

# Rising to the Challenge

Budget 2020 Submission



## Early Years & School Age Childcare Agency

In Budget 2020, Early Childhood Ireland is calling on the government to establish a single Early Years and School Age Childcare Agency.

We believe that this will realise the ambition in *First 5*, the national early years strategy, to ensure that babies and children have positive early experiences and a great start in life.

This new agency will be responsible for coordinating and integrating quality assurance, planning and administrative work across the early years sector. This will improve the current situation whereby work is fragmented and delivered by a variety of different agencies and departments.

# Current Early Years System



An Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of Children and Youth Affairs



Department of Rural and Community Development

An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail



## EARLY YEARS EDUCATION POLICY UNIT

Under the remit of DES but co-located in DCYA

## COUNTY CHILDCARE COMMITTEES

Responsible for fee monitoring, support and capacity building at a local level

## EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTIONS (EYEIS)

Early Years Education Inspections (EYEIs) are carried out in early years services participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Educational inspections are not carried out on non-ECCE programmes.

## TUSLA EARLY YEARS INSPECTORATE

Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is empowered by legislation to directly enforce health and safety standards and the relevant regulations in settings. Currently, Tusla does not inspect SAC facilities but work on this is ongoing.

## POBAL COMPLIANCE VISITS

Pobal, while officially under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development, is contracted on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), to monitor & ensure funding compliance in early years settings that receive state funding.

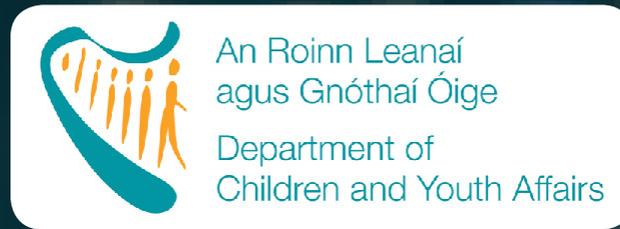
## The Problem

Our current early years and school aged childcare system is fragmented. Problems can slip through the cracks as relevant authorities are not fully engaged with each other. There is currently no central body responsible for quality, information, programme delivery, financial management oversight or strategic planning.

This means that a complete picture of how a setting operates from a regulatory, educational and financial perspective cannot easily be seen. Settings face three separate and uncoordinated inspections from three agencies with three distinct remits under the aegis of three different Government Departments. This results in inefficiencies and a potential duplication of resources.

Early Childhood Ireland believes that this is no longer acceptable. Our Budget 2020 ask seeks to focus on moving from the fragmented and confusing system of oversight above, to the aligned and coordinated agency opposite.

# Proposed Early Years System



## Early Years & School Age Childcare Agency

Single Inspection

Quality Assurance

Financial Compliance

Rapid Intervention Team

Information Portal for Parents and Providers

## The Solution

The Early Years and School Age Childcare Agency will draw together all of the disparate strands currently responsible for oversight and planning in the early years and school age sector under one roof. This new agency would align and integrate all functions relating to quality, planning, administration and funding. The agency would act as a “one-stop shop” for parents and providers, whether centre based or home based. There would be a **single ‘whole-setting’ inspection** to examine all aspects of provision alongside financial compliance. A new single inspection framework would be developed to replace those of Tusla and the Early Years Inspectorate. The work currently being done by Better Start and the County Childcare Committees would be more effectively integrated into the quality assurance infrastructure.

A **rapid intervention team** would also form part of the agency’s work and allow for immediate remedial action to be taken. The team would comprise quality, regulatory, and financial experts, as required, who would work with the setting to ensure that issues are addressed and rectified. This team would address very serious concerns as soon as they are raised. If the setting refuses to engage, or immediate and critical child safety risks are identified, the agency would have the power to issue an immediate closure order if required.

# Is This Just Another Quango?

A commitment to an agency similar to this has already been put forward in the *First 5* strategy. While this may be a new agency, it will not have any new functions. Rather, it would coordinate work that is already being done elsewhere, but more effectively, offering enhanced support and increased powers under one roof.

At first, the agency would be cost-neutral and over time would promote cost effectiveness as it would align work and create efficiencies. With promised increased investment, which allows the best outcomes for children, a single agency would also give a clear line of sight for tracking public funding.

Early Childhood Ireland believes that, for the sake of safeguarding children, and empowering our members to deliver the highest standard of care possible, an early years and school age childcare agency is needed.

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