

## **Programme for Government 2016: Commitments to Children and Young People**

**12 May 2016**

### **Introduction**

On 5 May 2016, the 32nd Dáil Éireann approved the appointment of a new Government. The Partnership Government comprises Fine Gael and a number of independents. Fianna Fáil has agreed to facilitate the operation of this minority Government under terms set out in 'A Confidence and Supply Arrangement for a Fine Gael-Led Government'.<sup>1</sup> The new Government published 'A Programme for a Partnership Government' on 11 May.<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, the new Programme for Government has retained the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs as a Senior Cabinet Minister will a full Department. This is of significant importance as there are still many challenges ahead with a lot of interdepartmental and cross government work to be done. Had the senior ministry and full department not been retained it would have represented a huge setback for children and young people in Ireland.

### **Commitments to Children and Young People**

Below are extracts from the Programme for Government of key commitments relating to children and young people. For the purpose of this summary the Programme for Government commitments have been re-ordered under thematic categories.

The Programme for Government outlines the Government commitment to:

#### **Early Childhood Care and Education and Afterschool Care**

- 'Review and assess the quality of the first pre-school year and the application of the Aistear curriculum and also include a review to ensure children can avail of a full two years.' (p. 76)
- 'Conduct and publish an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare in private and community settings, consistent with the principle of ongoing professionalisation of the sector. We will continue to support quality and professionalisation initiatives and reforms such as Better Start, Siolta and the Learner Fund' (p. 76)
- 'Monitor the implementation of new quality regulations and standards and work towards further paediatric first aid training for staff' (p. 76)
- 'Review and reform the inspection regime, and withdraw funding from providers that do not meet quality standards' (p. 76)
- 'support the introduction of a robust model for subsidised high quality childcare for children aged 9-36 months...' (p. 77)
- 'continue to support subsidised childcare places for low income families' and 'seek to streamline the existing schemes...' (p. 78)
- 'investing in the professionalisation of the workforce...' (p. 78) and 'support the development of a phased programme of reforms for childminders making it easier to support both families and childminders.' (p. 78).

1 A copy of this document can be found on the website of the Fianna Fáil Party, see <https://www.fiannafail.ie/confidence-and-supply-arrangement/>

2 A copy of the full Programme for Government document can be accessed at [http://www.merriestreet.ie/Merriestreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme\\_for\\_Partnership\\_Government.pdf](http://www.merriestreet.ie/Merriestreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme_for_Partnership_Government.pdf)

- 'link additional capitation to the provision of buildings for afterschool care, where demand exists. Community groups and private providers will be invited to tender to use school facilities (outside school hours). (p. 78).
- 'introduce a new system to support and expand quality afterschool care for school-aged children.' (p. 78)

### Family Life and Parenting

- 'increase paid parental leave in the first year of birth' (p. 77)
- 'support parents who choose to stay at home and care for their children (through an increase in the Home Carers Credit). (p. 78).
- 'look to publish a National Parenting Support Plan'... (p. 77)
- 'propose legislation in [... t]he regulation of surrogacy and assisted human reproduction services' (p. 57)

### Child Protection and Youth Justice

- 'provide ongoing support to Tusla in delivering targeted intervention services.' (p. 810)
- 'ensure robust protections are in place to fully protect children while online.' (p. 80)
- 'implement Child Safeguarding Statements as part of Children First legislation.' (p. 80)
- Enforce '[r]obust and efficient vetting procedures for all positions where there is substantial access to children and vulnerable adults...' (p. 80)
- 'implement in full the Istanbul Convention on tackling Domestic Violence and the commitments contained in the recently published Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence' (p. 101)
- 'proposed updated legislation to effectively deal with sexual offences including stronger sanctions aimed at protecting children from sexual exploitation, child abuse material and online grooming.' (p. 101)
- 'publish legislation to implement in full the EU Victims of Crime Directive...' (p. 100) and 'develop victim support services, including the Garda Victims Support Offices which provide a single point of contact in accessing support and information. (p. 101).
- 'extend Garda Youth Diversion Programmes for young people promoting restorative justice....' (p. 80)
- 'support the increased use of therapeutic intervention services for children in detention within Oberstown, including psychology, speech and language therapy and where appropriate referral to addiction services to children.' (p. 81)

### Early Intervention and Prevention

- 'establish a dedicated Prevention and Early Intervention Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform/Finance in the first 100 days. It will focus on early intervention policies that can improve the life outcomes of children...'. 'The unit will also produce an annual report outlining the percentage of departmental budget that is devoted to early intervention and long term planning on social issues, and recommend changes. It will oversee and monitor the impact of a number of these new programmes, and report regularly to the relevant Oireachtas Committee.' (p. 75)
- 'fund and expand existing scheme such as the Area-Based Childhood Programme' and 'ensure the sharing and implementation of learning from such programmes to other initiatives as they expand their reach.' (p. 132)

### Therapeutic Supports

- 'developing a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy' (p. 87 & 73 & 92); and bring the number HSE Speech and Language Therapists up to 1,102 (a 25% increase) (p. 86)
- 'Providing additional NEPS [National Educational Psychologists Service] psychologists to support new intervention strategies for staff and pupils, and offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents (p. 87, 76 & 93); to bring the total of NEPs to 238 (a 25% increase) (p. 86)

### Poverty

- ‘pursue an integrated plan across Government Departments to reduce poverty, disadvantage and inequality, by enabling individuals in jobless households back into the workforce, by breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and by ensuring that our educational programmes at every level offer excellence in outcomes for all.’ (p. 131)
- ‘tackle child poverty by increasing community based early intervention programmes. (p. 77)
- ‘consolidate all means testing under a single national body so that people/parents will only apply once for services or entitlements across all government agencies.’ (p. 77).
- ‘Introduce a new Working Family Payment that promotes work over welfare by supplementing, on a graduated basis, the income of a household, while at the same time incentivising more hours and full-time work. (p 104). ‘Every parent working at least 15 hours per week will be guaranteed that every extra hour they work will result in more take-home pay. We will also make available further training and skills development opportunities for those in low income jobs. By increasing income disregards for lone parents through the Working Family Payment scheme we can progressively support low and middle income lone parents in work.’ (p. 39)
- ‘Publish an Action Plan for Jobless Households, containing targets aimed at supporting those in jobless households into employment and reducing child poverty’ (p. 104) and ‘carry out an immediate review of the financial supports available to the unemployed or those returning to the education system to ensure the greatest possible uptake of continuing education by eliminating current barriers.’ (p. 135)
- ‘Increase the minimum wage to €10.50/hour by 2021’ (p. 135) and ‘ensure that the interests of low-paid workers and people in precarious work situations are adequately protected (p. 104)
- ‘reform the monitoring of child benefit payments by amalgamating the two existing school attendance monitoring systems, currently run by the Department of Education and Tusla, to address poor attendance within some families.’ (p. 81)

### Social Inclusion and Inequality

- ‘fund schemes which support disadvantaged communities’, for example, RAPID (p. 132)
- ‘developing a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, to tackle inequality and poverty. Our Integrated Framework will outline measures to help eliminate any persisting discrimination on grounds of gender, age, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion or membership of the Traveller Community. It will draw on existing as well as new strategies, in particular the (i) New National Women’s Strategy, (ii) New National Disability Inclusion Strategy, (iii) Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, (iv) National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, and (v) New Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.’ (p. 39)
- ‘develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. We will ensure the institutional arrangements are in place to support equality and gender proofing in the independent fiscal and budget office and within key government departments and to draw on the expertise of the IHREC to support the proofing process. For Budget 2017 the budget and finance committee will be tasked with looking at gender and equality proofing budget submissions and proposals with independent expertise (including the IHREC) to assist where necessary.’ (p. 104)

### Education

- ‘investing an extra €500m in education by 2021.’ (p. 88)
- ‘introducing a second preschool year.... raising the school age to 5 years’ (p. 87)
- ‘Reduce the pupil-teacher ratio for junior and senior infants...’ (p. 87)
- ‘increase mandatory school to age 17’ (p. 87)
- ‘publish a new School Completion Strategy’ (p. 87)
- ‘publish a new updated Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, within 12 months, with particular focus on DEIS schools. (p. 88) ‘to narrow the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, and examine how students outside of DEIS can be better supported. (p. 106)

- 'introduce a stronger complaints procedure and charter for parents, and commence the Fitness to Teach provisions of the Teaching Council Act (10 years after its enactment).' (p. 89)
- 'The role and power of an Ombudsman for Education, to whom a parent could complain and appeal on foot of a decision by a board of management, will be examined by the relevant Oireachtas Committee to ensure its consistency with the need to ensure better local decision making and accountability to parents.' (p. 89)
- 'new subjects should be introduced such as the arts, entrepreneurial education, and mental health awareness.'... 'including a coding course for the Junior Cycle and introducing ICT/Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject. (p. 91)
- 'support the introduction of a new Leaving Certificate P.E. syllabus, as a full optional subject.' (p. 79 and 91)
- 'ensure no small school closes against the wishes of parents' (p. 89);
- 'review the concessionary charges and rules element of the School Transport Scheme prior to Budget 2017'; and 'review the criteria and guidelines for the School Transport Appeals Board.' (p. 89)
- 'review the options for standardised testing so that clear information is provided to teachers and parents. (p. 89)
- 'set out capitation rates to schools on a rolling 3-year basis'; 'establish a new Schools Excellence Fund... Applications that seek to tackle educational disadvantage will be prioritised.'; 'establish a pool of experts [...] to assist school initiatives, promote innovation and enterprise engagement especially at school level'; 'introduce new technology bringing remote learning into classrooms'; 'invest in additional continuous professional development for teachers' (p. 90) and 'introduce a new funding mechanism for low cost safety measures for primary schools such as car parks and bus lay-bys. (p. 92)
- 'to delivering a school capital investment programme for extensions/refurbishments, additional school places, and eliminating the use of prefabs.' (pg92)

### Diversity in Education

- 'strengthen parental choice and diversity in our school system' (p. 88)
- 'work with all stakeholders to facilitate [phased transfer of Catholic schools to new patrons] whilst also considering new approaches such as the potential of different patrons on a single site. (p. 88)
- 'increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030. (p. 89)
- 'publish new School Admissions and Excellence legislation' and 'enact this legislation for the start of school year 2017-18'. (p. 89)

### Youth Unemployment

- 'must ensure that every young person leaving school can move seamlessly to a job, training or education, no-one will graduate onto welfare' (p. 80); 'we will double the number of apprenticeships to provide a total of 31,000 places by 2020' (p. 47) and 'significantly increase the number of traineeship places' (p. 93)
- 'The provision of relevant educational programmes, specifically aimed at early leavers and second chance learners should be made available throughout the year, on a modular basis. We will support an increase in the number of flexible courses available; giving people the opportunity to attend courses part time, during evenings, in the summer and at weekends.' (p. 88 & 93)
- 'introduce a pilot employment support scheme in 2016, providing 30-40 participants with skills and training identifiable with the Defence Forces'. (p. 88)

### Youth Services, Sport and Community

- 'implement Ireland's first ever National Youth Strategy and fund schemes such as the Youth Employability Initiative which provides grants to voluntary youth services that target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability.' (p. 133)

- 'following consultation, draw up and implement a National Sports Policy'. (p. 79)
- 'fund an expansion of Youth Services that support, in particular, Early School Leavers into employment.' (p. 79)
- 'fund a pilot scheme where guidance and mentoring relationships can be built at community and regional level with a focus on better outcomes and more active citizenship.' (p. 80)
- 'will plan earlier for adolescents and young adults with care needs (such as special education, disability, juvenile justice)...'. (p. 133 & 80)

### Right to Housing and Homelessness

- Refer 'to the new Oireachtas Committee on Housing for consideration' the eighth report of the Constitutional Convention on economic, social and cultural rights that 'recommended that the State progressively realise economic, social and cultural rights subject to maximum available resources, that this duty be recognisable by the courts, and that specific additional rights on housing be inserted into the Constitution' (p. 20).
- 'end the use of unsuitable long-term emergency accommodation, such as hotels and B&Bs, for homeless families by, in part, delivering 500 rapid-delivery housing units' (p. 26).
- 'The new Action Plan for Housing will contain a specific section on 'preventing homelessness' that will consult on and target new measures such as: Family mediation services... Preventing youth homelessness, Services to victims of domestic abuse... Structured programmes for those leaving hospital, prison or state care after a long period of time... (p. 26)

### Health

- 'extending in phases, and subject to negotiation with GPs'... 'the introduction of free GP care to under 18s' (p. 55)
- 'introduce a dental health package for the under 6s' (p. 55)
- 'extend the entitlement to a medical card for all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance in Budget 2017' – benefiting 10,000 children (p. 56)
- 'introducing a health levy on sugar-sweetened drinks' (p. 56)
- 'implementing a national physical activity plan, a national obesity plan and a sexual health strategy' (p. 56)
- 'the extension of the childhood vaccination programme to include meningitis B and rotavirus vaccines' (p. 56)

### Mental Health

- 'conducting an evidence-based expert review of the current status of implementation in Ireland and of international best practice in the area of mental health' which will advise on 'building further capacity in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)' (p. 66). 'The review will inform the next steps in the development of our mental health policy within the frame of human rights generally...' (p. 66).
- 'A National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health will be established to consider how best to introduce and teach resilience, coping mechanisms, greater awareness to children and young people, and how to access support services voluntarily at a young age' (p. 67).
- Extend accessible and informal mental health services, 'such as Jigsaw' (p. 67).

### Alcohol and Drug Misuse

- 'enact the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill' (p. 79)
- 'strengthen regulation of alcohol advertising to children'. (p. 79)
- 'Completing work and commencing implementation of a new National Drugs Strategy within 12 months' (p. 56)
- 'support the expansion of Local Drug Taskforce project ... (p. 80)

### Disabilities

- Commit to put legislation 'before the Oireachtas before the end of 2016' to 'address a range of legislative barriers to ratification' of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (p. 73).

- ‘examine transport service provision for young people with disabilities to ensure that the service is fit for purpose, consistent with their needs’ (p. 72).
- ‘ensuring that all 18 year old school leavers with intellectual and physical disabilities have continued education or training opportunities’ (p. 72)
- ‘ensure the further development of’ the ‘Early Childhood Care and Education programme for young children with disabilities’ (p. 73)
- ‘examine the adequacy of current special education access and funding provision, in particular for children with Down syndrome and other conditions. We will request the National Council for Special Education to advice on how best to address this issue. We will also consult with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.’ (p. 73, 92 & 106).
- ‘introduce a new in-school speech and language services at primary level.’ and ‘commence an in-depth review of the variation in waiting lists across the country’. (p. 73)
- ‘support an increase in Carer’s Allowance and Carer’s Benefit as well as improved access to counselling supports for carers’. (p. 74)

### Travellers

- ‘publish a revised National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, aimed at improving the lives of members of the Traveller and Roma communities by the end of 2016’ (p. 107)
- ‘establish a special working group to audit the current delivery and implementation of local authorities’ Traveller Accommodation plans and consult with stakeholders on key areas of concern. The group should report a plan for the delivery of safe, culturally appropriate accommodation.’ (p. 107)

### Migrants and Asylum-Seekers

- ‘to supporting a humanitarian response to the current refugee crisis and providing a safe haven to those who come to Ireland under EU programmes.’ (p. 102/3)
- ‘reforming the Direct Provision system, with particular focus on families and children’ (p. 106).
- ‘introduce a comprehensive Immigration and Residency Reform Bill’ (p. 103).

### Minorities Groups

- ‘publish an updated National Women’s Strategy by end 2016.’ (105)
- ‘develop an LGBT Youth Strategy that will encompass education, youth services, mental health and other issues. As part of this strategy, we will review implementation of the National Action Plan on Bullying in our schools.’ (p. 106)

### Court Reform

- ‘review the operation of Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) to ensure that a child’s view is always effectively represented in court proceedings.’ (p. 80).
- ‘commission an annual study on court efficiency and sitting times, benchmarked against international standards, to provide accurate measurements for improving access to justice.’ And ‘propose legislation to reduce excessive delays to trials and court proceedings including pre-trial hearings.’ (p. 101).

### Community and Voluntary Sector

- ‘affirm the contribution of the community and voluntary sector to building a more just and prosperous society, and its strong focus on urban and rural regeneration.’ And ‘will increase funding levels to support the sector, and develop a multi-annual funding model that focuses on quality, effectiveness and efficiency. We will produce a coherent policy framework and develop a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector and encourage a cooperative approach between public bodies and the community and voluntary sector.’ (p. 131)
- ‘ensure that all commissioning for human, social and community services takes place in a societal value framework (targeting at maximising the value for society).’ (p. 131)

- ‘through Social Innovation Fund Ireland, we will seek to raise a minimum of €50million to provide growth capital to Ireland’s best social innovations and to invest in ongoing innovation that improves social outcomes and contributes to world-class social infrastructure.’ (p. 106 and 132)