



SIPTU Big Start
Early Childhood Education
and Care Campaign

PRE-BUDGET 2020 STATEMENT



THE LOW PAY CRISIS

There is a low pay crisis in Ireland's Early Childhood Education and Care sector.

POBAL's 'Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017/2018' reported that Early Years Assistants earn on average just €11.18 per hour, (€1.12) below the Living Wage. Furthermore, 43% of honours degree graduates in the sector earn below the Living Wage on an annual basis¹.

Predictably, this has resulted in a staff turnover rate of 25%.

Poor pay and conditions are forcing educators to live in poverty. However, they are also detrimental to quality for children and sustainability for providers.

Evidence clearly shows that high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care has benefits for children in terms of their cognitive and social development, improving school readiness and life outcomes². The impact is even greater for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The quality is largely dependent on the interactions between educators and children. Research has consistently shown that a high turnover of staff undermines the delivery of a high-quality service³.

High staff turnover rates are also impacting on providers. 86% of services reported that they were concerned that problems recruiting and retaining staff will impact on the viability of their service⁴.

The cause of the crisis is twofold.

Firstly, government is significantly underspending on Early Childhood Education and Care. The Republic of Ireland (ROI) spends just 0.3% of GNI* compared to an EU average of 0.7% and well below the UNICEF 1% GDP target. This has resulted in it having the second highest childcare fees in the EU while simultaneously being among one of the lowest paid sectors in Ireland⁵.

Secondly, there is currently no national pay agreement for the Early Childhood Education and Care sector.

PROGRESS TO DATE

The publication of 'First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children' is a welcome development. SIPTU supports the commitment to the development of a graduate led sector and a doubling of government investment. SIPTU welcomed the support by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs for a Sectoral Employment Order. This is a key industrial relations framework that will facilitate increased investment in pay and conditions. As SIPTU will be in a position to apply for a Sectoral Employment Order in early 2020, the union is calling on government to allocate funding to improve pay and conditions in the upcoming budget.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the low pay crisis, SIPTU is calling for:

- 1** As a first step to phasing in the Mercer⁶ pay scale, an allocation of €32 million to raise pay. This would have the capacity to bring all employees up to the Living Wage level.
- 2** The establishment of minimum pay and conditions by means of a Sectoral Employment Order with the active engagement of government
- 3** The development of a radically reformed funding model for Early Childhood Education and Care with the aim of transforming the sector from a market-led to a service-led model.
- 4** An increase Early Years Education and Care from the current 0.3% of GNI* spending to the EU average over a 5-year period. Spending should increase to 1% of GNI* by 2027.

¹ Higher Education Authority (2019) Graduate Outcome Survey

² Heckman, J. (2015) The Economics of Human Potential

³ Moon, J. and J. Burbank (2004), "The early childhood education and wage ladder; a model for improving quality in early learning and care programs" Economic Opportunity Institute

⁴ Early Childhood Ireland (2017) Early Years Sector Staffing Survey

⁵ SIPTU (2019) Childcare Low Pay in Comparison

⁶ MERCER (2018) Remuneration For Early Years Professionals

"I love my job and early years education is something I am passionate about but current conditions may force me to reconsider my career path and I think this is extremely unfortunate."

Ann, Early Years Educator

F is for **Funding**

P is for **Pay Scales**



Q is for **Quality**

A is for **Affordable**



The average rate of pay for an Early Years Educator is €11.18 per hour. Thousands work under precarious 15 hours a week, 38 weeks a year contracts.

According to the Government, Ireland spends just 0.3% of GDP on Early Years Education and Care compared to an EU average of 0.7% and the UNICEF benchmark of 1%.

The cost of childcare in Ireland is the second most expensive in the EU for couples and the most expensive for lone parents.

Staff turnover in the early years sector is 25%⁷ per year. 86% of services said that they were concerned that problems recruiting and retaining staff will impact on the viability of their service.

Our recommendations are in line with ICTU's pre-budget submission which addresses the overall budgetary implications, including generating the required revenue.

"Just really disappointed in it all. Love my job when I'm in it but so disheartening that I spent 4 years in college and still wouldn't even be able to get a mortgage on a 1 bed apartment."

Sinead, Early Years Educator

As an owner manager, I have the most amazing, professional staff but I cannot afford to pay them a professional wage. We need state investment so that the work of our educators is financially recognised.

Sarah, Early Years Owner Manager

The Big Start Campaign

SIPTU is the union for the Early Years sector. Historically, the early years sector has been non-union, low paid and low status. Through the Big Start campaign, SIPTU is organising Early Years Educators and bringing together parents, providers and child focused Non-Governmental Organisations to radically transform the sector. We are campaigning for high quality and affordable, accessible Early Years services that are delivered by qualified professionals paid a decent wage within sustainable services.

⁷ Early Years Sector Profile 2016/2017 (2018) POBAL



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is for BigStart



Together Stronger



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