



## RE: The Programme for Government and Provision for Quality, Affordable and Accessible Childcare

24 May 2020

A chara,

We are writing in relation to the next Programme for Government and the opportunity to develop an Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) system that is high quality, affordable and accessible. While the last government built the foundations for reform by launching a new National Early Years' Strategy, the next Government is now well-placed to reform the system as a whole. A unique opportunity now exists to address the multiple challenges in the ECEC system relating to affordability, low-pay, high staff turnover and sustainability. A substantial increase in government subsidy, subvention and investment is required to end the multiple challenges mentioned above.

We envisage the current Wage Subsidy Scheme of financial support, together with the existing ECCE scheme (Free Preschool Years), becoming the new starting point in establishing a sustainable system of state funding of ECEC in Ireland. This can transform the Irish ECEC system into a properly nationally funded system for children and families as part of the new social contract, delivered by the existing bedrock of professional service providers. This new higher level of state funding would deliver better sustainability and security for operators, professional wages for staff and affordability for parents. Ultimately it will result in enhanced quality of early years experiences and outcomes for our youngest children.

In partnership with the appropriate representative bodies and early years' service providers, this quality, sustainable ECEC system would be built through collaboration and consultation. All the relevant stakeholders would contribute to its vision and development, including representatives of operators, staff, parents, employers and civic society groups.

We request a meeting to discuss with you in further detail our vision and strategy for a new approach to the funding and governance of ECEC and look forward to working with you in this exciting endeavour in the times ahead. Looking forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Teresa Heeney  
CEO, Early Childhood Ireland

Orla O'Connor  
CEO, National Women's Council of Ireland

Joe Cunningham  
General Secretary, SIPTU

Tanya Ward  
CEO, Children's Rights Alliance