of information with parents should be facilitated.

Another key development noted by the Working Group was that in 2001, Planning Authorities issued guidelines for Childcare Facilities, within which they recommended that planning authorities should, in their Development Plans, encourage the development of a broad range of childcare facilities, i.e. full day care, part-time care, after-school care etc. in the following locations as a key element in the provision of sustainable communities:

- Residential areas;
- Places of employment;
- Educational establishments;
- City and town centres, neighbourhood and district centres;
- Convenient to public transport.

They made a specific recommendation that after-school services (and pre-schools) could be located 'in the vicinity of' schools. This reflects an interest in providing services that are convenient for parents, and which also comprises a sustainable approach to the use of built facilities and transportation.

4.3.3 Recent policy developments in relation to school age childcare

More recently, in January 2015, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced the establishment of an Inter-departmental Group (IDG) on Future Investment in Early Years and School Age Care and Education. The purpose of this group was to identify and assess policies and future options for increasing the quality, supply and affordability of early years and school age childcare and education services in Ireland. In order to inform the work of the IDG, an Open Policy Debate was held in March 2015 with a range of stakeholders and representatives from the early years and school age childcare and education sector.

The group published its report in July 2015 and the recommendations for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in regard to school age childcare included:

→ **Subvented childcare provision for children aged up to 12**

This subvented scheme for all childcare provision for children age 1–12 years would ‘wrap-around’ the universal ECCE provision. Beginning with a targeted cohort, based on income, this could be expanded over time subject to available resources. This programme would be open to community/not-for-profit and private providers.

The IDG proposed a new initiative to provide for greater accessibility to a single targeted Programme with simplified eligibility criteria based on income. All existing targeted schemes would cease. To the degree that resources allowed, the new scheme would involve a reduction in contributions for those families most in need, and include, over time, a wider cohort of families.

To be eligible for subvented childcare, parents must need non-parental care because two parents (or one in the case of lone parent households) are working, studying or on an approved training course. Subvented provision would also be given where there is a concern for the child’s welfare.

Childcare services which provide childcare under the subvented childcare programme would agree to charge a set hourly fee for childcare. The options considered and costed were based on two possible fee structures. Eligibility for subvented childcare would be based on family income. The IDG costed an option where parents with children of school-going age could get childcare subvention for up to 20 hours a week during the school term. In addition, they could get subvention for up to 40 hours outside the school term (i.e. during the summer holidays). In time, the proposal is that all families could benefit from subvention.

→ **Assessing future demand for places and available infrastructure**

The DCYA, in collaboration with the Departments of Education and Skills, Environment, Community and Local Government, and Social Protection, the CSO, Pobal and the City/County Childcare Committees should work to develop a planning system to predict and assess demand for childcare.

This system should collate data on current population, population predictions, and supply and demand for childcare services to inform policy and be in place by end 2015. Planning for increased supply should have regard to existing investment infrastructure, the potential for displacement and Competition Authority advice.

Following an assessment of supply/demand, the DCYA should work with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to consider whether a revision of the Planning Guidelines is required to promote developments where supply is likely to be limited.

In addition, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation should ensure that access to local enterprise business supports is promoted for childcare providers.

As part of DCYA’s development of a policy framework for the provision of after-school care in a diverse range of appropriate settings, the Department of Education and Skills should carry out an initial survey of schools on the current provision of after-school services on school premises and the willingness of schools to consider future provision in this area where required or appropriate.

Through the youth sector, the DCYA should explore the potential role of the youth sector in after-school provision and their current access to existing infrastructure for the location of such services.

In the interim, to expand the range of options parents and children have for after-school services, a small capital grant should be made available to support a range of providers (public, private, voluntary) to develop additional, innovative, high quality after-school services. Such investment should only be provided where need has been established. Priority should be given to using existing State infrastructure, for example schools, or community facilities close to schools.

→ **Ensuring the development of appropriate after-school services for school age children**

DCYA should, with relevant partners, develop a model for after-school care including a quality standards framework (drawing on existing models and based on any available international practice). DCYA should plan for the phased introduction of self-assessment against the quality framework (which would be linked to State subsidisation of after-school and other out-of-school care). Quality standards should be published and consultation/training events held nationally for the sector.

In due course, consideration should also be given to the regulation of such provision in respect of physical environment, location, qualifications of staff and the quality framework.

DCYA should commission research to ascertain the views of children with regard to their preferences for after-school care.

→ **Additional recommendations**

The report proposed that any measures taken regarding affordability are complemented by a menu of quality initiatives aimed at improving quality and embedding a culture of continuous improvement, not only as regards centre-based care but also non-formal care settings. These included recommendations on:

- Information and resources;
- Education and training;
- Intensive supports and mentoring;
- Improvement of quality standards and regulation for the childminding sector.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

The interest in non-parental and after-school care arose from the changing context of childhood and childcare in the context of growing female labour force participation and a move away from home-based care to sharing of care across different settings from the 1970s onwards. In this context, earlier studies in relation to non-parental care, in respect of early years but also with reference to after-school, focused on the negative effects of maternal employment, and for older children, time unsupervised by an adult after-school. It also considered the positive effects of targeted after-school care for those children from lower socio-economic groups.

The more recent debate on after-school care is situated in the context of modern childhood where children are cared for on different sites – the home, school, community, extended family, private settings and so on. It is also one which, as is the case with the literature on early years, increasingly concerns itself with the quality of non-parental care in different settings and the related effects of child outcomes. The importance of the spatial spaces that influence the type and scope of activities in which children engage are highlighted, as is the importance of bringing the experience of children to bear on policy development. Experiences of children tend to illustrate that they value freedom, choice, and privacy. Flexibility and the support of non-intrusive adult figures also emerge as important to children in their after-school care.

CHAPTER 5

FACILITATING THE PROVISION OF SCHOOL AGE CHILDCARE OPTIONS FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN SCHOOL BUILDINGS



5.1 CONTEXT

It is established that in the best interests of children, school age childcare should be clearly differentiated from school activity. The time in primary school and the implementation of the curriculum should meet the child's academic or educational needs. However, there is a rationale for the provision of high-quality developmental activity for young children, outside formal school time, that complements the curricular and educational experiences during the school day. Access to additional enriching, play-based group and individual activities after school can help to further promote children's physical and language development, thinking skills and creative abilities. It also helps to foster children's social and communication skills. Through accessing high-value, co-curricular experiences, children of primary school age can enjoy learning opportunities in an informal context. They experience the fun in learning and develop the skills and habits of engagement with learning that will stand to them throughout their lives.

In Section 8 of the Programme for a Partnership Government (May 2016), the Government commits to the utilisation of primary school buildings for after-school care provision for school age children to offer more options and flexibility to parents, where there is demand for such a service, in partnership with community groups or private providers. In Section 10, there is another relevant commitment, which states that school buildings must be utilised outside of school hours if they are to remain at the centre of their communities and this usage should include after-school care, homework clubs and other community activities where demand exists.⁷

5.2 CURRENT POSITION

It is well recognised that schools play an important role in the development of sustainable communities⁸. In general, the use of school premises for community or after-school purposes is managed at local level. The publication of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform report in 2005⁹ and engagement and consultation with education partners at that time on the use of school premises culminated in the publication by the Department of Education and Skills of a circular¹⁰ on the use of school premises. The circular encourages Boards of Management and Trustees of schools to make their facilities accessible to local communities, provided that certain conditions are met and that the needs of the school are given priority.

The Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019 also refers to this Circular and reiterates that *'In urging and encouraging the Trustees and Boards to respond sensitively to this need, the Department fully appreciates that the decision ultimately lies with the relevant Board or Trustees and that the first priority at all times should be the interest of the school, its teachers and pupils.'*

Many schools at both primary and post-primary level have opened up their facilities outside of school hours for the use of the community in response to demand and in recognition of their unique position within the communities they serve. The level of activity varies across the country, generally dependent on local demand and capacity. A survey of primary schools carried out in early 2016 by the Department of Education and Skills showed the variety of uses of school buildings in a significant proportion of schools in Ireland. The range of activities includes homework clubs, breakfast clubs, summer camps, sporting and other activities for children as well as the facilitation of community groups in the evening. Forty per cent of respondents indicated

⁷ Programme for a Partnership Government (ss. 8.2.8 and 10.4.6), May 2016.

⁸ *The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities*, Department of Education and Science and Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, July 2008. https://www.education.ie/en/School-Design/Design-Guidance/pbu_prov_schools_and_planning_sys_COP.pdf

⁹ *Developing School Age Childcare - Report of a Working Group of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee*, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, June 2005, <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Developing-School-Age-Childcare-report>

¹⁰ Circular 16/05, <http://www.education.ie>

that their school premises were in use, although the level of usage varied across counties. In general, schools in urban areas with a growing population were more likely to facilitate out-of-school activities for their pupils and others.

The School Completion Programme, which is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, plays an important role in supporting and enabling many of these activities and services in schools in areas of disadvantage (DEIS schools). In the period 2010–2012, additional dormant account funds were used to specifically promote and fund the provision of out-of-school activities in 22 DEIS primary and post-primary schools in the Limerick area. This initiative was supported by the OSCAILT network comprising local schools, the Department of Education and Skills and Mary Immaculate College. A full report of the learning from the scheme has been published¹¹ and this has helped to inform consideration of how to build on current usage.

5.3 MEETING THE PROGRAMME FOR A PARTNERSHIP GOVERNMENT AFTER-SCHOOL CARE COMMITMENTS

The commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government (May 2016) have been explored through engagement between Government and education partners and are an important priority for the Department of Education and Skills. A number of relevant considerations informed this engagement with education partners to arrive at a workable model that meets the objectives of these two commitments and that is aligned with the delivery of the wider commitment to introduce a new system to support and expand quality school age childcare which is being led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The context for engagement was also informed by the submissions received by the Minister for Education and Skills in his consultation with education partners on the Statement of Strategy for his Department.

Important considerations included:

- The suitability of school premises for delivery of formal after-school childcare (school age childcare as defined in this report);
- Implications of the use of school infrastructure on education provision in the school;
- The range of challenges for patrons, trustees, and local school management in facilitating such arrangements;
- Avoiding displacement of existing out-of-school hours activities and the use of buildings by the wider community;
- Liability, governance, and procurement issues for the delivery/licensing of the provision of school age childcare services in the school.

5.4 CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY EDUCATION PARTNERS

The OSCAILT report (*see above*) set out the challenges for the schools that took part in that initiative. These challenges were echoed by the IPPN representatives consulted by the Inter-departmental Group and by patrons and management bodies of schools who were consulted as part of the initial phase of the Department's engagement with partners relating to the wider use of school buildings for the community.

¹¹ Report of Dormant Accounts funded scheme to enable DEIS schools in Limerick City to maximise community use of premises and facilities, OSCAILT, 2013, www.education.ie

In general, school authorities have a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to how their premises are managed and utilised at local level. The use of such school buildings outside of school hours and any licence agreements to be put in place requires the consent of the patron and the school building owner (usually the patron or trustees).

School management bodies and other partners (including patrons and trustees) are, in general, favourably disposed to expand the use of their school buildings outside of school hours where this is appropriate, and have considerable experience in doing this. In relation to school age childcare, some stakeholders have put forward the view that the availability of additional facilities that are fit for purpose is an essential element (i.e. a non-classroom environment). Whilst there is a general willingness to make buildings available out-of-hours where local needs exist, and many schools already do this in line with the Department of Education and Skills Circular, the issue of consequent liabilities arising from the use of school buildings was raised by trustee/patron representatives and management bodies.

It was noted that there is potential for tension to arise between using the buildings for commercial revenue and the displacement of use for community purposes. It is generally considered that ideally any provision should be largely self-financing and should, at a minimum, cover utility bills, additional insurance costs, licensing requirements and other associated costs. There was general consensus on a number of issues. Out-of-hours use of buildings can give rise to additional maintenance and security requirements. All partners agreed that the facilitation of any out-of-hours service places an additional administrative burden on the school and that thought needs to be given to the significant time commitment outside of school hours that results from such usage for school management, caretakers or key holders, and other staff. Issues arising from the use of school buildings out-of-hours can give rise to concerns regarding liability and indemnity from a property owners' and school management perspective.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

Following this initial period of intensive engagement with stakeholders and the education partners in relation to the use of school buildings for school age childcare, a number of conclusions were reached as a basis for further actions:

1. Some schools are more suitable than others for the provision of a quality school age childcare service on the premises. Newer schools, or schools with non-classroom spaces and access to outdoor facilities, provide a more suitable environment for such a service.
2. The priority for schools is mainstream educational provision for their pupils. The provision of school age childcare can create expectations from parents or the local community that this service will be always available. This can create problems when a growing school population requires previously available infrastructure on the school grounds.
3. Whilst there is an additional administrative and resource burden for schools in the organisation of such a service, many schools currently make their facilities available for out-of-hours use.
4. A range of issues arise from a property owners' and school management perspective, including security and maintenance, potential displacement of existing services, governance and oversight of services which may warrant specific attention. Legal issues such as liability, indemnity and licensing arrangements also need to be considered.
5. In some areas, a sustainable commercial arrangement may provide a revenue stream to the school, a sustainable business model for a licensed private provider, and a more affordable service for parents. However, in other schools, lower cost social economy models can be provided by parents or other community groups. In those instances, the school may charge nominal rent for the buildings to cover costs and parents can avail of lower cost school age childcare arrangements.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS



6.1 INTRODUCTION

Access to high quality, affordable childcare for children of all ages remains a priority for Government and is identified in 14 commitments within the current Programme for a Partnership Government. Improved access, on a more affordable basis, can encourage greater labour market activation and reduce poverty. Ireland is well behind its OECD counterparts with regard to its financial investment in affordable, high quality childcare. Families in Ireland currently rely heavily on family members, including grandparents, for their SAC needs, followed by childminders and the formal childcare sector. Parents regularly indicate an absence of choice with regard to their SAC needs. As the economy continues to recover and as investment in childcare continues, it is critical that capacity be developed within the system to provide parents and children with greater access and choice. This must be accompanied by strong measures to improve quality and affordability.

The findings from the consultations with children commissioned for this report indicate that children want to be able to relax and feel comfortable after school. A home-like environment was preferred, with outdoor and indoor play identified as important by children of all ages. Relationships with family, extended family, friends, childminders and other carers were noted as being very important to children. Eating and cooking were also identified as important activities for children after-school. Children expressed a dislike of being in structured environments with rules. Other dislikes included not being treated appropriately for their age along with lack of food choice. The voice of children is critical to informing policy in this area. If children's preference is to go home after school and enjoy certain patterns and activities, and it is not possible to facilitate this, then the system of SAC must seek to reproduce their preferences in a variety of settings, other than their home.

Parents need choice and affordable options, but they also need assurance about the quality of the service. In Ireland, childcare for children under 6 is regulated within the formal sector (crèches etc.) but this is not the case for children aged six or over. In addition, the vast majority of childminders are not regulated, as they are exempt from the Child Care Regulations. A Working Group has been established to consider this matter and make recommendations to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

There is extensive international research to guide Ireland in policy development on SAC and much of the policy is undisputed. The IDG, having considered this relatively strong evidence base, believes that there are three main components to an effective SAC model. These three components and their constituent elements are summarised below.

6.2 ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF A SAC SYSTEM

The following diagram represents a summary of the essential components of the SAC model proposed by the IDG. The model is child-centred but also recognises the needs of families. It covers SAC across formal/centre-based care and childminding. The model recognises the rights of children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The model is divided into three major components: Quality, Access and Affordability. When introduced, the model will mean that children who need non-parental/non-relative care after school and outside of term time will be able to access it, in their local community where possible, from a range of service providers. The care provided to them will be quality assured and will in many ways simulate a healthy home environment. Staff providing their care will be trained and supported in their work. The care will be affordable to parents.

A model for school age childcare in Ireland



6.2.1 Quality

The model demands a focus on quality across all SAC services, both formal (centre-based) and informal (childminding), to protect the rights and well-being of children. The model requires a robust quality assurance framework to be established in Ireland, recognising the absence of any regulation for the school age sector at present.

The immediate priority is the development of a comprehensive set of quality standards. These will cover all the fundamentals of children's needs at this time in their lives. There will be standards for areas such as the physical environment, the qualifications and competence of the workforce, the programme content, rest, relaxation and play, nutrition, information for children and parents, health and safety, and child autonomy and choice. These standards will assist parents in understanding what they should expect from a service and what constitutes good school age childcare. The standards will also reflect what children and parents have said that they need and enjoy, which is a safe environment that in many ways simulates a healthy home environment.

A robust system of quality assurance against the standards will be put in place. This will be a requirement to be eligible for any State funding, current or capital. Over time, statutory regulation should be introduced alongside the existing Early Years Inspectorate operated by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, but in the interim, in order to ensure timely progress, it may be necessary to introduce some phased reforms.

Under the model, all services providing SAC, be it the formal childcare sector or the informal sector, ie. childminders, would be actively encouraged and supported to meet the quality standards. A system of investment in, and provision of, initial training and subsequent continuing professional development for all staff should be introduced. Support would take the form of, for example, an effective system of sharing information and best practice at local and regional level through cluster learning groups, structured professional development for staff through accredited full-time or part-time courses, and capital investment to assist in developing and maintaining a suitable physical environment.

6.2.2 Access

Under the model, children and families will have access to a number of options for their SAC needs. These will range from informal options (childminders), to formal/centred-based (for example, school-based SAC services or dedicated SAC services off-site), across a range of locations in local communities, but all of these services should meet quality standards.

Geographical convenience is critical for many families and whilst the challenges of achieving a critical mass to sustain a formal service in a rural area are often significant, creative and innovative approaches should be supported where this is possible.

Transport to SAC services based outside the school setting is critical and the costs associated with this must be considered.

Capital investment is required to ensure that sufficient capacity is developed across a range of options.

SAC services must be inclusive and cater for children with disabilities. They should also seek to meet the needs of all social groups. Consideration should be given to a range of supports which are appropriate to the needs of school age children attending after-school or out-of-school services.

In order to create a system that guarantees choice for parents, it is critical that a robust system to monitor supply and demand is created. The DCYA, the CSO and the DES must formally link up to create a system which meets this need. This data will inform policy and investment decisions. It will also assist childcare providers and City and County Childcare Committees to identify need and under or over supply within their local area and to advise providers and parents accordingly.

Parents need easy access to information on local SAC services. The role of the local Childcare Committee in this regard needs to be considered. Parents also need information and assistance to enable them to adequately evaluate the quality of services.

6.2.3 Affordability

The model recognises that the expense of SAC is a major deterrent to its use by parents. The model seeks a wider expansion of subsidised childcare beyond the current universal ECCE scheme (free pre-school), and beyond the 31,000 children that benefited from subsidised childcare and SAC in 2015/2016, to a much wider population. The model will be underpinned by the recently announced Affordable Childcare Scheme to be introduced on a phased basis in September 2017 to provide the infrastructure for the provision of subsidised and affordable Early Years and SAC. The new scheme will be capable of delivering targeted or universal subsidisation to children from 6 months to 15 years of age. The scheme will enable Government to make additional investment available, year on year, to reduce the cost of Early Years and SAC, ideally to reach a stage where Ireland compares favourably with its OECD counterparts. The annual

Estimates process should provide the mechanism for Government to consider the level of further investment possible for childcare.

The affordability component of the model also recognises the cost to providers of providing high quality SAC. The independent review being commissioned by the DCYA of the cost of providing childcare is welcome in this regard and will inform future policy and investment. An extension of this review to include the cost of childminding is required. Despite the high cost of childcare in Ireland, most early years practitioners earn little more than the minimum wage. It is accepted that quality can best be assured by a more qualified workforce, but a qualified workforce merits higher rates of pay, potentially raising costs. The objective data obtained under the independent review will be critical to future investment decisions. A sustainable and stable sector is necessary for the delivery of accessible, high quality and affordable childcare services that meet the needs of children, families, a healthy society and the economy.

Investment in major and minor capital infrastructure is required to ensure sufficient access to high quality and affordable SAC. Given some evidence relating to relatively low profit margins in services, and the need to expand capacity quite significantly in the next five years to meet growing demand, it is likely that significant capital investment will be required.

CHAPTER 7

ACTION PLAN



No.	Area	Action	Agency	Deadline
1	Q	Establish a working group to develop a comprehensive set of Quality Standards for SAC. These standards should cover, for example, the programme of activities in SAC, the physical environment, adult / child ratios, the provision of appropriate food and nutrition, access to outdoor play, inclusion, and the health, wellbeing and protection of the child. The working group will have regard to work already undertaken at national and international level on best practice. The group will have regard to the voice of children and parents in the development of the Quality Standards.	DCYA	Mar 2017 (to report in Sept 2017)
2	Q	<p>DCYA will approve and introduce a robust quality assurance system for SAC services. Expert working group(s) to be established to recommend a quality assurance system for SAC services to the DCYA. This will be divided into two components given the diversity and complexity of the task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → a robust quality assurance system for childminders → A robust quality assurance system for setting-based SAC services, whether those eligible for current childcare schemes (given that part of their service is in an early years service registered with Tusla), or those that are stand alone and currently ineligible for registration by Tusla. <p>Both groups will make recommendations for the establishment of a national register of quality assured SAC services.</p> <p>Statutory regulation, similar to that provided by the Tusla EY Inspectorate, to be considered by DCYA in the longer term with phased reforms for consideration in the immediate term.</p>	DCYA	<p>Dec 2016</p> <p>Dec 2016 (to report in May 2017) and Mar 2017 (to report in Dec 2017)</p>
3	Q	A variety of supports for the childminding sector will be examined and costed for consideration in the 2018 estimates process.	DCYA	July 2017
4	Ac	DCYA will assign resources to establish a specialist function to work with the Central Statistics Office, Department of Education and Skills, Pobal and the CCCs to identify demand for SAC and EY services and the supply available. The unit will actively monitor change on an annual basis to inform policy makers. CCCs will play an important role at local level in engaging with providers. The unit will also, over time, monitor access and inclusion generally.	DCYA	June 2017

continued

No.	Area	Action	Agency	Deadline
5	Q	Develop a Workforce Plan for the Early Years and SAC sector that will examine the existing early years and SAC workforce, the entry and career pathways, training needs, current capacity, predicted future demand and available supply.	DCYA DES	March 2017 comp by Q1 2018
	Ac	The development of a CPD infrastructure for EY and SAC workforce will be considered taking into account the recommendations of the Workforce Plan.		Dec 18
6	Ac	Capital grant funding of €3m available in 2017 will be used to provide grants to SAC services, both new and existing, to increase quality options for parents.	DCYA	Open Scheme April 2017
7	Ac	Develop an online information resource for parents containing information on SAC, linked to all CCCs and National Voluntary Childcare Organisations. The dedicated web resource will support parents to understand their SAC options, to ask the right questions when choosing their SAC provider and to access relevant information. Consultation with parents will inform this information resource.	DCYA	Jan 2018
8	Ac	Use of Schools and existing community facilities which have suitable environments available for SAC should be maximised where demand exists and where it can be facilitated by the school patron/trustees. The Department of Education and Skills will consider how increased use of school buildings could be facilitated, taking into account the issues raised to date, and will engage with property owners and school authorities to facilitate increased use of school buildings where feasible.	DES	June 2017
9	Ac	The Department of Education and Skills will engage further with the relevant education stakeholders and school property owners to formulate guidelines for schools to facilitate the use of school buildings out-of-hours.	DES	Q2 2017
10	Q	The Department of Education and Skills will engage with QQI to develop an appropriate qualification for the SAC workforce in the wider context of the review of existing QQI ECEC awards.	DES	Q1 2017
11	Q	The DCYA will establish a dedicated Learner Fund with attractive terms to enable existing staff (both centre-based practitioners and childminders) achieve the qualification in SAC described above.	DCYA	Sept 2017

continued

No.	Area	Action	Agency	Deadline
12	Q	The DCYA will commission an independent review of the cost of providing informal care (childminding). This will inform any future subsidisation.	DCYA	
13	A	The Affordable Childcare Scheme will be designed and introduced with the potential to include subsidisation of suitably quality assured SAC services (formal and informal). Any future subsidisation and eligibility will be explicitly linked to compliance with the prescribed quality assurance system.	DCYA	To begin April 2017
14	A Ac	The Affordable Childcare Scheme as published in October 2016 enables existing beneficiaries of targeted schemes to receive contributions towards transport costs. DCYA will consider how transport needs will be addressed in the future and will agree clear rules for same if critical for access to SAC services.	DCYA	Sept 2017
15	Q	In addition to a standard relating to the provision of food in SAC services, DCYA will ensure that cross-departmental consideration will be given to how SAC services might address food poverty for disadvantaged children.	DCYA	Dec 2018
16	Ac	DCYA will commission research on best practice in the provision of inclusive SAC services, to include children with disabilities and those experiencing social disadvantage. DCYA will continue to work closely with the Department of Health and the HSE to further develop linkages between childcare services and disability services so that where needs emerge they can be responded to in a timely and effective manner.	DCYA	Dec 2018
17	Ac A Q	The SAC Working group will continue its work and monitor progress on actions. An evaluation framework will be put in place. A formal review of progress will take place three years from publication of this Action Plan. This monitoring of progress will be supported by consultations with children and with parents to ensure that their respective needs are being met under the SAC.	DCYA	Ongoing 2019

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APPENDICES



APPENDIX 1: MEMBERSHIP OF THE INTER-DEPARTMENTAL GROUP ON SCHOOL AGE CHILDCARE

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Bernie McNally, Assistant Secretary General (Chair)

Laura Slevin

Mary Hogan

Adam Gunning (Shared secretariat)

Department of Education and Skills

Gary Ó Donnchadha, Assistant Secretary General

Aoife Conduit

Willie McIntosh

Lorraine Reilly

Amanda Shields (Minutes/Shared secretariat)

APPENDIX 2: BREAKDOWN, BY COUNTY, OF COMMUNITY VERSUS PRIVATE SAC PROVISION, WAITING LISTS AND SPARE CAPACITY, AS OF MAY 2016

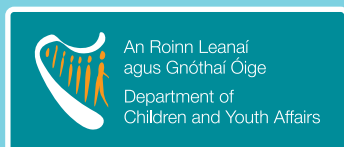
Early Years Services contracted to DCYA 2016

County	CB Enrolled	PP Enrolled	Total Enrolled	CB Available	PP Available	Total Available	CB Waiting list	PP Waiting list	Total waiting list
Carlow	359	169	528	5	10	15	17	10	27
Cavan	259	128	387	22	32	54	5	1	6
Clare	310	422	732	50	108	158	12	22	34
Cork City	91	154	245	42	57	99	17	0	17
Cork County	810	1,144	1,954	112	279	391	87	42	129
Donegal	537	288	825	73	136	209	10	3	13
Dublin - Dublin City	1,346	1,055	2,401	89	97	186	207	31	238
Dublin - Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	269	764	1,033	10	90	100	5	75	80
Dublin - Fingal	27	1,921	1,948	21	296	317	0	124	124
Dublin - South Dublin	306	826	1,132	22	86	108	36	52	88
Galway	929	1,019	1,948	134	209	343	11	62	73
Kerry	683	212	895	173	56	229	15	0	15
Kildare	81	1270	1,351	7	136	143	0	30	30
Kilkenny	292	347	639	38	65	103	43	11	54
Laois	628	296	924	49	155	204	13	2	15
Leitrim	224	42	266	19	10	29	2	10	12
Limerick	724	717	1,441	40	190	230	5	39	44
Longford	279	117	396	17	20	37	18	4	22
Louth	166	639	805	19	175	194	22	32	54
Mayo	607	164	771	69	38	107	26	23	49
Meath	400	764	1,164	53	138	191	24	20	44
Monaghan	794	184	978	155	54	209	7	6	13
Offaly	163	207	370	23	53	76	0	13	13
Roscommon	366	224	590	43	70	113	35	0	35
Sligo	322	244	566	12	32	44	40	0	40
Tipperary	305	491	796	44	56	100	3	5	8
Waterford	357	372	729	32	64	96	57	17	74
Westmeath	219	283	502	17	44	61	0	5	5
Wexford	546	397	943	40	83	123	27	14	41
Wicklow	291	454	745	50	39	89	15	18	33
Total	12,690	15,314	28,004	1,480	2,878	4,358	759	671	1,430

CB = Community-based Provider
PP = Private Provider







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