



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth



Report on New Funding Model  
Consultation with Parents  
November/December 2020



# Introduction

## Background and context

This series of seven sixty-minute online consultation sessions with parents was one part of a larger 'Phase 1' process in relation to a new funding model, which included:

- An Ipsos MRBI survey of 500 parents undertaken in August and September.
- A call for submissions (17 September to 2 October) - 168 submissions made.
- A webinar held on 22 September that attracted over 700 people.
- A further 130 providers and practitioners had also been involved in separate focused discussions to help inform a new funding model (those focused discussions are the subject of a separate report).
- A closing webinar on the programme of consultation was held on 16 December 2020 (see [www.first5.gov.ie](http://www.first5.gov.ie)). All parents that registered an interest in attending a session were invited to attend the closing webinar.

The next phase of the project will involve generating options to address the issues identified in Phase 1, including throughout the consultation, testing proposals and making recommendations for solutions. It is envisaged that recommendations of the Expert Group will be delivered to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in November 2021.

## Approach

Initially, participants for the focused discussions with parents were sought via the City and Country Childcare Committees (CCCs). This initial call for parents resulted in the first session with 20 parents identified and the first focus-group discussion session with parents proceeded on 29 October but with only seven participants. Further to low uptake through the CCCs, the remaining dates for focus-group discussion sessions were published on Eventbrite for any parents to register. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) advertised these sessions via the First5 Twitter account and emailed a number of representative organisations to seek support in reaching a diverse range of parents that may be interested in participating. This outreach resulted in 174 parents registering their interest and being invited to attend the remaining sessions over the period 12 November to 2 December.

## Session dates

Date	Number of Participants
Thursday 29 October	7
Monday 23 October	7
Tuesday 24 November (lunchtime)	8
Tuesday 24 November (evening)	13
Wednesday 25 November	4
Thursday 26 November	5
Wednesday 2 December	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>

## Nature of discussion

The sessions were not themed but provided an open discussion forum to discuss the topic:

*Your views as a parent on the 'strengths and weaknesses of the existing system and your suggestions for how the system could be improved'.*

The session was broken into three parts:

- Strengths
- Weakness
- Suggestions for improvement

The objective of each session was the same, to gain insights and opinions of parents and get their feedback and experience. The method of each consultation was similar utilising interactive technologies, such as Google Jam Boards, where possible. There were slight differences in discussion content due to varying sizes of groups, varying access over phone, computer, etc. and personal experiences driving the conversation.

The facilitators ensured that it was clear that the input was to be from a parent's perspective even if a parent was a professional member of the sector.

The background documents, agendas and minutes of each meeting, as well as the first suite of research papers, are publicly available at:

<https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie>

### What parents talked about most in the sessions:

- The costs of services.
- The qualities they appreciated most in staff (kindness, warmth, caring, approachability, good communications etc.).
- The importance of retaining staff (particularly experienced staff) and avoiding high staff turnover.

A second tier of issues (for these parents) included:

- The lack of available spaces.
- The lack of flexibility around hours.
- A need for a more integrated approach around children with additional needs.
- The curriculum/ learning and play.
- Their support for apps that aid communication.
- Their frustrations around administration (especially in relation to the National Childcare Scheme [NCS]).

This Report has been prepared by the independent facilitators contracted to undertake this consultation on behalf of DCEDIY (formerly DCYA), Chris Chapman and Ali Warner from 'The Change Exploratory'.

Thanks are due to all who participated in the consultation and also to staff from DCEDIY who have supported the process and to members of the Expert Group who attended sessions.

The topic headings below have been listed broadly in order of how much they were talked about in the seven sessions (i.e. the topics talked about most are listed first).

# What Parents Talked About Most in the Sessions



## A. Costs of services

- *“It’s like a second mortgage to have two children in childcare”*

In each session, parents were asked to list the strengths and weaknesses of services (in their experience) and their suggestions for improvements. The costs of services were, by some way, the most mentioned ‘weakness’.

There was considerable recognition that the issue of costs was particularly acute in Dublin. (One mother who had moved out of Dublin suggested that costs were 40% cheaper after her move; another shared her belief that fees in South Dublin were the most expensive in Europe.)

Individual parents did recognise that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) had been helpful.

*“I get subsidised care and it has made a real difference to my standard of living - I’m really impressed with that and how it has affected me and really appreciated it”*

- The impacts of costs on particular parents mentioned included:
  - Not being able to work in the childcare sector because of the cost of one’s own childcare.
  - Feeling forced to send children to school earlier than they wanted to.
  - The impact on career development.
  - Having to resign from a dream job, as going to work is too expensive.
  - Not feeling able to have a second/ third child.
- The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) was seen as minimally helpful:

*“Fifty cent an hour is nothing for a working parent to reduce child care costs”*

- Concern was also expressed regarding the support for those who fell just outside of means test limits:

*“Those that don’t meet the means testing but work full time and pay full-time fees are not benefiting. Have a child to be away from them 10 hours a day? There needs to be more support for full-time working parents”*

- An additional concern was expressed regarding the costs of school age childcare:

*“The conversation in the staff room recently from one teacher was that after-school is costing 10 euro more than full-time care in the crèche”*

- Recognition was given that it is much harder for some parents than others:

*“From the perspective of an immigrant mother, it is just impossible”*

- In terms of what should be done about costs, there were many requests that funding should be increased and fees should be cheaper.

Three parents suggested tax breaks as the way to increase affordability:

*“In Ontario, Canada they do have a tax credit for parents. That could be something that's pursued so that it's not up to the provider, but the parent can submit the application themselves”*

Reference was also made to the merits of looking at other models across Europe  
*“where parents are paying a reasonable amount for local childcare”*

One parent expressed support for *“the Australian Family Day Care Model – more cosy and relaxing”*

One parent made a specific request for more funding to go to care for Under 3s:

*“At the moment the ECCE scheme ensures quality of care for pre-schoolers but under-3s don't get that”*

## B. Qualities of staff

- In the part of the sessions where participants were asked about what they had experienced as the strengths of services, the thing mentioned most often was the positive qualities of staff.

*“Preschool is really good because of the quality of the staff”*

*“The staff cannot be praised enough”*

- The most frequently mentioned qualities were kindness, warmth and caring.

*“We went to a small crèche with staff that had been there for years - kids got lots of hugs and genuine care”*

- Considerable value was also placed on approachability and good communications.

*“Little chats outside in the car park, particularly in these times where you don't know what is going on with the pods etc. - our gang built a huge castle!”*

*“I'm a lot older than a lot of the teachers, but their approach is fresh and we are all like equals - the time of the matriarch is gone”*

*“They are so easy to discuss problems at home with”*

*“They were very helpful in suggesting improvements on their side, as well as what could be done at home and didn't take my feedback as a criticism”*

- Three parents talked specifically about how much they appreciated the support that they had received with aspects of child development:

*“We have had two deaths and also the death of a pet and they spoke about this, read stories and talked about feelings etc. and gave me some great information to use at home to discuss losing a loved one”*

- Acknowledgement was also given to the dedication and commitment of staff:

*“We have been very lucky to have the same teachers for six years for my daughter and you can see they love their jobs, whereas others parents don't have that - probably due to conditions for the staff”*

There were very few negative comments about practitioners at all. Parents tended to recognise weaknesses in services generally as more systemic than personal. There were a few criticisms of 'management' within services – mostly in relation to communication.

## C. The Importance of retaining staff

- In discussions about the weaknesses of services, the second most mentioned topic (after the costs of services) was the high turnover of staff and the impact that has on continuity and services.

*“It's so important to keep staff in the area and ensure we have the right people caring for our children”*

*“We're terrified if the practitioner in our son's room leaves, as we can see that other staff are leaving. You see there is way too much going on for the girls (i.e. the staff), they just don't have the time”*

*“In my son's time at his crèche, he had eight different minders because there seems to be a high turnover of staff e.g. a lot of staff seem to come over to learn English for a year and then go, and this seemed to be an approach in a big crèche”*

*“There are fantastic staff in our crèche who do wonderful things with the kids. Would hate to see them leave”*

*“Make childcare an attractive career option (career structure, good salary) – recognise their qualifications”*

- Parents saw staff as undervalued and underpaid and there was much support for proposals that staff should be paid better.

***“I don't know the wages for the workers in crèche, but I doubt they are high and they do such important work”***

*“We talk about cost being prohibitive, and on the other side, are the people who are taking responsibility for our children getting the pay that they should? I feel that they're not”*

*“There need to be better incentives to keep staff in place. The ratio of summer leavers for travel/studies shouldn't outweigh permanent positions”*

*“It's so important to keep staff in the area and ensure we have the right people caring for our children. We should introduce a Sectoral Employment Order for workers to reduce turnover”*

*"This work is seen as women's work, as benevolent work, and until it is truly valued by society these problems will continue"*

- There was also concern that some staff were leaving due to qualification issues:

*"Excellent people who have worked in childcare for years are leaving because they don't have qualifications"*

- Concerns about retention were expressed across the country and across different types of service:

*"The high turnover of staff seems to be happening in the after school care too - what is that would keep the staff in their roles?"*

*"Especially for babies, it's an odd experience for them so it's important for them to have that safety net of the continuity of staff"*

# What Parents Also Talked About in the Sessions



## D. Availability and flexibility of services

- Issues of availability of service were particularly acute for parents in Dublin, but not limited to them.

*“Extreme stress”*

*“I had to go out of county”*

*“As soon as you pee on a stick and it says positive, you have to find a pre-school then”*

*“When we lived in Dublin a childcare place was a lot more difficult to source”*

*“If I could find an early childhood setting for my son, I would have him there in the morning - I feel all I can find is someone who will put him in a room and stand at the back and make sure he doesn't cut himself”*

***“A new housing development got planning permission based on two new crèches being created - which never got built”***

- Whilst some parents expressed their appreciation of services providing access to ECCE and others were particularly appreciative of having access to services close to their home, for many the lack of hours and lack of flexibility within ECCE hours, in particular, were a problem.

*“For a parent who's working, it's great to say you have 15 hours a week of the ECCE scheme, but how are you meant to get your kids to school at 9am and home at 12 noon if you're working?”*

*“The ECCE scheme is great, but three hours a day doesn't suit a lot of parents - and most jobs don't stop at half-term or for summer holidays. What can we do to facilitate more choices for people?”*

*“Flexibility for ECCE and every child should be funded fully five days a week, regardless of whether they attend full-time. There should be no penalties for parents or services if a child is absent long-term due to illness”*

*“Childcare managed in school between 8am and 6pm - why couldn't we have that here? Here four crèches nearby all close at 2.30pm”*

*“Having no January start date feels illogical and unfair”*

- Three parents commented that crèches were only offering places for children from one year upwards. Attention was drawn again to the stress of it all.

*“Crèches not taking babies under a certain age is a huge problem and causes so much stress”*

*“Need for minders for young infants - we'd all love to have 12 months maternity leave but that's not available, so we need support with finding the care”*

*“Agree regarding ECCE indirect effect on the rest of childcare. I've been looking for a crèche place for a one year old since last January for September 2021 and I can't get one”*

Two parents commented specifically on the lack of part-time places in their area.

Five parents commented on the lack of School Age Childcare (SAC) – (comments were also made about the difficulties finding SAC places for children with additional needs).

*“After-school services were often originally set up as pre-school services - they don't have the space. They don't have the resources. It's less payback for the crèches with the income they get”*

Several parents voiced support for the idea of encouraging more schools to support SAC.

- Other flexibility issues/ comments included:
  - Having to pay if you took holidays during term-time.
  - Not feeling able to take part-time parental leave - *“Take one day a week parental leave and we'd be first against the wall, if there is any need to cut numbers”*
  - The impact of ECCE on the age your child goes to school.
  - Differing views on smaller/ larger services - *“The big chains can be more flexible, but you have to pay for it”* - *“My after-school service is very flexible with mid-term and holidays in that I can switch around the days and hours to suit me. This again is a small after-school. The larger ones would never do this for me before”*
  - Difficulties with part-time/ flexible hours working - *“Great to be able to take parental leave, but we need a childcare system that can support people who don't work full time - otherwise it's a particular block to women fully participating in the workforce. For a time I was paying full-time fees to get 2.5 days of care for daughter when she was one”* - *“If I wanted to work an extra hour a day it would send my costs for full-time childcare to a level where it wouldn't make any sense”*

- *“There is no way to hold ECCE funding whilst child is unwell (open heart surgery)”*
- *“Options need to be more flexible. My kids are in for a five-hour session. Anything over this counts as a full day and increases the cost hugely”*
- *“My kids might have a summer camp for a couple of weeks and then put them in crèche for a couple of weeks, but I'm told I have to put them in for the whole holiday which doesn't work”*
- *“It would be great if I could combine my hours and then get a childminder for the other hours”*

## E. Services for children with additional needs

- Stories presented by parents were obviously individual, reflecting the particular needs of children and the services available in particular localities.

There were a number of positive stories:

*“Great that three-year-old son on the autistic spectrum is in a small class”*

*“Great to get help with physio”*

*“My daughter has an eye issue and the staff have been very helpful with patching, even when we couldn't manage it, helpful with drops, again even we struggle to get her to cooperate”*

- However, there were more negative stories, either about a lack of appropriate services:

*“There is absolutely no support for children with other types of additional needs, and there should be - regardless of their age or other supports they need”*

*“No Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) support for younger children under three years, or children doing full days or half days or outside the academic year”*

*“SAC for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) children is non-existent - “I worry about what kind of after-school service will be available to him when he starts school (my son with Down Syndrome)”*

*“A lot of time when you have a child with additional needs and you try to avail of the services, they won't take your child on, because they give the impression that the adult-child ratio is already so great, they couldn't take them on”*

***“I can't work because I don't have childcare in the afternoons for my child on the autistic spectrum – it would be good to have the choice of an after-school facility if I needed it”***

*“Crèche would not take my son, who has Down Syndrome, outside of Montessori hours even though I offered to pay extra for a Special Needs Assistant (SNA). It delayed my return to work etc.”*

- Or about limitations of the services provided:

*“ASD early intervention class has no access or experience with speech and Occupational Therapy (OT) – a critical service for autistic children”*

*“No links to OT or Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) for non-verbal child” – “Lack of additional staff supports for special needs kids”*

*“I couldn't work as the autistic class starts at 9.15, so I would only be able to start work at 10am. In Dublin, many people are from the country and other countries so we don't have grandparents. I was a high-earner and contributed a lot of tax, so that has an effect”*

*“Crèches just say no to specific requests around caring for a child with special needs - has a huge impact on women and their chance to return to work”*

- There were also comments about perceived weaknesses in services for children with additional needs:

*“A lack of empathy for children with additional requirements”*

***“The new crèche staff didn't understand my daughter's needs, even though it had been flagged to them that she is on the ASD spectrum.”***

*“The service is pressurising me to get diagnosis for my son as the only way to get supports” (This last comment related to a sensitive situation that the mother felt was being dealt with insensitively.)*

- There was support for expanding and building on AIM:

*“AIM support needs to be expanded to full day-care”*

*“AIM support needs to be a round package looking at the needs of the child”*

*“Funding made available for AIM children beyond the three hours and better funding given. Thirteen euro paid by the Department, after accrued leave and employer PRSI is €10.65 an hour. Who is going to work for that?”*

*“There are a number of children with special needs in my crèche, but there is only one AIM worker and you can see through the door that it isn't enough”*

*“Support for AIM is just tailored around Montessori which is only three years - why can't an AIM assistant be provided to a child with special needs for a few extra hours so a mother or father can go back to work?”*

- There was also support for more integrated ways of working:

*“If speech and OT goes to the school, that means six children get a session in one go. Otherwise, you have six families travelling to therapy, missing school and days off work.”*

*“Inclusive education for autistic children needs access to OT and SLT” – “inclusion of wrap-around support team with Psychology, OT and SLT” – “Early Years should have access to OT and SLT, I think parents would welcome some assistance”*

*“It's short-sighted not to have psychologists involved in AIM. This is the time to intervene and it needs to be co-ordinated at a national level”*

- *“Early intervention is key nut [to crack], yet very little help out there unless you go private” - “if children have a diagnosis they need the help asap – it's a long wait for the help”*

*“Children with special needs are getting forgotten, so that by the time they arrive at school they are completely lost”*

- And a recognition that being more responsive to children with special needs also has implications (good and not so good) for other children (and adults):

*“Whilst my child does not have special needs, I appreciate special needs trained staff”*

*“Crèche facilitated children with special needs which we really liked – was good for all the children”*

*“Sometimes we focus very much on the needs of one child, but we don't remember how the care for that one child can affect everyone in that room including the staff”*

*“Children are welcoming to children with special needs – it's the adults we need to work with e.g. the view that they don't know how to work with a child with special needs even though they have the qualification”*

## F. The curriculum (learning and play)

- Many parents acknowledged the standard of the curriculum and recognised the merits of there being a child-focused, structured programme (in many settings).

*“I feel like my children are learning each day” – “Each day it surprises me what has been learnt”*

There was a general acknowledgement that learning and development were being supported and that a lot of the benefits were being achieved through play. Two parents expressed specific appreciation of the Montessori approach (which they described as learning through guided play). Another recognised that what they were experiencing was a *“holistic approach, incorporating many schemes and holistic elements”*

Two parents commented on the lack of structure and evident curriculum in their settings, one wondered *“why can’t they plan childcare like the school curriculum?”* and another *“why can’t there be more creative programmes, such as Early Childhood music?”*

## G. Apps as one way to aid communication (and communication more generally)

- Six parents made positive reference to their experience of apps that aid communications and help them have more insight into what is happening for their child (and other parents in those sessions showed great interest too!)

*"The app allows me to track what my son has eaten and what he did throughout the day. I can send the teacher a message and receive an answer immediately."*

*"My crèche uses an app called Childspath and I can look and see what my children have eaten or haven't eaten, so I know I can plan for that. I find that very good."*

*"We get the update about food, but we also hear that our child was happy, that they created something in nature. It's very reassuring for parents working from home"*

*"Surely every crèche should use an app?"*

- These experiences contrasted with some poor experiences for others in relation to communication:

*"We don't get a huge amount of feedback from staff, putting that down to the outdoor collections we are having due to Covid" – "Lack of transparency since Covid on internal organising of activities/pods"*

*"Being told about something that had happened with my son by a staff member who hadn't actually experienced it and couldn't share more information was upsetting"*

***"Sometimes I'd like to be able to engage in a little conversation about my daughter. I don't really know what she's been doing all day - I'd like to have more communication from my crèche"***

*"Either they come out with a clipboard and tell me that she's had dirty nappies, or they just say she had a good day - I wish my crèche had the apps that I know other crèches have"*

*“I was part of a chain crèche where the staff would come out with a clipboard and talk about eating and sleeping, but I wanted to know more e.g. how did he feel or how did he cope when there was an incident etc.”*

*“The way incidents are communicated can put worry on you as parents”*

- As well as support for apps, several parents were supportive of the idea that there should be more feedback and greater opportunities for parental involvement:

*“More feedback – a book filled out about what they do, especially for smaller kids when they can’t tell you”*

*“Possibly more child worker/ parent meetings throughout the year to 'check-in' on progress”*

*“Can there also be a way of factoring in some standards around open and clear communication?”*

## H. Administration (particularly the National Childcare Scheme [NCS])

- Many parents reported that they found the processes around NCS frustrating and confusing:

*“Parents jumping through hoops to get state funding” – “Too many conditions on funding”*

*“It kept popping into a new screen every time I put in information” – “It was only when I looked up at the top I realised it was opening new screens each time” – “CHICK code way too complicated”*

*“More user friendly NCS website and a case-by-case approach to new applications rather than blanket approach” – “Easier and clearer info on NCS support” – “More clarity on criteria to apply for NCS”*

*“Spent 3.5 hours on the NCS website three times and had to call the call centre four times and logged in seven times on mygov.ie - It says I can get a subsidy, but another system says I don't get a subsidy”*

***“You need an honours degree to get through all the hoops of the NCS & getting the CHICK code - I almost had to sell my soul for the €20”***

*“You'd need a separate degree to work it all out - the information needs to be clearer, it's very contradictory. When you delve into it there is so much involved, it's trying to make you step back and not finish the application”*

Some parents questioned the merits of the scheme and others whether it should be made mandatory:

*“We applied for the childcare scheme last summer and were told we weren't entitled to anything except 50 cent an hour - so it makes me question what I hear on the news”*

*“We don't apply for NCS, as it wouldn't be worth 50 cent per hour”*

*“So many funding models, dread the thought. That is part of the problem. We are only getting used to NCS and the Hive and if a different system comes in, it will be more arduous”*

*“Not very well-coordinated seeing as it's the National Childcare Scheme. Why isn't it mandatory? Maybe it's unattractive because of the workload.” - “National Childcare Scheme - should it be mandatory?”*

One parent fed back that their crèche had stopped using the scheme because of the paperwork.

## I. Additional comments

Additional comments in relation to topics that were less discussed than those above have been included in the sections below.

### (i) Monitoring of services

- Several parents raised their concern that childminders were not regulated (whilst in some cases also expressing support for smaller family-based care)

*“I went to a private childminder but at one point she had 15 children around the table - there's no funding around that area to limit her having that many kids”*

Some parents also had concerns generally about private sector care and particularly larger services:

*“I think there needs to be better monitoring of the private sector - looks like they're doing a great job, but not sure that they are doing a great job. They treat their staff terribly - they can put on a good show and we need to be careful about that”*

*“Having a bottom line in a profit-generating service means that standards can have corners cut”*

*“Found that the bigger services – the more branches they had – the worse the staff are treated, so the worse the care is” - “I have found, with large crèches, badly paid and inexperienced staff who don't know about or follow guidelines”*

*“There needs to be better guidelines and monitoring for larger branches”*

- Not all experiences of larger services were bad:

*“I have experience of a large Dublin crèche and a smaller private crèche. While both are great the large crèche did have more facilities, more rooms meant kids are always with kids their age so more interesting for them. The food provided in the large crèche was excellent, providing own food is fine for me but can be difficult for some people.”*

## **(ii) Other comments re School Age Childcare (SAC)**

- Two parents expressed a wish for SAC to be organised differently to serve older children better:

*“Mixed ages in SAC means older children get very bored” – “SAC could be split into age groups”*

There was a suggestion that SAC could do more in relation to homework:

*“I feel more after-schools should be created to help with homework. Our after-school did help but when too many kids they can only do so with more staff”*

## **(iii) Other comments in relation to parents**

- Several parents mentioned deficits in the available information:

*“Very hard for parents to navigate the information that is available e.g. Tusla reports, Department of Education reports - and to know what to do and where to go if they do identify an issue”*

*“It would be good for there to be public communications that make it easier to find childcare settings, guided in understanding the types of facilities e.g. community/private, who works there etc.”*

Some parents discussed services in wider contexts, e.g. mental health and bringing maternity pay and cover into the conversation:

***“We need to think about the mental health of parents - it takes a village to raise a family and we’re losing our villages.” – “We are not getting to know other parents and children in the group”***

*“In terms of extending maternity cover so that it's equal between women and men and it's paid - can we look at that? Six months is too short, and we need to pay women and men equally” – “Equal maternity pay and cover for males and females for the first year of life”*

Several mothers recognised that women tend to face the consequences of limited services:

*“It tends to be women that are left out because of the cost of childcare - it's such a relief now that she's gone to school as after-school in €700 a month versus €1200 a month for crèche. The practitioners deserve proper respect and pay. Parents are choosing not to have a third child, and it's the mother who drops out of the workforce”*

*“Because I love my son's crèche, I'm trying to work my life around his crèche e.g. applying for jobs that would fit around his times, but it's really difficult. What can I do to get something that's going to facilitate me and my son?”*

***“With four kids with such a large age gap we couldn't find childcare that would be affordable, it's just not workable - I've been to college and got my degree and now I'm a professional nappy-changer”***

*“Cost is a big thing. While I said it was easy to pay, it takes a lot of my wages, it makes it feel like a luxury which it shouldn't be. I work a three-day week to save costs and to be spend time with the kids. This is possible in my job but not for all my friends, it means they take a step back at work.”*

*“There needs to be more understanding of situations with sick children”*

#### **(iv) Other comments in relation to staff**

- As well as comments noted earlier in relation to the qualities of staff and the importance of retaining staff, there were also comments made about qualifications in the sector being at a low level and that this was another way in which staff weren't being acknowledged as professionals.

*“We agree around investing in the childcare workers, so they can develop” – “Give childcare practitioners the opportunity to go back to college” – “Increase the level of qualifications” – “Invest in a career strategy for the sector”*

Although one parent did comment that asking about qualifications can be difficult:

*“Asking about whether the staff in a particular setting have the right qualifications feels like it is setting up an adversarial relationship - who would want to set up an adversarial relationship with the person caring for their child?”*

## (v) Other comments in relation to services

- One parent picked up on services here feeling clinical in comparison with their experience in Australia:

*“In Australia, practitioners are with your children from three months through to the age of older children. Practitioners go to the post office with children, children can lounge on the sofa - here our schools are too clinical and not somewhere a child would like to stay for a long time”*

Concern was expressed by some regarding a lack of outdoor play and spaces, although in some settings it was reported that that had improved since Covid-19.

Other implications of Covid-19 included:

*“I have two different gates to drop at in the morning which puts pressure getting to work”*

*“I think I am lucky that I know the crèche as my daughter is a little older, but I feel really sorry for new moms this year not getting to know the crèche so well when drop off is so quick”*

*“Now because of Covid-19, there is very little of that face-to-face one-on-one time so that I can get a better understanding of what happened and think of how to handle it”*

## (vi) Other comments in relation to the role of the state/ private sector

- Some parents expressed concern regarding the role of the private sector:

*“We are treating kids as products”*

*“Crèches that are in it for the money are not even following HSE guidelines. Crèches should be taken over by the state.”*

***“I'd like to send my child to a public childcare facility, I don't want to send him to a private operator and I don't want to be giving €1000 a month to a private operator”***

*“The system is fully capitalist, it's a way to make money rather than being about citizens - and when I saw the price here compared to France e.g. in France if you earn €2000 a month you pay €200 a month for childcare”*

- There were several conversations in different sessions calling for greater state involvement:

*“We're getting pushed into the black market”*

*“We need to work towards a more standardised model of care nationally”*

*“We need to increase budget for Early Years, it needs to be more subsidised by the government. This will allow to bring consistency in the quality of service and also increase staff retention (which is key for kids settling and creating a bond) with more investment”*

*“Early years should be treated similarly to primary school, managed centrally to provide equal standards of care”*

***“There should be more community crèche settings - community childcare, in my experience, is amazing, very child focused and the staff cannot be praised enough”***

*“Could we use existing school facilities to plan better childcare from one years?”*

## Glossary

**AIM** Access and Inclusion Model

**ASD** Autistic Spectrum Disorder

**CCC** County Childcare Committee

**CCSP** Community Childcare Subvention Programme

**CHICK code or number** Childcare Identifier Code Key

**DCEDIY** Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (formerly the Department of Children and Youth Affairs or [DCYA])

**DCYA** Department of Children and Youth Affairs (now renamed the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth or [DCEDIY])

**ECCE** Early Childhood Care and Education

**Hive** The dedicated Early Years programme portal for service providers

**HSE** Health Service Executive

**IPSOS MRBI** Market Research Company

**NCS** National Childcare Scheme

**OT** Occupational Therapist

**PRSI** Pay Related Social Insurance

**SAC** School Age Childcare

**SLT** Speech and Language Therapist

**SNA** Special Needs Assistant

**Tusla** Child And Family Agency

