

Pay rates in the Irish early childhood care and education sector ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF available for download ^[2]

Background

The Early Childhood Education sector in Ireland includes about 25,000 staff. From September 2016 a regulation will be in place for the first time requiring all staff working in centre-based services (i.e not childminders) to have a minimum qualification. This, together with qualification requirements necessary as part of the funding provided to services operating the Government's Free Pre School Year, or ECCE scheme, and the introduction of a Fund for Learners has seen rapid changes for the sector. Despite these welcome changes, uncertainties remain regarding an infrastructure to support continued professionalisation. There is clearly a need for further professionalisation of the sector as well as the development of infrastructure to support this professionalisation. Specific to this is the absence of a consistent and coherent basis for remuneration of staff.

Higher wages and better working conditions affect people's job satisfaction, work motivation and, indirectly, the quality of their teaching, caring and interactions with children (Huntsman, 2008; Moon and Burbank, 2004). Many countries experience difficulties with retaining the early childhood care and education (ECCE) workforce, with particularly high staff turn-over rates in the child care sector. The factors that lead people to leave the ECCE sector are often the same factors that discourage people from pursuing a career in the ECCE sector: low wages; low social status; heavy workload; and lack of career progression paths.

Research has indicated that where wages are low (refers to the share of workers earning less than two-thirds of median earnings), it "impacts quality primarily by preventing qualified and committed individuals from considering working in child care or early education in the first place" (Manlove and Guzella, 1997). Low wages are related to high staff turnover rates (Moon and Burbank, 2004), which influence children's language and socio-emotional development as well as the relationships they form with practitioners (Whitebook 2002; Torquati 2007). Low wages are also correlated with the perception that working in the ECCE sector is not a high status profession (Ackerman, 2006). Although pay in ECCE-related professions in most OECD countries is not very high, where the incidence of high pay refers to the share of workers earning more than one-and-a-half time median earnings (OECD, 2006), this is not the case in all OECD countries. In Scandinavian countries, for instance, where a bachelor's degree is needed to work as an ECCE teacher, staff receive better pay, and their job has a higher status, than in countries with lower pay. Countries with split systems often have lower educational requirements and lower wages for practitioners working with very young children (up to three years of age) and higher educational requirements and better pay (and better status) for those working with children ages three or four to primary school age.

In light of the evidence outlined above, Early Childhood Ireland is conducting an investigation of remuneration within the Irish ECCE Sector. This investigation is part of a larger body of work which includes the recognition of non-contact time, continuous professional development and the creation of an optional full-year model for providers. Furthermore, this work is being used to ensure that all parties and candidates in the upcoming General Election 2016 are better informed of the challenges that face early childhood education and care. We have clearly identified low pay in the sector as a major barrier to ensuring that our children benefit from quality early education and care.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: wages ^[4]

childcare workforce ^[5]

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Links

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<https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/work/research-2/current-projects/pay-rates-in-the-irish-early-childhood-care-and-education-sector/> ^[3]

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