

# Zappone to explore ways to improve pay in childcare sector <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** O'Regan, Michael

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New approaches must be explored to improve the pay and conditions of those working in the childcare sector, Minister for Children Katherine Zappone has said.

She told the Dáil that while the Government was not the employer, it would be unacceptable if it were oblivious to the needs of people who provided such a vital service to the children, parents and families.

Ms Zappone said one approach would be a sectoral employment order, through either the Workplace Relations Commission or the Labour Court, allowing employers and employees to agree a way forward.

"Let me assure the House my department would make a submission to such a process, and make its expertise available to help achieve an outcome agreeable to all," she added.

Ms Zappone said overall State spending on childcare this year was € 466 million, which represented a 79 per cent increase on the 2015 total.

The Minister was replying to a Sinn Féin Private Member's motion calling for increased State funding to average OECD levels to ensure sustainable high-quality childcare provision, professional pay scales and paid non-contact time.

Sinn Féin's childcare spokeswoman Kathleen Funchion said there was an intrinsic link between the working conditions of those responsible for children and the quality of care and outcomes.

"It is common sense that if staff members are overworked, underpaid and highly stressed, as committed as they may be, the outcomes for the children they care for will not be as positive as for those being cared for by people who feel valued and have relative job security," she added.

## Social welfare

Ms Funchion said about 3,500 early years educators would this summer sign on to social welfare, at an estimated cost of €7.5 million to the exchequer.

This did not include the thousands of providers who were unable to sign on because they were classified as self-employed.

Fianna Fáil TD Anne Rabbitte said she feared for the future of the community crèches sector, as she did for all childcare providers at the moment.

"It is haemorrhaging the retention and development of childcare professionals," she added.

Social Democrats TD Róisín Shortall said that because of chronic underfunding the service was highly inconsistent and the sector was verging on a staffing crisis.

"Amongst the estimated 22,000 workers in this sector, many are employed for just 15 hours a week, or only on contract for 39 weeks a year, forcing thousands of trained workers to sign on to social welfare each summer," Ms Shortall said.

-reprinted from The Irish Times

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