



## Summary

- **Extend the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) scheme to two year olds, increase hours from 15-33, extend 48 weeks a year.**
- **Expand the Affordable Childcare Scheme and the Universal Subsidy towards Childcare to all make sure parents pay max 3% of their incomes in line with the Scandinavian Model.**
- **Integrate care, education and after-school services by linking early care and education services, primary schools and after school services.**
- **Conduct a quality audit across all early years' services to provide baseline data for the implementation of National Early Years Strategy.**
- **Publish a fully resourced rights-based National Early Years Strategy**
- **In the medium term move to A National Child Care Service paid for through direct taxation.**
- **Move towards an investment of 0.8% of net GDP and eventually to 1% of GDP.**
  - **Better income supports, particularly for single parents and migrant women.**
- **Introduce a National Regulatory Body for Child Minders and After School Services**
- **Review qualifications of childcare workers. Expand the Learner Fund to provide support to allow childcare workers to professionalize to progress to FETAC levels 7 and 8.**
- **Unionise the industry and increase pay to reflect skills and responsibility.**
- **Encourage parents to participate in the organization and structure of crèches, through places on management bodies.**
- **Support stay at home parents with a review of the Growing Child Programme.**
- **Improve access for children with special needs to childcare services.**
- **Improving work-life balance for parents so that parents can work and bring up their children. This will mean more flexible working arrangements for parents.**
- **Twelve months paid leave to be split between parents once a child is born.**

## Introduction

People Before Profit recognises the importance of children's early care, education and development. We are also fully committed to an equality agenda that provides women with the option to return to work after having children. These values underpin our policy on Early Childhood Care and Education, which advocates children having access to early care,



education and after-school services as a fundamental human right. All children have the right to education from birth under Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is linked to the maximum development of their capacities under Article 6 (2) of the same Convention. It is crucial that any policy addressing the needs of children should place the rights of children and their families at the forefront, rather than pursuing narrow economic considerations. At the very least, this means providing parents with proper subsidies to private facilities, but People Before Profit ultimately wants to move to a publicly funded **National Childcare System.**

At present, early childhood education and care services are generally delivered outside the formal education system, by a wide range of private, community and voluntary interests that include crèches, nurseries, preschools, playgroups and day-care services. Three quarters of these services are run for profit in the private sector with 27% operating as community-based services. Government investment in these services comes largely from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and although it has increased in recent years it remains radically insufficient. Ireland has a young and changing population. A European Commission Report in 2014 found that 9.6% of Ireland's population is under 6 years compared with a European average of 6.3%. Ireland is becoming increasingly culturally and religiously diverse, moreover, with about 12% of the population having a non-Irish background. Almost 40% of four-year-olds and nearly all five-year-olds are enrolled in infant classes in primary schools (sometimes called national schools). But pre-school care is too sporadic and too expensive. According to the OECD 'Education at a Glance 2017' report, Irish expenditure on early year's education amounts to just 1/8<sup>th</sup> of the OECD average. This has been backed up by the EU Social Justice Index 2017 which found that Ireland ranks lowest amongst 28 EU countries for investment in pre-primary education. This has the effect of forcing the costs of childcare onto workers and parents. Average wages in the sector are just €11.12 an hour and yet the cost of childcare for an individual child is anywhere from €800-€1400 a month depending on location.



This not only makes Irish childcare the second most expensive in Europe, it also means that many providers are cutting corners in a bid to make profits. The 2019 scandal in Hyde and Seek shows the incompatibility of childcare and the profit motive. If we want happy, healthy and developmentally successful children we need proper state led investment in pre-school children immediately. The Early Childhood Ireland's Childcare Barometer shows that 65% of the Irish public think that childcare, like primary education should be free. To achieve this, People Before Profit recommend the following.

### Increase Funding, Provision and Affordability of Services

- **Extend the Early Childhood Care Scheme, the Universal Subsidy and the Affordable Childcare Scheme to make Childcare Genuinely Affordable.** Childcare in Ireland begins too late, is too short and far too expensive. Most international evidence points to the fact that a child's learning and development is fastest before the age of 3 years as it is from here that subsequent learning is shaped. Currently, children in Ireland only get 3 hours a day, 15 hours a week. This does not even cover most part-time employment and ceases when schools are not operating. It also distorts the childcare system as private operators gear their services around achieving these subsidies instead of making the service work for all children. People Before Profit would expand the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme to be available from 2 until children start primary school, increase the paid hours to 33 hours per week and increase it to cover 48 weeks of the year.
- **Conduct a quality audit across all early years' services to provide baseline data for the implementation of National Early Years Strategy.** In order to move towards well informed best practice, People Before Profit would conduct a quality review and publish a fully resourced rights-based National Early Years Strategy.
- **Integrate care, education and after-school services by linking early care and education services, primary schools and after**



**school services.** There needs to be investment to integrate childcare and afterschool services. The provision of these services should not only promote children's development but also fit in with parents working hours.

### Improve Funding and Reduce Costs

- **Move to a National Childcare Service Free at the point of use.** People Before Profit used our Alternative Budget in 2019 to propose a National Childcare Service that would hire 25,000 childcare professionals and link them into current services. Once a quality audit is carried out, current services that are deemed best practice will be integrated into the new National Service. The new model should include aspects of the Scandinavian Model as this has been proven to achieve high educational attainment, low levels of child poverty, and high labour market access, including that of lone parents. Cap fees to 3% of income, and move to a free public system.
- **Increase investment - move to 1% of GDP.** The Republic of Ireland currently spends around 0.1% of GDP on childcare and development. People Before Profit would move immediately towards 0.8% and overtime get to 1% of GDP. This is necessary for a National Childcare System and is less than the amount spent in many Scandinavian countries.
- **Better income supports.** Many families in Ireland receive no financial assistance besides a universal child care payment (CCSU) of €20 euro per week. Under the [Community Childcare Subvention Scheme \(CCS\)](#), low income parents and those in training or education can avail of childcare at reduced rates. However, this subvention is only available to children attending participating community services. This inevitably means that some families miss out. They also work from a snapshot four-week period from midSeptember meaning that if circumstances change they are not taken into account until the following year. People Before Profit would help parents in two ways - through better provision of



services generally and through better targeted interventions for those families most in need.

- **Targeted resources for single parent families.** Single parent families are the most deprived in the country. Around 55% of children in one parent families suffer from deprivation, whilst the exorbitant cost of childcare means many parents cannot choose to work. People Before Profit would establish a fund to be accessed by parents of single parent families who want to work.
- **Support migrant women.** Migrant women may not have the informal networks that are often essential in providing childcare. People Before Profit is committed to making sure that the children of migrants have culturally appropriate and well-resourced childcare and development options.

### Better Regulation, Pay and Conditions.

- **Establish a National Regulatory Body.** Child-minding in Ireland is largely unregulated, and as recent scandals have revealed the Child and Family agency, Tusla is not fit for purpose. There is also no mechanism in place to ensure the provision of quality services. To improve standards in the industry, People Before Profit would establish a National Regulatory Body for Child Minders and After School Services.
- **Improve, qualifications, skills and training for Childcare professionals.** Qualifications of childcare workers in Ireland need to be increased from level 5 through state support to reflect the importance and responsibility of their developmental role with children.
- **Unionise – Improve Pay and Conditions.** Childcare professionals, predominantly women, are underpaid and undervalued. They are also poorly unionised. People Before Profit would look to unionise the industry and move pay towards the average industrial wage. This would involve working with the **Association of Childhood Professionals** who are currently looking to unionise the profession.



## Parental Participation, Stay and Home Parents and Parental Leave.

- **Encourage parents to participate in the organization and structure of crèches.** Parents are vital stakeholders who must be both consulted and included in the care and development of their children.
- **Support stay at home parents with proper access to advice and Public Healthcare Nurses.** People Before Profit would do an audit of the **Growing Child Programme**, provided through **Lifestart**. This child development programme delivered through homevisitation to parents of children from birth up to pre-school or school entry is currently elective. We would make sure it is fit for purpose.
- **Improve access for children with special needs to childcare services.** As in so many other areas children with special needs are being left behind in Irish society. In line with Special Needs Assistants in Schools there should be a system of Special Needs Assistants set up in the National Childcare System. This should involve further investment in providing LINC training. The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) should also be assessed for efficacy and extended if appropriate.
- **Twelve Months Parental Leave.** Ireland currently only offers mothers six months paid maternity leave. People Before Profit would extend this to 12 months to be used by either of the parents. Legislate to guarantee full salary during this period.