

Delivering social change through childcare ^[1]

A ten year strategy for affordable and integrated childcare 2015-2025

Author: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

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AVAILABILITY

News release ^[2]

Draft childcare strategy ^[3]

Consultation

The Programme for Government 2011-15 commits the Executive to publish and implement a Childcare Strategy with key actions to provide integrated and affordable childcare.

Junior Ministers McIlveen and McCann have launched the Executive's draft Childcare Strategy for public consultation. Consultation will run for 16 weeks until 13 November 2015, and will include a series of regional consultation events.

An overview of the executive's childcare strategy

Aims

3.1 The Childcare Strategy has two main aims:

- **Developmental:** To give all our children the best start in life, preparing them for lifelong wellbeing and achievement, thereby creating the basis for a better, more prosperous future.
- **Employment:** To enable parents to join the workforce thereby enhancing prosperity, and to improve gender equality by enabling mothers to join the workforce, return to work, remain in work, work the hours they want and progress in their careers.

Objectives

3.2 To achieve these aims, the Childcare Strategy will, over the coming decade, work towards the following seven key objectives:

- Childcare services that are available to all children, regardless of where they live, their needs or circumstances with a registered and appropriate childcare place for every child that requires one;
- Childcare services that are affordable—no longer taking a disproportionate share of average household incomes;
- Childcare settings that aim to become sustainable, able, eventually, to cover their costs from the fees they charge;
- Childcare settings that foster lifelong respect for diversity, thereby laying the foundations for a more tolerant and inclusive future;
- Childcare services that are of high quality, meeting or bettering the current minimum standards and with all staff and managers trained to the appropriate level;
- Detailed and up to date information on the childcare sector that is readily available to parents, allowing them to make informed choices regarding the childcare services they use; and
- Childcare services that are integrated with, and complementary to, educational and youth services.

Actions

3.3 Delivering the Childcare Strategy and achieving its aims and objectives will require coordinated action across a range of government departments and services.

3.4 Back in September 2013, we launched the first phase of the Strategy, including a set of 15 Key First Actions to address the most immediate childcare needs and priorities identified during consultation and research. These initial steps focused on: increasing the types of childcare provision most in need; building the skills base of the childcare workforce; providing parents with more detailed and user-friendly information; and establishing a partnership approach between government departments and the childcare sector.

3.5 In this, the full, ten year Childcare Strategy, we will now examine how we might build on those preliminary actions, making good any gaps via a two stage process. Firstly we are replacing our initial 15 actions with the 22 areas of development set out in this document. We

will, for example, look at the options for extending the support we currently provide to school age childcare to cover, going forward, the full range of childcare services and childcare providers. We will consider how to make childcare services more responsive to the needs of all parents, regardless of where they live, including the need for more flexible care, available outside of conventional working hours. Ways of making the financial assistance available with the costs of childcare more widely known and used will also be examined.

3.6 Building on this and working with the childcare sector and with childcare stakeholders, we will roll out the selected and affordable interventions to scale and thereafter continue to monitor and evaluate the performance of our Childcare Strategy and report on our findings.

By 2025...

3.7 We intend, through ten years of coordinated action to develop and deliver childcare services, thereby ensuring that this Strategy achieves its aims—that children receive the best start in life, that parents are not prevented from joining the workforce, that a fundamental and positive change in our society is achieved.

Related link: Northern Ireland Executive outlines childcare strategy [4]

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