

Needs Analysis of Early Years Childcare in County Kildare

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June 2018

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Kildare County Childcare Committee (KCCC) manages a number of national programmes and provides support to childcare services in the County. As part of its programme of development work it commissioned an independent researcher to conduct a childcare needs analysis. This report is the culmination of that work. It examines childcare needs from the perspective of children, parents, childcare services and childminders. An extensive consultation process provided feedback from 88 children, 318 parents, 185 childcare staff and managers, 21 childminders, 6 staff in other agencies working in the County, KCCC staff and the KCCC board.

National Policy

National policy is focussed on the provision of quality childcare that is accessible, affordable, child and family centred. However, there are different regulatory and quality frameworks governing the sector, different perspectives on what its primary role is (education versus care and development versus a tool to support labour market activation) and how this marries with the Constitutional role of parents as the primary carers and educators of their children. Funding is also targeted at particular sub-sectors to the exclusion of others such as childminders. As a result there are many conflicting expectations of the sector that sometimes result in a disconnect between national policy, sectoral aspirations and local practice. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is leading the development of Ireland's first cross-departmental ten year strategy for early years. Its goals will be strong and supported families, good health and positive early learning experiences. In this context a national dialogue on what type of childcare sector we would wish for going forward would be timely.

Features of County Kildare

The population of County Kildare has grown steadily with a 4% increase between 2006 and 2011. Over one-third of individuals are aged under 15 years and the percentage of children with disabilities is above the national average. Services in general have not kept pace with population growth. Demand for childcare services is exceeding supply in many parts of the County.

There are 192 registered ECCE services, 4 stand-alone after schools services, 97 childminders on KCCC's database and 37 parent and toddler groups. Around 60% of services provide sessional care, 30% provide full day care and the remainder are either after school or mixed services. Unlike many other counties in Ireland where strong community childcare sectors exist, Kildare's childcare sector is dominated by the private sector which accounts for 96% of childcare services.

Needs of Children

Children in pre-school want to play, be with friends and engage in creative activity. They had mixed views about playing outside, with more boys interested in doing this than girls. While the ECCE sector is relatively well catered for, gaps in provision were identified in respect of babies and young children under the age of 2. Particular parts of the County have insufficient pre-school services, in particular the commuter towns of Maynooth, Leixlip and Celbridge, rural areas in the mid to north part of the County and in the Monasterevin / Kildare area.

Children attending after school also want to play, to be with friends and to engage in various activities particularly outdoors. In many after school services children do homework. They expressed mixed views about this – some liked that they did not have to bring homework home, others found it a challenge. Children want after school to be mainly about providing opportunities to ‘chill out’ and play. The majority of children attending were aged between 5 and 11 and there is a gap for children aged 11 to 14.

The support needs identified for children centred around care and safety and child-led activities. In addition, there were growing trends in the number of children requiring additional supports such as English as a second language (9% of children), Speech and Language (4%), children needing help with anxiety or emotional regulation (3%) and children with a disability (1%).

Parents expressed concern that current eligibility criteria regarding birth date for the two free pre-school years means that some children will not be able to benefit fully from two years free care.

Needs of Parents

Parents consider childcare provision in County Kildare to be generally of good quality. When choosing childcare the most important criteria are that children are happy and safe, that time is devoted to them, that the service is reliable, affordable and proximate to either home or work. Parents also want carers who are experienced and qualified and can provide consistent care to their children.

Just over half of parents use a combination of childcare such as pre-school and/or after school combined with a childminder. This was particularly notable for working parents who commented that childcare services are generally not meeting their needs in terms of opening and closing times and out of school provision. Childminders were preferred by some because of their flexibility in this regard as well as the home from home atmosphere and smaller numbers of children.

There were calls from parents for support for working parents, more information about availability of childcare in their locale, provision that has flexible and out of term time hours, more affordable childcare, parenting programmes and peer support groups.

Needs of Childcare Services

Childcare services are facing challenges with hiring and in some cases, retaining staff. Pay across the sector is generally low (the average hourly rate in Kildare is €11.76) but the requirement for qualifications is increasing. Childcare workers feel undervalued because of this. Differences in ethos amongst the role of childcare were also evident. Some childcare workers believe their primary role is that of educators and they should be on par with school teachers. Others believe their primary role is of carer, while yet others believe it is both caring and educating. The introduction of a formal curriculum in ECCE may be a contributory factor.

Other challenges identified included financial sustainability, supporting children with additional needs, getting the balance right between administration and contact time. Services identified specific needs in respect of training for staff and for board members of community childcare, mentoring, continuous professional development through online fora or short courses and supporting children with additional needs. KCCC is the most important source of support for the majority (82%) of services.

Needs of Childminders

Childminders feel under-valued and not respected in the current environment. There was anger that voluntary notification with Child Minding Ireland was no longer acceptable and access to schemes like ECCE and AIM was only available to Tusla registered childminders, of which there are only two in the entire County.

Concerns were raised about future regulation of childminding, not in terms of regulation per se, but in terms of the capacity of regulators to recognise the unique differences between childcare services and childminding in a home setting. Childminders believe parents choose them for flexibility, providing a 'home from home', smaller numbers of children, individual attention for each child, value for money, continuity of care and providing cover during out of term time.

Childminders want to be respected as a profession, to have access to resourcing and to training that will support them to meet regulatory requirements. There were calls for the reintroduction of a Childminders Support Worker for the County.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This needs analysis confirms previous research about the main issues faced by the childcare sector in the County. These include financial sustainability (including funding), staffing

(including pay rates), regulations and paperwork, a sense of anger, frustration and low morale with calls for the profession, including childminders, to be valued and for more investment in quality childcare.

Concerns were raised that investment in ECCE had been at the expense of other types of childcare services. Childcare services and childminders are both equally valid forms of childcare and many parents use both types. It is important that all forms of childcare receive recognition and are adequately resourced.

The research confirms previous analysis of parents needs including access to childcare, parental support, affordability, services for children with special and additional needs, choice, availability and flexibility. It also highlights the importance of play, friends and creative activity for children. If we are to honour child-led provision then these should drive the philosophy and ethos underpinning the sector.

The County is under-resourced in terms of surrounding services that can support childcare such as family resource centres and various therapies like speech and language. Waiting lists for access to assessments and therapy mean that issues identified in pre-school are not being addressed early.

Gaps in childcare services were particularly evident in the commuter belt of north Kildare, where the growth in a wide range of services, including childcare has not kept pace with population growth. Community childcare is under-represented in the County and opportunities to develop it as an option that will address gaps in provision should be explored.

The range of needs identified indicates that no one agency has the capacity to address them all and a County wide interagency and collaborative approach is recommended. Given the importance of the private sector, it needs to be included in any interagency approaches to addressing needs in the County.

Summary of Recommendations for the Department of Children & Youth Affairs

<p>Policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the context of the National Early Years Strategy, develop a clear vision for the childcare sector • Encourage streamlining of various regulatory and quality frameworks governing the sector • Extend parental leave to 3 years • Review ECCE birth date • Extend AIM to younger children and after school • Clarify role of County Childcare Committees re: information and training on GDPR
<p>Investment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broaden investment beyond ECCE • Review pay and conditions • Take needs of working parents into consideration in programme/ scheme design • Develop visiting speech and language service • Reintroduce Childminders Support Worker • Review with Pobal the adequacy of resources to meet processing and reporting needs associated with administration by County Childcare Committees of national programmes and schemes
<p>Training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review training to emphasise care and development • Include understanding of regulations and their application as a stated learning outcome • Review adequacy of Pobal's training bursary

Summary of Recommendations for Local Agencies

<p>Childcare Working Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KCCC to use the needs analysis to convene an interagency working group • The interagency working group to develop an action plan for collaboration including resourcing new actions
<p>Family Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KCCC to advocate for the appropriate body to provide Family Support Workers to work with services to support parents. • Resourcing of County Childcare Committees to fulfill this role if DCYA consider it appropriate
<p>Training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tusla to provide information about its quality framework or provide funding to KCCC to enable it deliver training to services about the quality framework
<p>Community Childcare</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KCCC and County Kildare LEADER Partnership to identify the potential for developing community childcare • KCCC and County Kildare LEADER Partnership to review options for models of operation for community childcare • Interagency working group to fund a Development Worker in KCCC to support development of community childcare
<p>Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Authority should consult with KCCC to determine if there are additional needs for childcare facilities

Summary of Recommendations for KCCC

Organisational Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct an organisational review to identify gaps in resourcing to meet County childcare needs• Examine funding requirements and models and opportunities to work collaboratively and share resources with neighbouring County Childcare Committees
Learning Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand Community of Practice to support shared learning amongst more services and childminders• Develop a Managers' Network and a Childminders' Network• Ensure the Networks are represented on the interagency working group
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to collaborate with Kildare Local Enterprise Office on training provision• Explore the challenge of releasing staff for training with the Managers' Network and Childminders' Network• Explore online learning platforms to share tools and tips• Use this needs analysis to prioritise training provision to childcare services and childminders
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review layout of KCCC web site for parent information• Promote the availability of information on the web site to parents• Target parents more as a specific strand of KCCC's work• Conduct research with parents and children about after school needs for the 11 to 14 age group
Supporting Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop specific supports for the childminding sector• Continue to provide business mentoring• Explore with Kildare Local Enterprise Office opportunities to bring services together to share administration or to merge

Summary of Recommendations for Services

Supporting children

- Maintain a strong focus on play for children of all ages

Supporting Parents

- Develop supportive cultures
- Actively engage in Communities of Practice and the Managers' Network to share learning and strategies to support parents
- Examine how flexible opening and out of term time hours can be made available to accommodate working parents

After School

- Consider how best to provide for different age groups.
- Split after school into juniors (5-10) and seniors (11-14) with appropriate staffing, supports and activities
- Ensure adequate staffing so that children are appropriately supervised to reduce the risk of bullying
- Consult with parents and children about the provision of food
- Offer homework support with competently trained staff
- Conduct further research with parents and children of the 11-14 age group about their needs

Summary of Recommendations for Parents

Communicating

- Be mindful of the importance of communicating with children
- Be aware of the impact of screen-based devices on speech and language development

Introduction

County Kildare has a steadily growing population and at 37%, one of the highest youth dependency ratios in the State¹. In some parts of County Kildare, demand for childcare services exceeds supply as evidenced by growing waiting lists and reduced vacancies.

The childcare sector has undergone significant change in recent years with, for example, the introduction of new quality and regulatory framework, curriculum, staff qualifications requirements and a second free pre-school year.

Kildare County Childcare Committee (KCCC) manages a number of national programmes and provides support to childcare services. As part of its programme of development work it commissioned an independent researcher to conduct a childcare needs analysis.

The research entailed:

- Interviews with KCCC management and staff.
- Attending three Parent & Toddler groups in three locations – Athy, Maynooth and Leixlip - in order to meet with parents to discuss their childcare needs. Childminders and grandparents were also consulted at these sessions. Twenty-three parents, two grandparents, one au pair and seven childminders were interviewed.
- Focus group with eight parents attending a KCCC funded information evening in Naas to discuss their childcare needs.
- Focus group with three members of the Kildare Childminders Network to discuss the needs of childminders and of children they support.
- Site visits to 10 services located around the County, two per Municipal District (Athy, Leixlip/Celbridge, Kildare/Newbridge, Maynooth and Naas). The purpose of the site visits was to consult with service managers and staff about their needs and the needs of parents and children they support. Eleven managers, one administrator and 63 childcare workers were interviewed. A member of KCCC staff attended separately to consult with children in these services. Eighty-eight children were consulted.
- Each site visited was asked to hand out a questionnaire to the parents using their service. One hundred and sixty-three questionnaires responses were received. This helped to design an online survey.
- Online survey for childcare managers and childcare staff. One hundred and ten responses were received.

¹ Central Statistics Office, 2016 Census

- Online survey of parents/guardians. One hundred and fourteen responses were received.
- Online survey of childminders. Six responses were received.
- Consultation with KCCC board.
- Consultations with five key stakeholders in other agencies in the County.
- Desk research to review relevant policy, statistics and information about services and programmes.

Overall, 88 children, 308 parents (excluding childminders and childcare workers), 185 childcare staff and 21 childminders were consulted for the needs analysis.

For the purposes of this report **childcare services** refers to privately owned or community based full day or sessional services including pre-school and after school, and **childminders** refers to people who care for children in their own home.

The report is split into two parts – Part One places the research in context and Part Two presents the needs analysis.

Part One: Context for the Needs Analysis

County Kildare

County Kildare has seen steady growth in its population from 186,335 in 2006 to 222,504 in 2016². It has a relatively high youth dependency ratio - in the 2016 Census there were 58,406 families of which 37% had children aged under 15. Unemployment is below the national average for both males and females but the County has pockets of deprivation, even within more affluent areas. The Census indicated there were 739 members of the Traveller community in the County and 16% of residents were born outside Ireland. The number of children with disabilities as a percentage of the child population is higher than the national average³. The County is split into five Municipal Districts – Athy, Leixlip/ Celbridge, Maynooth, Naas and Newbridge/Kildare.

Policy

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) has primary responsibility for childcare. It has developed a model of provision that is focussed on access, affordability and quality and is child/family centred.



Key components of access include options and choice, proximity, data on demand and supply and public information. Affordability includes the cost of provision, targeted and universal subsidies and capital investment. Quality includes standards, programme content, qualifications and continuing professional development (CPD) of staff, physical environment, monitoring and regulation and health and safety. Sustainability, governance and human

² Central Statistics Office Census data.

³ State of the Nation's Children, 2012

resource management (HRM) are also important components of quality. Ensuring child and family centred provision is based on having guiding principles or being guided by the principles of Síolta and Aistear, the national frameworks, which include a children's rights approach.

*Right from the Start*⁴ promotes universal provision with extra support for people who need it. Prevention and early intervention are key pillars along with children's rights. The strategy aims to work with children and families and to ensure high quality, accessible, affordable services that are well governed.

*Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*⁵ aims to support parents, to listen and involve young people, to strengthen transitions for children⁶, to support quality services, earlier intervention and prevention and to ensure cross governmental and interagency collaboration and co-ordination. The outcomes it hopes to achieve are that children are active and healthy, achieving in all areas of learning and development, safe and protected, have economic security and opportunity and are connected, respected and contributing.

The Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) were established by DCYA to address multiple needs, to work in partnership with others in the community and with other agencies and to work with young people. In terms of service provision, their focus is on evidence and outcomes and ensuring quality services with trained staff and volunteers, strong leadership, structures, cultures and strategies. The CYPSC and the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in each local authority area agree a Children and Young People's Plan for inclusion in the Local Economic and Community Plan of the local authority. KCCC feeds into the development of this plan.

In 2017, the Affordable Childcare Scheme Bill (ACS) was introduced to replace the four existing non-legislative childcare schemes. The ACS provides subsidies to make childcare more affordable for families and has both universal and targeted components.

The DCYA is currently leading the development of Ireland's first *National Strategy for Early Years*. This will be a ten year cross departmental strategy. It will have three main goals: strong and supported families, good health and positive early learning experiences.

Other policies of relevance to childcare include *Healthy Ireland*⁷ which aims to create generations of healthy children by focussing investment in early intervention and prevention.

⁴ Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013, 'Right from the Start. Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy', DCYA: Dublin.

⁵ Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 'Better Outcomes Brighter Futures. The national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020', DCYA: Dublin.

⁶ For example, from pre-school to primary school and from primary school to secondary school.

⁷ Department of Health, 2013, 'Healthy Ireland. A framework for Improved Health and Well-Being 2013-2025', Department of Health: Dublin.

The early childhood care and education sector is regulated by the Child Care (Preschool Services) Regulations. The sector works within the National Framework for Quality called *Síolta*⁸ and the National Curriculum called *Aistear*⁹. After school services are not currently regulated but from July 2018 they will come under Tusla's inspection remit. The Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector has recently proposed a series of legislative, regulatory, quality, funding and strategic reforms and supports¹⁰. The aim of these is to achieve better outcomes for children, to ensure children are safe and protected, to build on the unique strengths of childminding, to provide parents and children with safe and nurturing environments and to support childminders to provide quality care, development and learning opportunities for children of all ages.

Programmes

KCCC delivers a number of national childcare programmes. The table below summarises the programmes.

The Free Pre-School Year offers two years of free pre-school education to children from three years of age. It is a universal scheme funded under the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE). Services must be registered with Tusla.

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) supports access to childcare for children with disabilities. There are seven levels within the programme. Levels 1 to 3 inclusive are universal and promote and support the development of inclusive cultures within childcare services. Additional supports that are specific to each child can be accessed under Levels 4 to 7. For example, expert educational advice (Level 4); equipment, appliances and minor alterations (Level 5); therapeutic intervention (Level 6) and additional assistance in the pre-school room (Level 7).

Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) provides support to parents in a number of different circumstances. The Universal subsidy is non-means tested and available to children aged between 6 months and 36 months in a Tusla registered service. CCS targets support at low income families with children in community services. Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) extends this to privately owned childcare. Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (CCSR) targets Programme Refugees and supports their resettlement and integration into Irish society by enabling parents to attend language and orientation courses.

⁸ Centre for Early Childhood and Development, 2006, '*Síolta. The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*', Department of Education and Skills: Dublin

⁹ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009, '*Aistear. The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Principles and Themes*', NCCA: Dublin.

¹⁰ Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector, 2018, '*Pathway to a quality support and assurance system for childminding. Volume 1: Survey report of the Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the childminding sector*'.

Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (Transition) (CCSR(T)) provides access to free childcare for children of families experiencing homelessness.

Training and Employment Childcare (CETS) provides subsidised childcare to certain categories of parents to enable access to training and employment. CETS is available to parents attending certain training courses. The Community Employment Childcare programme (CEC) is available to parents who are on Community Employment (CE). Finally, the After-School Child Care programme (ASCC) provides after-school care for primary school children for certain categories of working parents and parents on employment programmes other than CE.

Number of Children Registered on Programmes¹¹

Programme	Number of Children Registered
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):	
• Free Pre-School Year	6,371
• The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) ¹²	221
Community Childcare Subvention:	
• Universal (CCSU)	1,971
• Community Childcare Subvention (CCS)	79
• Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP)	589
• Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (CCSR)	102 (2017) 49 (2018)
• Community Childcare Resettlement (Transitional) (CCSR(T))	0
Training and Employment Childcare (TEC):	
• Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS)	167
• Community Employment Childcare (CEC)	86
• After-School Childcare (ASCC)	12

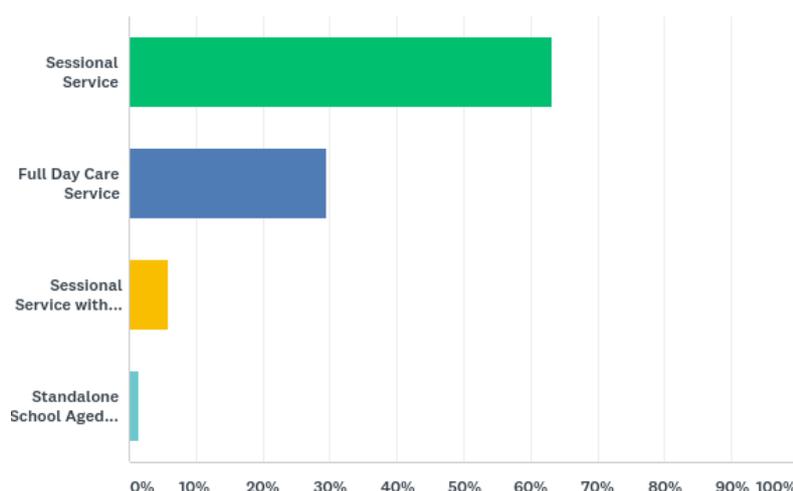
Childcare Providers

There are 192 ECCE registered childcare services and four stand-alone after schools services in County Kildare in 2018. KCCC conducted a survey of childcare providers in the County in 2016. Just over 60% of providers were sessional, i.e. services which offer morning and/or afternoon sessions of up to 3.5 hours duration. Just over 30% were full-time day care, i.e. services offering activities for more than 5 hours. Sessional and/or part-time and/or after school services might also be provided by these services.

¹¹ Pobal Performance for Implementation Platform (PIP) as of April 2018 except for AIM data which is as of December 2017.

¹² Between September 2017 and April 2018 there were 130 children receiving Level 4 support, 8 in receipt of Level 5 and 83 in receipt of Level 7.

Types of Services



The total number of childminders in the County is not known. However, there are 97 childminders on KCCC's database of which two are registered with Tusla. Childminders provide care for up to five children within the childminder's home¹³ and may include full-time, part-time, sessional, before and after-school care.

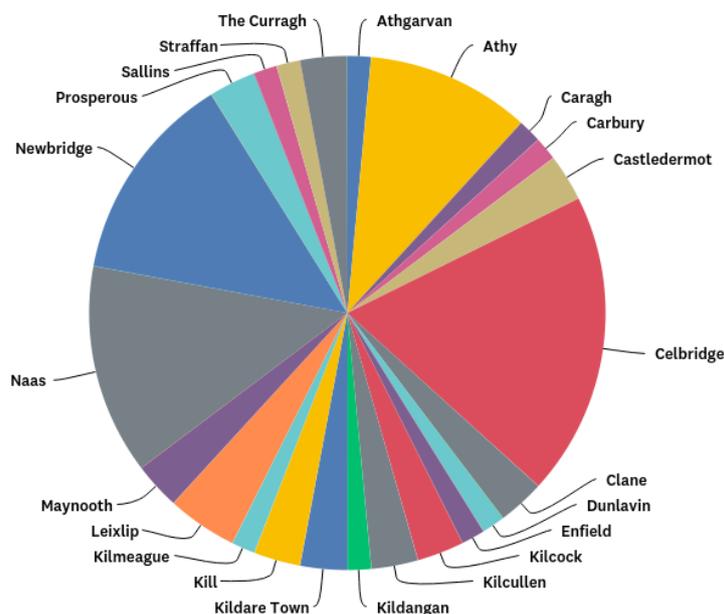
There are approximately 37 Parent & Toddler groups around the County. These are generally run by volunteers and offer short sessions (usually an hour) for children of pre-school age to meet and socialise.

The majority of childcare services in the County are privately owned. The number of community owned services was never large and has been in decline in recent years. Other notable trends in the County include continued population growth, declining vacancies and increasing waiting lists, with demand exceeding supply in certain parts of the County.

The highest concentration of services was in Celbridge, Newbridge and Athy. Relative to population size and growth, areas that appear to be under-serviced include Naas, Maynooth, Leixlip, Kilcock, Monasterevin and Rathangan.

¹³ Including their own children. There are some exemptions in respect of caring for children of relatives and children from the same family.

Service Location



The diagram below provides a profile of services collated by Pobal for the 2016/2017 year. It shows that there was 862 staff in services, most with Level 4 or Level 5 qualifications under Quality and Qualifications Ireland's National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ), and 7,366 childcare places.

Select county to see relevant statistics	Total childcare staff	Staff by highest Early Years qualification	Annual staff turnover rate		
<input type="checkbox"/> Carlow <input type="checkbox"/> Cavan <input type="checkbox"/> Clare <input type="checkbox"/> Cork City <input type="checkbox"/> Cork County <input type="checkbox"/> Donegal <input type="checkbox"/> Dublin - Dublin City <input type="checkbox"/> Dublin - Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown <input type="checkbox"/> Dublin - Fingal <input type="checkbox"/> Dublin - South Dublin <input type="checkbox"/> Galway <input type="checkbox"/> Kerry <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kildare <input type="checkbox"/> Kilkenny <input type="checkbox"/> Limerick <input type="checkbox"/> Leitrim <input type="checkbox"/> Longford <input type="checkbox"/> Louth <input type="checkbox"/> Mayo <input type="checkbox"/> Meath <input type="checkbox"/> Monaghan <input type="checkbox"/> Nationwide <input type="checkbox"/> Offaly <input type="checkbox"/> Roscommon <input type="checkbox"/> Sligo <input type="checkbox"/> Tipperary <input type="checkbox"/> Waterford <input type="checkbox"/> Wick <input type="checkbox"/> Wicklow	862		27.0%		
	Average full-time fee	Average part-time fee	Average sessional fee	Average hourly wage	Average hourly wage (EY assistants)
	€ 188.31	€ 114.55	€ 76.78	€ 11.76	€ 10.80
	Total children enrolled	Vacant places	Children on waiting list	This dashboard provides data from the 2016/2017 Early Years Sector Profile Report, published by Pobal for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. - The data included here is based on direct responses to the survey (which stood at 86%) rather than national or county level extrapolations. - For more information, see the full report on www.pobal.ie	
	7,366	513	454		

Some notable trends in Kildare include a 4% growth in the population of children aged 0 to 14 between 2011 and 2016¹⁴. Based on Pobal data, the number of childcare places in community-based services declined by 24% from 703 in 2014/2015 to 532 in 2016/2017. At the same time, the number of places in privately owned childcare services increased by 28% from 5,766 to 7,366. In the same period, waiting lists in childcare services increased by 241% (from 133 to 454) and vacancies declined by 1% (from 645 to 639).

KCCC Services

Apart from administering national programmes, KCCC provides a range of services to childcare providers in the County.

The Quality Outreach Programme helps childcare providers to respond to the needs of children and families and ensure that quality services are provided. It offers on-site visits, on-going mentoring, support tools, information and guidance. The Better Business Outreach Programme offers similar supports with a focus on the sustainability, governance and HRM of childcare services.

A Community of Practice for ECCE services has been set up in collaboration with Early Childhood Ireland to share best practice and to promote networking amongst childcare providers.

Training is provided on Children First, Aistear and Síolta. KCCC administers a Learner Fund and Learner Bursary on behalf of Pobal to support CPD. It has also collaborated with Kildare Local Enterprise Office (KLEO) to provide training courses specifically for childcare services in 2018 on the topics of costing/pricing/cash flow, recruiting and training staff, book-keeping, employment law and motivating a team.

Grants are available for Parent & Toddler Groups, childminder development and capital investment.

Resources have been developed including guidelines for service providers, a Step-by-Step Guide to setting up a childcare service¹⁵ and Playful World, a booklet and DVD containing games from around the world to support inclusiveness amongst children¹⁶. Information and talks for parents have also been provided by KCCC. Resources have been developed for parents including guidelines on choosing a quality childcare service and parenting from birth to 14 years.

¹⁴ Based on the 2011 and 2016 Census data there were 51,568 children in the 0-14 age category in 2011 and 53,560 in 2016.

¹⁵ Developed in collaboration with Galway City & County Childcare Committee.

¹⁶ Developed in collaboration with Athy Travellers Group, Kildare Youth Service and Star Girls Youth Group.

Childcare Programmes



+55%

ECCE – 193
CETS – 72
ASCC – 64
CEC PS – 52
CEC AS – 62
CCS – 6
CCSP – 144



Children Registered
for ECCE

+21.9%

Parents receiving
subvention

+72.1%

Capital Funding €€€€

Capital Funding - €122,402.33

P & T Grant - €8,963

CMDG - €8,213.10

LF Bursary - €42,000

Communication

42 Weekly
Bulletins



4534
Readers



Events/Training

49 Events/
Training



"Edi workshops were
really good, relevant
and useful"



Participants on KCCC Events



655 Participants

649
Childcare
Staff

6
Child-
Minders

157
Childcare
Services

Outreach Support – Quality, Business and Financial

+20%
2016→2017

Focus
on
Quality

84
Visits

"Overall the programme was very
helpful and was very well delivered. The
site visits were of great support"

108
Visits

+83%
2016→2017

"Thanks so much for helping
me out with this. I look
forward to your visits and am
learning lots."

KCCC Collaborations



118 Meetings Attended

74 Local
Collaborations

44 National
Collaborations

2017 Testimonials

"KCCC offers valuable
support on a local level. I
hope it will continue to link in
with services."

"I can never find any fault in the way KCCC members
help the childcare sector & staff. I would be lost if it
wasn't for the dedicated team in Clane."

"KCCC you are always
supportive and give call back
and return e mail queries.
Keep up this vital work."



KCCC collaborates with many other agencies including Tusla, the Health Service Executive, CYPSC, the Early Years Specialist Service, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills, the National Early Years Inspectorate, the National Voluntary Childcare Organisation and Pobal.

Summary

The diagram below summarises all the factors that influence the work of KCCC and impact on the provision of childcare services in County Kildare.

KCCC

- 8 staff, 8 board
- Programmes – ECCE, CCS, CCSP, CCSR, CCSRT, TEC, AIM
- Capital grants and grants for P&T groups
- Childminder development grant
- Learner Fund and Learner Bursary
- Better business outreach and 1:1 mentoring
- Quality outreach
- Development resources (guides, playful World) & mentoring
- Children First training
- Roll out of Sólta and Aistear training
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training
- Community Practice Hubs (5)
- Networking
- Parenting talks/supports/resources
- Promoting programmes
- Data

Influencers on the Work of KCCC

- KCCC's work plan
- Department of Children & Youth Affairs
- Children & Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) plan
- Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) priorities
- Community Childcare Ireland
- Pobal
- Tusla
- Department of Education & Skills
- Kildare & Wicklow Education Training Board
- Department of Justice/Office for Promotion of Migrant Integration

Policy

- Universal – help all, extra for most in need
- Prevention and early intervention
- Children rights and voice
- Working with children & families
- Accessible & close proximity to families
- Affordable
- Strengthening transitions
- High quality services, well led and governed
- Outcomes and evidence
- Cross agency collaboration
- Sólta and Aistear
- Education focussed incl. inspections
- Recent focus on health and healthy food
- Multi-disciplinary workforce and inter disciplinary training
- Professionalization of provision

Services

- Number of services – 192 ECCE services, 97 childminders, 4 stand-alone after-school
- Average no. children enrolled = 50 (high end nationally)
- 7,366 children enrolled –70% in urban areas, 30% in rural areas
- Ownership of services – 96% private, 4% community
- Location of services – some areas poorly serviced for population size and growth
- Waiting lists have more than doubled
- Static number of P&T groups – low grant uptake
- Sustainability for many services is an issue
- Uptake of CCS/CCSP places comparatively low but recently improved due to awareness raising

County Kildare

- Growing population
- One of the highest percentage of children under 15 (53,560)
- More 0-4 year olds in urban areas, more 5-12 year olds in rural areas
- Lone parent rate below national average (16.9% v. 19.9%) but number of children in lone parent households relatively high
- Unemployment below national average
- Demand exceeding supply for services in general
- Traveller (739) & Roma (200)
- New communities (11.5% population)
- Children with disability – demand for AIM is high
- Deprivation in pockets
- Mental health in children & young people
- Insufficient supports in AIM for children under 3
- Declining community owned services and places
- High child protection referrals

Support needs for services identified by KCCC

- Parents/children where English is a second language
- Cultural diversity
- Leadership and governance
- Financial sustainability
- Attracting staff due to low pay, especially special needs support staff
- Staff burn-out
- Administration and compliance paperwork
- Loss of experienced staff
- Business skills supports

Part Two: Findings from the Needs Analysis

Feedback from Children

Eighty-eight children were consulted in the four MDs¹⁷: 53 pre-school children and 35 in after school settings. Fifty-nine percent were aged three to four, 38% were aged between five and ten and 3% were aged between eleven and twelve. Fifty-two percent were male and 48% were female.

Pre-School Children

Playing was the most frequently named thing that pre-school children most liked about pre-school. Sixty-eight percent of children named play in their conversations when asked what was their favourite thing about pre-school. Toys was the next most frequently named thing (36%), followed by drawing/painting (20%), friends (16%) and being outside (12%). Other less frequently named responses¹⁸ included dressing up, tidying up, water, sand, chalk, kitchen, reading, writing, the babies, the slide, animals, the yellow swivel chair and doughnuts¹⁹.

Favourite Thing about Pre-School – Most Frequent Words



Children were asked what they would do if they were the boss of the pre-school. The most frequent descriptors were play (30%), telling others to do things (18%), outside (14%), lunch (8%) and tidying up/cleaning up (8%).

Some quotes from children are provided below:

¹⁷ It was not possible to access children in childcare service in Athy MD in the research timeframe.

¹⁸ Named three or fewer times.

¹⁹ Non-verbal child on autism spectrum.

'Give hugs'
'Read books'
'I would go outside'
'Tell everyone to play nicely'
'Go to the shop and get cake'
'I would play if I were the teacher'
'Have lunch as soon as they come in'
'I would tell everyone what to do'
'I would play computer games'
'I would mind the children'
'I would drive the bus'
'Do the clean up'

The things children liked the most were playing with friends (93%), painting (87%), being inside (84%), playdoh (81%), drawing (78%), reading (78%) and playing with sand (76%).

Seventy-one percent liked table top activities (e.g. puzzles), dressing up and home corner (e.g. kitchen). Lower percentages liked being outside (64%), playing with blocks (60%) and playing on their own (42%). Over half (51%) were unsure if they liked playing alone.

Generally, boys and girls had similar likes and dislikes with some notable exceptions. More girls liked being inside (92%) than boys (75%) and more boys were unsure (15%) if they liked being in.

More boys (70%) liked being outside than girls (60%) and a much higher percentage of girls (36%) said they disliked being outside compared to boys (10%).

Girls also like painting (96%) compared to boys (75%) with 20% of boys saying they disliked it while none of the girls did.

More girls disliked water (24% compared to 15% of boys) and sand play (12% compared to 5% of boys), while more boys (15%) disliked playdoh compared to girls (5%).

Likes and Dislikes – Percentage of Responses

	Like	Dislike	Unsure
Playing with friends	93%	2%	4%
Painting	87%	9%	4%
Being inside	84%	7%	9%
Playdoh	81%	9%	9%
Drawing	78%	9%	13%
Reading	78%	9%	13%
Playing with sand	76%	18%	7%

Home corner ²⁰	71%	16%	13%
Dressing up	71%	16%	13%
Table top ²¹	71%	24%	4%
Being outside	64%	24%	11%
Playing with blocks	60%	18%	22%
Playing alone	42%	7%	51%

Appendix C gives a more detailed breakdown by gender.

After School Children

Thirty-five children attending after school services were interviewed. Nine (26%) attended the after school both in the morning before going to school and afterwards. They were asked did they like attending before school. Four said yes and five said no. The main reasons for liking it were play and friends and for not liking it were getting up and not being able to sleep in more:

Reasons for Liking Before School	Reasons for Not Liking Before School
<i>'I get to sleep'</i>	<i>'I want to see my friends'</i>
<i>'I get to play'</i>	<i>'I have to get up early and don't get to play'</i>
<i>'I like playing with my friends'</i>	<i>'I would like to have a sleep in'</i>
<i>'I like seeing my friends'</i>	<i>'Sometimes I am a bit sleepy'</i>
	<i>'I want to sleep a few minutes more'</i>

All 35 children interviewed attended after school. Thirty-one (89%) indicated they liked attending, two said they liked it sometimes and two did not like it. The main reasons for liking after school were friends (24%), playing (24%) and activities/things to do (27%).

Main Reasons for Liking Attending After School

Play (8) **Friends** (8)

Activities baking (3), drawing (1), making stuff (1), things to do (4),

Fun (3) **Outside** (2) **Food** (2) **Toys** (2)

²⁰ This includes activities like puzzles, games or any activities that require sitting at a table.

²¹ This includes role play areas such as a kitchen.

Some quotes from children are provided below:

'I like baking'
'I get to go outside'
'I get to play football'
'I get to see my friends'
'I get food here and I have stuff to do after school'
'It's fun to play with friends'
'I like drawing and baking'
'There is lots of activities'
'I like the toys'

The two young people who do not like attending after school indicated this was because it was boring. The two who said they did not like it sometimes said it was because of their mood at the time.

Seventeen children (49%) come to the after school during summer holidays.

Children were asked what their favourite thing was about after school. The most frequently named related to playing (37%), being outside (23%) and football (23%).

Favourite Things about After School

Play₍₁₃₎
Football₍₈₎ **Outside**₍₈₎
Toys₍₆₎
Art₍₃₎ **Baking**₍₃₎ **Friends**₍₃₎

The least favourite things about after school were mainly homework (23%) and others being mean (11%).

Least Favourite Things in After School

Homework₍₁₃₎
People being mean₍₄₎

Twenty-three children (66%) indicated they had to do homework in their after school, 10 said they did not and two gave no response. When asked if they got a lot of help with their

homework, nine (39%) said they did, 13 (57%) said they did not and one indicated that they did not need help. Children liked that they did not have to do their homework at home and that they could get help. Some found having to do homework boring. Sixteen (70%) named other things they would prefer to do. The main alternatives included play and video games.

Doing Homework in After School



When asked what would they do differently if they were the boss of the after school the most frequently named things were toys (26%), play (23%), food (11%) and helping others (11%).

If I were the Boss of After School

Toys₍₉₎ Play₍₈₎

More food₍₄₎ Helping others₍₄₎

Some quotes about what they would do if they were in charge are provided below:

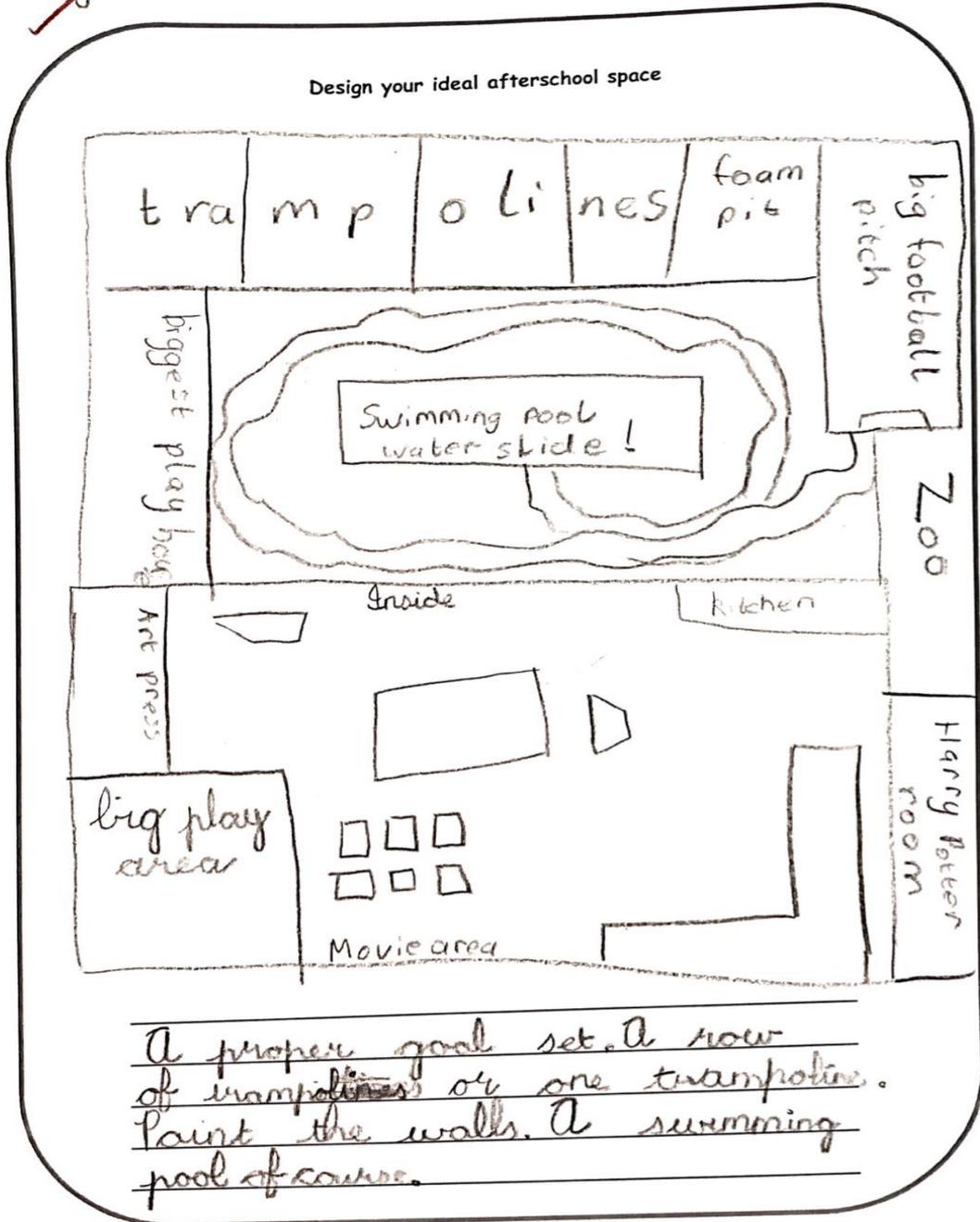
'I would help people'
'I would get more Lego'
'More food and a second snack'
'Let everyone play football all day'
'No school for everyone and playing all day'
'I would have a pet area where you could pet the dogs and cats'
'More equipment outside'
'No homework'
'Bouncy castle'
Watch TV'

Children were also asked to design their own after school. One of the designs is presented below.

10 girl

12/11/2011

Design your ideal afterschool space



A proper goal set. A row of trampolines or one trampoline. Paint the walls. A swimming pool of course.

Feedback from Parents

Forty-one parents were interviewed for the research. Fifteen of these were also minding the children of other parents.

Ten childcare services were visited during the research and these were asked to hand out a questionnaire to parents using their childcare facilities. Four hundred and eighty questionnaires were handed out and 163 were completed, a response rate of 34%.

An online survey of parents took place during the third week of February. Social media was used to promote the survey. One hundred and fourteen responses were received.

This chapter examines the feedback provided by parents.

Number of Children

Twenty-five percent of parents who responded to the surveys had one child. Forty-four percent had two children. Twenty-two percent had three children. Eight percent had four children and 2% had more than four children.

Choosing Childcare

Consultations with parents enabled the development of a list of criteria that were considered when choosing a childcare service. Parents in the services visited and in the online survey were asked to rank these criteria in order of importance to them when choosing childcare. The top 10 were as follows:

Top Ten Ranking of Criteria that were the Most Important in Choosing Childcare

Criteria	Rank (1 = most important, 2 = next most important and so on)
Children are happy	1
Safe environment	2
Time given to meets the needs of each child	3
Reliability	4
Location (close to home or work)	5
Experience of staff/childminders	6
Adult child ratios	7
Affordability	8
Consistency of staff/childminders	9
Qualifications of staff/childminders	10

Parents want a reliable proximate service that has a safe stimulating environment where their children will be happy and they are supported by experienced staff or childminders who give each child time to meet their needs. While both experience and qualifications of staff or childminders were important, experience was ranked of more importance than qualifications.

Research shows however that better outcomes for children are achieved when practitioners have higher qualifications.²²

Affordability was also an important consideration and was more important for parents attending community childcare than parents attending private services. However, many parents commented about costs and a sample of quotes is provided below.

'Very expensive. Should be tax relief as grant is only for regulated childminding services.'

'Just about scraping childcare money together but we won't compromise on quality for cheaper option.'

'There is no suitable childcare to facilitate shift work hence paying for children on some days that are not required to secure the place.'

'I gave up work due to the cost of childcare.'

'It is almost the same cost as our mortgage payment. Do not know how we will cope if have a second child.'

'Luckily have parental support so paying part time childcare but find childcare so expensive.'

'Very little government support for working families. Subsidy is very little.'

'The cost of childcare is extremely high for parents who work full-time. In some cases it is like a second mortgage.'

'My children are in primary school and after school care is an issue for me as it is very expensive and inflexible. This forces me to work part time.'

'Three children under 3.5 years of age and working 3 days a week. Childcare costs twice what we pay on our mortgage despite the fact we bought our house at the height of the boom.'

Parents highlighted the importance of proximity for working parents in the context of the overall travel times to and from work. Generally, these parents want childcare to add no more than 15 minutes to their daily commute. However, some parents met during the research were travelling up to 30 minutes and more to access quality childcare.

Type of Services Chosen

Preschool was the largest category of service being used, reflecting the uptake of the two year free ECCE scheme. Full day services also offered ECCE places. Overall, 46% of children attended registered childcare services, 29% attended childminders and 25% attended after school services. In addition to services, around 15% of children were also cared for by grandparents or other relatives or family members.

²² *'Highly qualified practitioners provide better quality ECEC. This can yield better child outcomes, both socially and academically, not only in the short term but also in the long term'* (Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD: Paris 2012)

Breakdown of Children by Service Type (N=493 children)

	Number of Children	Percentage of Children
Crèche/Full day care on a full time basis	65	13%
Crèche/Full day care on a part time basis	27	5%
Sessional preschool/Montessori	136	28%
Childminder on a full time basis	55	11%
Childminder on a part time basis	88	18%
After school service in school	65	13%
After school service outside school	57	12%

Nearly half of the parents were using only registered childcare services, 13% were using only after schools services, 6% were using only childminders and 34% were using a combination of services. Twenty-three percent of parents were using childminders in addition to other childcare services. This excludes grandparents or other relatives, relied on their own or in combination with other services by around 14% of parents. Childminders are often used to bring children to and from registered childcare, particularly for working parents. After schools services were also important with 29% of parents using these services.

Services Currently Used by Parents (N=247 parents)

	Number of Parents	Percentage of Parents
Registered childcare service (full day, pre-school or sessional) only	119	48%
Registered childcare service and childminders	44	18%
Registered childcare and after schools service	28	11%
After schools service only	31	13%
Childminder and after schools service	7	3%
Registered service and childminder and after schools service	4	2%
Childminder only	14	6%

Childcare in Kildare

Consultations with parents explored the positives and negatives about childcare provision in Kildare.

Positives included a sector that was considered to have quality, choice, good environment and activities, good staff, was well regulated, was not dominated by franchises and services that are generally not too large.

Negatives included a perception that services manipulated schemes and capitation rates to their benefit rather than the benefit of parents. Staff burn-out was a particular concern as was the level of pay within the sector. Too much time was been devoted to paperwork and insufficient time was going to developing the emotional intelligence of children. Some commented that the childcare environment was not always 'up to scratch' and that children

with allergies are not always adequately accommodated in terms of policies, for example the use of cakes to celebrate events. Others felt there needed to be a stronger focus on the capabilities of staff to support the emotional development of children.

Affordability was a major concern with 82% of parents in the online survey indicating it was an issue. Thirty-five percent of respondents said they qualified for a government funded childcare scheme and 65% did not.

Unregulated childminding was also a concern for some but others had a preference for employing childminders. Reasons for the latter included flexibility, experience, home from home environment, tailoring to each child's needs, on call to collect an ill child from crèche or school, affordability and responsiveness to parents' situations. Some parents using childcare services commented on the differences between these and childminders. They named the absence of flexibility regarding hours in crèches and school pick-up as well as having to pay for full day care even though only part hours were required. Parents commented about having to 'ask favours' of family and grandparents for childcare. Advantages of crèches over childminders were named as regulated settings, back-up from other staff if the other childcare workers were ill and qualifications of staff.

Some parents indicated they paid to secure a place in a childcare service and others noted that planning well ahead was often necessary to secure a place. A small number indicated they had stayed at home or went back to work and subsequently stayed at home because the economics of childcare affordability meant it was not worth their while to work.

Seventy-nine percent of online respondents were working outside the home, the majority (77%) on a full-time basis. Parents interviewed indicated that opening hours of childcare services were not accommodating working parents and that greater flexibility and a wider range of opening hours needed to be developed.

While the second free ECCE year was welcomed as an initiative, parents still had concerns that the use of specific birth dates to determine eligibility would mean that some children would miss out on a full two years. They expressed a preference for more open-ended eligibility that would enable all children under a certain age to avail to two free years. The quote below encapsulates the concerns.

'The fact that childcare is so expensive pushes me to send my children to school at the very early age. I can't afford childcare for one more year. Even though I know they are not ready for school I have to do it due to financial reasons. Children born in April will be the youngest at school (almost two years younger than the oldest ones), with the shortest amount of preschool time! Children born in April qualify only for one year of free Montessori scheme, the second year is free only if you keep your child away from school. Staying one more year at day care full time is huge cost, staying one more year with child at home has a huge impact on my earnings'.

When asked what they would develop the parents named outdoor play areas, training for staff in supporting additional needs, better pay for staff, services that are proximate to or co-located with schools so that local connections for children can be maintained. One parent who is a Public Health Nurse expressed particular concern about vaccination policies in

childcare services and felt that information about whether or not there were unvaccinated children attending a particular facility should be made known to parents with children attending.

Some examples of quotes from parents are given below.

'If service for ECCE was run for one hour longer a day I believe it would be more beneficial to all parents, in particular parents who work or attend college.'

'I feel the capitation grant that is payable to childcare services for the free pre school year is inadequate and quite frankly an insult to the excellent childcare service which is run by highly qualified and experienced childcare staff where our children attend. It is the most underpaid service in the country yet it is the most important, investment in childcare is what is needed.'

'Fees have increased so much recently that it's hard to work and pay fees.'

'Flexibility of use of ECCE places, e.g. being able to use the 15 hours as you need rather than being restricted to 3 hours 5 days a week - less friendly for working parents who have to make arrangements around these 3 hours each day.'

'I have been able to get service of choice. 2 kids - 1 attending [childcare service] and 1 attending after school and childminder. Very happy with both.'

'Very happy with the childcare service chosen. Lovely staff and happy children. Great location close to primary school.'

'My child is very happy and contented due to his childcare. Staff excellent. My own mind always at ease as care given at all times.'

'Has been great experience for child as he has learning difficulties and doesn't enjoy been out or mixing with others but loves going to [pre]school and has come on so much.'

'We're very lucky to have a great place and wonderful childminder very close to our home.'

'Delighted with our choice of childcare. Very high quality, couldn't ask for more.'

'If I'm honest I haven't really looked at many childcare options. I rely on family for my childcare needs.'

'I believe the preschool my child attends gives top rate care, education and support to my child. As a part time worker I was very lucky to find someone flexible to care for my younger child as all crèches in area only offered full day/full week service. A part time sessional for younger children would have been a great benefit. Also sessional less formal than preschool during summer (or part thereof) would be a great addition to the area.'

'Childcare for 3 children remains one of the main outgoings in our household. 2 years free play school places are a positive move in the right direction.'

'High standards and quality but not enough places for the needs of growing communities. School readiness seems to be an issue. 4 year old isn't emotionally ready for a classroom reality. The consequences are seen in child/young adult mental health (anxiety especially) which can lead to a whole list of issues.'

'My son is very happy - excellent care - staff are very approachable and kind. Have no worries sending in him in every day.'

'I have always enjoyed a good relationship with my childcare provider. My children are happy and well cared for. I put this down to continuity of care and environment which has not changed in their early years.'

'I cannot comment on services in Kildare but in my location the services are ok. We have 3 crèche to pick from. However the cost of them can be pricey, the outdoor space is also a huge hindrance.'

'Protection and retention of qualified staff in Montessori school needs consideration when allocating funds at budget time. Don't rate hand-on experience less than qualifications.'

Support Needs

Parents were asked what other types of childcare supports they would like. Just over half (55%) would like more information about what childcare is available in an area, notably in Maynooth and Leixlip/Celbridge. This need was also raised by parents who were interviewed, particularly those who were new to an area, notably in Athy and Maynooth. Parents commented on how difficult it could be to find out what childcare services were available and how to go about accessing childminders.

Support Needs of Parents Identified by Parents (N=196 parents)

	Number of Parents	Percentage of parents
Information about what childcare is available in an area	107	55%
Parenting programmes	90	46%
Opportunities to meet other parents (peer-to-peer support)	69	35%
Parent and toddler groups	53	27%

Just under half (46%) would like parenting programmes, with the highest demand in the areas of Naas and Newbridge/Kildare.

Around one-third (35%) would like to have more opportunities to meet with other parents for support, notably in Athy and Maynooth. Twenty-seven percent identified a need for more parent and toddler groups, with the highest demand in the areas of Maynooth, Naas and Newbridge/Kildare.

Appendix A gives a breakdown by area.

Feedback from Childcare Providers

The researcher visited 10 services, two in each Municipal District. These included full day care services, sessional services and after schools services. These services employed 95 people including 11 managers, three administrators, three food preparation workers, one bus driver, one caretaker, nine Community Employment/Tús support staff and 63 childcare workers. Only three of these employees were men. The services had 840 children registered at the time of the research visits. Eleven managers, one administrator and 63 childcare workers were interviewed.

An online survey of other childcare services in the County took place in the third week of February. One hundred and ten responses were received of which 102 were owner/managers of eight were childcare workers. Seventy-six of these services indicated that they currently had 4,345 children in their care. Seventy-five respondents gave information about staffing. These services employed over 479 of which 20 were male (4%).

During the course of the research 15 childminders and two grandparents were interviewed. An online survey of childminders also took place in the third week of February. Six responses, all female, were received. These services cared for 47 children. No additional staff were involved.

This chapter examines the findings from these consultations.

Age Range Accommodated

The age ranges that childcare services and childminders catered for were mainly 3 to 5 years old and after schools for 5 to 14 years old. Those interviewed commented that after schools mainly provided care for children aged 5 to 10.

Age Range Accommodated by Childcare Providers (N=5,198 children and 92 providers)

Age range	Children		Childcare services and childminders	
	Number of children	Percentage of children	Number of providers	Percentage of providers
0-1 years	107	2%	18	20%
1-3 years	721	14%	50	54%
3-5 years	3,033	58%	85	92%
5-14 years	1,337	26%	40	43%

Support Needs of Children

Apart from providing care and attention in a safe and caring environment where programmes of activities are child-led, childcare providers named a number of common themes regarding support needs. Some of these needs have become more prevalent in recent years and childcare providers speculated that the use of tablets and other screen-based devices were

contributory factors in motor skills and communication challenges that some children were experiencing.

Percentage of Children with Additional Support Needs²³

English as a second language	Speech and language issues	Physical/intellectual disability	Learning difficulties	Emotional regulation	Experiencing anxiety	Motor skills
473 out of 5,184 9%	185 out of 5,184 4%	58 out of 5,184 1%	101 out of 5,184 2%	17 out of 839 2%	28 out of 806 3%	9 out of 806 1%

Frequency with which Childcare Workers in Services Visited Recently Encountered Particular Support Needs (Percentage of Workers²⁴)

Children with:	Often	Sometimes	Never
Speech and language issues	50%	38%	13%
English as a second language	36%	48%	16%
Different cultures	38%	54%	8%
Different religions	27%	53%	20%
Ethnic minority	8%	27%	65%
Physical/sensory disability	30%	54%	16%
Intellectual disability	16%	66%	18%
Learning difficulty	15%	74%	11%
Behaviour issues	13%	67%	21%
Health issues or allergies	20%	66%	14%
Motor skills issues	3%	77%	20%
Anxiety	2%	57%	41%

Communication: This includes children who have no English or English as a second language, diagnosed Speech and Language issues and delays in speech and language that were not diagnosed.

Services commented on the growing diversity of children attending their services and the range of nationalities attending compared to the past. In the services visited around 3% of parents using these services had no or poor English.

Staff indicated that speech and language issues have become more prevalent in recent years and were particularly commented on by older staff who have been in childcare for ten years or more. Some speech and language issues were linked to a disability but others were not.

²³ Some children had multiple needs and are counted more than once.

²⁴ Some workers care for babies and very young children where additional support needs were less evident.

Other factors named that might be contributing to this trend included time-poor working parents, the use of screen-based technology by both parents and children (including very young children), less story-telling and conversation between parents and children.

Examples of strategies used to aid communication with children included miming, pictograms, Google translate, sign language such as Hanen and Lámh and lists of key words in the main languages (often sourced from parents). Sign language and word lists were not commonly used although staff commented that they would be useful additions to their toolkits. In some instances parents shared notes from Speech and Language therapists with childcare workers and this was considered of benefit to both the workers and the child.

Behaviour: Childcare workers commented on how assertive and confident young children were with adults. This was seen as positive but some childcare workers felt that greater consistency on approaches to boundaries were required between the childcare setting and home. Building and maintaining good relationships with parents was seen as key to this. A challenge in partnering with parents was identified where children were brought to and collected from the childcare service by childminders. Extra effort was necessary to engage with the parents in this instance. Some examples of strategies used to engage parents included one-to-one conversations when children were collected, 'parent-teacher' style meetings, evening information sessions and parenting skills programmes.

Other behaviour issues identified included children with sensory processing issues. For example, being afraid of messy play or finding it hard to cope in noisy situations. Anxiety also emerged as a growing trend, partly linked to other behaviour and communication issues. Examples of strategies used to support these children (and all other children) included sensory rooms/corners, one-to-one in quiet spaces, teaching children 'down time', yoga and mindfulness.

In some services inappropriate screen-based behaviours and language were an issue. For example very young children using words like 'stab' and 'kill' and/or acting out scenes of violence seen in online games.

Disabilities: The number of children in services visited with physical disabilities ranged from zero to twelve and the number with intellectual disabilities ranged from zero to three. The introduction of AIM has enabled services to include more children with physical and intellectual disabilities. Seventy-three percent of online respondents had considered accessing AIM to help meet needs. However, a number of those interviewed commented that AIM is only available to children in ECCE and expanding it to younger children would ensure earlier intervention and support the inclusion of children with disabilities in services at an earlier age.

Twenty-seven percent of online respondents had not accessed AIM. The reasons included not having children currently in the service who meet the criteria, parents unwilling to have children assessed, inability to recruit a full complement of staff to support AIM (this was also

raised as an issue by those interviewed) and children who were already accessing services privately.

Waiting lists to access assessments were noted as an issue for parents with staff noticing that many parents paid privately. In addition, staff would like to see testing for hearing and vision within childcare settings at an early age.

Learning Difficulties: Learning difficulties were sometimes linked to an intellectual disability, but not in all cases.

Motor Skills: An emerging trend identified by services was the number of children with poor fine motor skills. Grip and hand strength were noted as issues. Engaging children in play that uses motor skills such as drawing and outdoor activities that build core strength such as the use of balance beams and monkey bars were some of the strategies used to help children.

Other Support Needs: Only one service visited currently had children who had experienced homelessness (three children). One other service had encountered a homeless family in previous years.

One service currently had children over whom there were child protection concerns (three children). One other service had to make a child protection report in recent years. Other services interviewed were confident they had policies and procedures in place and knew what to do in the event of needing to make a child protection report.

None of the services visited currently have children from an ethnic minority such as Travellers. One service has had Travellers in the past and will have again in the next September enrolment for ECCE. With the exception of this service, staff in other services were not aware of any children they were encountering that were an ethnic minority. However, all were very aware of different cultures and these were celebrated within the services. For example, by celebrating national holidays and inviting parents to take part in these.

One service currently has two children with global developmental delay.

Allergies also emerged as a growing trend noted by childcare workers amongst children.

After school: Services providing after school care noted differences between junior and senior care. Juniors (ages 5-10) comprise the majority of children in after school care. Their needs include a welcoming environment with caring staff that can engage with them in activities, both indoor and outdoor. Some services provide meals but many others do not have adequate kitchen facilities to do so and/or have concerns about food safety. Many provide homework support but the main emphasis in the service is on relaxation and fun.

For the senior cohort (ages 11-14) their needs are to have 'chill out' spaces away from younger children and access to outdoor areas where they can play sports. Some of the after school services were located on or near school grounds and had access to sport pitches but

others had no such facilities. Adequate space to give both juniors and seniors their own areas was a challenge for many and preferences would be for specific purpose-built facilities. A 'youth café' type environment was felt by many to be the more appropriate environment to try to achieve for seniors.

There was general agreement that after school services needed guidelines on what should be provided and what are appropriate staffing ratios. However, while some expressed a preference for programmed activity, the majority felt that this was not suitable for after school services because children needed time to unwind and relax after school. Child-led activity was considered to be central to an after school service.

Support Needs of Parents

Childcare staff believe that parents would benefit from having more information and knowledge about parenting, child development and behaviour. Opportunities to meet other parents, particularly for younger people, were considered beneficial. Some services have provided parenting courses, but attendance has generally been low.

Eighty-two percent of online respondents have policies on engaging parents about their children's learning and development and 18% do not. Examples of the types of strategies used to engage parents include photo updates, newsletters, booklet of themes and interests covered, learning journal portfolio, sharing of observation book, handover report when the child leaves the service (which some share with schools with parental consent), informal updates each day when the child is collected and including parents in activities in the service.

With the economic upturn, working parents are a major category of service users. Services were asked what the shortest, typical and longest distances children were travelling to their services. Many were within walking distance or within a 5 kilometer driving distance. However, some parents were travelling longer distances to childcare services. For example from Dublin to Clane and from Prosperous to Newbridge.

Childcare providers noted that many parents starting work early and/or commuting used childminders to bring their children to and from childcare services. The survey of parents shows that many are using both childcare services and childminders. Only one service indicated that it had extended its opening hours in recent years to accommodate working parents. Opening hours for other services have remained the same. Services commented on the time constraints and pressures working parents were under and speculated that this might be resulting in less engagement and communication with their children such as playing, reading and story-telling. Plain English literature that explains the importance of these activities was suggested as supports that might help parents.

In some areas parents were returning to work six months after the birth of a child and demand for places for babies had increased. One service has expanded its services for babies on foot of demand.

Parents with no or poor English who do not have an English speaking partner was identified as a communication challenge, both in terms of direct contact and the written word.

Some parents it was noted have literacy and/or language issues themselves that can impact on their capacity to communicate with the childcare service and to support their children with homework.

Services have supported parents with form filling, particularly in respect of accessing services for children with special needs.

Some parents are not aware of return to work/education schemes that support access to affordable childcare or of AIM.

Staff commented that many parents are reluctant to hear about developmental delays, and fear conditions such as autism. It was felt that more information about developmental delay would help to allay parent's fears and ensure that children's needs were addressed speedily.

There were mixed views on whether or not the role of early childcare services should be to provide family support or whether this was the remit of other services. Some believe it is an integral part of what they do. Others believe they are doing it because there are no other services available locally, whilst others believe it should not be the role of early care and education. Those who engage in family support have developed extensive local networks to support parents. These were less evident in services where family support was not seen a part of their remit.

Support Needs of Childcare Staff

Pay, terms and conditions emerged as significant issues in consultations with staff. Examples of staff leaving to go to Australia or Dubai were given and comparisons made with hourly pay rates there. One service has put in place an incentive package to encourage staff to remain rather than move to another service for an additional 50 cents an hour.

Outside of this, support needs identified by many of those interviewed included tools to aid communication in different languages and with children who are non-verbal or who have communication issues.

Forums to help staff from different services to share and learn from each other (e.g. peer support networks or practice hubs) were also named as well as developing better links between the childcare sector and health professionals so can children can be supported consistently in all settings.

Continuing professional development (CPD) was another support need, particularly short courses that were topic specific. Areas named included:

- Understanding speech and language delay and supporting children with it
- Providing family support

- Behaviour psychology, behaviour management and strategies to address challenging behaviour
- Tusla’s quality framework²⁵
- First Aid (FAR)
- Equality and diversity
- Play therapy
- Dealing with different allergic reactions
- Child protection
- Supporting children with learning difficulties
- Supporting children with additional needs

Some children require one to one support in the classroom and staff suggested either resourcing for additional staff to provide this level of support or the equivalent of Special Needs Assistants (SNA) for childcare settings.

Staff undertaking degrees felt that the current bursary available from Pobal and administered through KCCC was inadequate and not sufficiently proportionate to the cost of Level 8 or 9 qualifications and a higher level of bursary for degree qualification would be beneficial.

Support Needs of Owner/Managers

Owners and managers were asked what the main challenges they faced in running their childcare services.

Challenges for Owner-Managers (Mean score ranking from 1 to 4)

	Mean Score (the lower the score the higher the challenge)
Human resources:	
Hiring staff	1.00
Training and upskilling staff	1.80
Supervision and support for staff	2.00
Obtaining temporary staff cover	2.00
Supervision and support for manager	2.60
Staff retention	2.80
Financial:	
Generating a surplus	1.40
Running costs	1.40
Financial sustainability	1.70
Maintenance and replacement of materials and equipment	1.70
Financial management	1.80

²⁵ While generally welcomed concerns were expressed that this would result in more compliance paperwork and that it might not integrate fully with existing frameworks.

Generating an income for the owner-manager	2.00
Making applications for funding	2.10
Staffing costs	2.20
Impact of different schemes and capitation rates	2.30
Funding for capital investment	2.30
Other business aspects:	
Administration associated with compliance	1.40
Business planning	1.90
Data protection	2.20
Managing demand and waiting lists	2.30
Developing policies and procedures	2.50
Quality assurance	2.50
Communication including social media management	2.60
Children and parents:	
Services for children with or without a diagnosis	2.60
Providing family support	2.60
Supporting transitions for children	2.70
Supporting diversity and inclusion	3.10
Building and maintaining relationships with parents	3.30
Responding to child protection concerns	3.30

Human Resources: Hiring of staff was the single biggest issue. Pay rates were unattractive particularly as the economic upturn has gathered pace and more attractive alternatives are available. For example one person interviewed works part time in childcare and part time in retail and earns three times as much per hour in retail without any of the responsibilities or compliance obligations incurred in childcare. Obtaining temporary staff cover was also difficult.

Only one service had been able to attract men. This was a community service and it had male staff who were bus drivers and caretakers. It also had one man on CE who was doing childcare.

While managers indicated that they had no difficulties to date retaining staff, one had felt the need to put in place an innovative incentive package to ensure staff remained. This person indicated that staff with higher level qualifications (Level 8 or more) were more likely to move after a two year period in childcare. Others had noted more attractive job options for staff with higher level qualifications in Tusla, Better Start and other statutory bodies. Continuity of staff was considered an important component of quality care for children but the childcare business was financially very marginal and did not afford the opportunity to offer attractive pay, terms and conditions.

Supervision and support of staff was also a challenge with managers rating it either high or medium. Manager owners also noted that they had no supervision or support, other than perhaps their partners or colleagues in other sectors (e.g. schools).

Some services that had accessed AIM for children with disabilities had encountered considerable difficulties getting staff to support children under AIM. An example was given of a child who qualified for Level 7 support under AIM who lost out because suitably qualified staff could not be hired.

Accessing affordable training for staff was another challenge identified. In some services staff paid for CPD while in others it was paid for by the service.

Financial: This was the next biggest challenge. With the exception of two services it was rated either medium or high. Generating a surplus was difficult and manager-owners gave examples of going without their own wages on occasion in order to pay staff or cover expenditure.

Staffing accounted for a high percentage of expenditure (c.70-80%) and other running costs, notably insurance and rates, had risen. One service had recently become subject to rates due to ownership of an estate being transferred to the County Council and commented that this would be the difference between financial survival or failure.

Maintenance and replacement costs were not covered by capitation rates and were on-going requirements. Access to funding to enable investment and completing funding applications was considered to be challenging.

Capitation rates under ECCE were lower than what some services had been achieving on a fee paying basis in the past and this had implications for long term sustainability.

Business management: Other aspects of business management considered particularly challenging were administration associated with compliance and schemes, particularly for organisations that have no administration support and business planning. Owner-managers of smaller services were particularly stretched for time to cover all aspects of their business especially when they also were providing childcare directly to children. While data protection was not generally a high challenge, the implications of the General Data Protection Regulation may not yet be fully appreciated.

One manager encapsulated the feelings of frustration when saying *'I feel I am no longer in control of my own business'*.

Children and parents: Many of the issues have already been addressed above. Accessing services for children with supports needs was the single biggest challenge identified as childcare services cannot make direct referrals. At best they can discuss a need with a parent and encourage them to access services. Some had developed good links with local Public Health Nurses to help parents to access services.

Some quotes from managers are provided below.

'The learning side of childcare has been well catered for. We now need to develop supports for additional needs.'

'Assessments for children [with additional support needs] are done in strange places not known as a safe place and children should be assessed in the environment where they are secure and to see reality.'

'With regulation and frameworks I feel I no longer own my business anymore.'

'We need respect from the top down. Childcare is not just about facilitating parents to work.'

'Hiring staff is a big issue.'

'Staff recruitment and retention is an enormous struggle, as wages are low and childcare workers are undervalued.'

'There is little or no direction/guidance for after school. No one is flying the flag for after schools.'

'I feel more valued now than I did 10 years ago.'

'ECCE funding does not cover the daily running of a good quality service.'

'Access to affordable training would be a priority.'

'We meet needs as best we can but the diversity of issues is increasing and it's hard to have the skills to do all.'

'I feel we should be able to support parents more but administration paperwork makes it very difficult to find time.'

'It's hard to get funding if you are a private service.'

'Take the stigma out of Tusla visits – it should be seen as a positive. Change the language used in inspections, do some training for childcare workers and include Tusla inspection process on the curriculum.'

'Services need to do more networking/visiting each other to learn.'

'It is so hard to keep up with all the new regulations, meeting deadlines, registering children on different schemes and amending fees accordingly, getting good qualified staff is a huge issue and short term cover.'

'The hiring and retention of staff is my biggest issue and this has a direct knock on to the experience the children receive. Investment in a staff scale system would solve the problem almost immediately. I feel my practice is suffering due to lack of motivation from the team.'

'Huge change and demands from Government have come through the sector but it has not been supported adequately. A recent example is the requirements from Children First. My own children's primary school closed for a half day so teachers could do their child protection training, paid, in office hours. The early years sector is expected to do this after hours - already we do a day twice as long as a teacher).'

'Clarity for parents re AIM needed due to expectations. Some AIM children do require an SNA which AIM does not cover ECCE capitation for degree plus experience.'

'Staffing is the biggest issue for childcare now. We are constantly struggling to fill roles and retain our best staff. This is because of the new phenomenon of SNA's in primary school. A lot of newly qualified people are looking at this as a preferable role rather than going into an active crèche. We will have to consider downsizing in the near future if we cannot get the quality staff we need.'

'The lack of provision within the funding for the ECCE scheme towards continued professional development including mandatory training is the biggest stumbling block to the whole scheme.'

'Recent advances in funding for the benefit of the parents is very welcome but at what point is the provider going to get the same recognition and support?'

'Happy with the overall improvements in childcare over the years but I am totally bogged down in paperwork and courses and am getting to stage where I am feeling it is just too much work now.'

'Since I started childcare we have grown to be a professional organisation with professional support. It would be nice to be paid for our professionalism now as valuable educators.'

'Regulation of after school would help to put us on the map with regards to childcare. The needs of our SAC are so different from ECCE, we should not be modelling ourselves on ECCE services.'

The online survey asked managers/owners what additional supports they would like in the areas of quality assurance, business management and human resources/ staffing.

Quality assurance: Thirty (41%) indicated that they were managing well in this area and did not require additional support. Fifty-nine percent would like support. The main call was for mentoring:

Additional Support with Quality (N=43)

	Number of Online Respondents indicating Support Need	Percentage of Respondents
Mentoring on quality	17	40%
Quality peer network	12	28%
Linking practice to Aistear and Síolta	11	26%
Increased rate for smaller services	1	2%
More opportunities to renew Síolta validation	1	2%
Recruiting and retaining staff	1	2%

Business management: Thirty-five (51%) indicated they were managing well in this area. Forty-nine percent would like support. The main calls were for help with applications for capital to upgrade infrastructure, Tusla compliance and data management and protection.

Additional Support with Business Management (N=33)

	Number of Online Respondents indicating Support Need	Percentage of Respondents
Applying for capital investment	16	24%
Tusla compliance	15	22%
Data management and protection	14	21%
Pobal compliance	13	19%
Business planning	8	12%
Financial management	7	10%
All of the above	1	3%
Information workshops on Department of Education & Skills site visits	1	3%

The low percentages for business planning and financial management are somewhat surprising, as the experience of KCCC and of those services interviewed is that these are both very challenging areas.

Human resources and staffing: Fifty-two responded and indicated support needs. The main calls were for help with training and upskilling staff and accessing training, obtaining temporary staff cover, supervision and support for managers and hiring staff.

Additional Support with Human Resources and Staffing (N=52)

	Number of Online Respondents indicating Support Need	Percentage of Respondents
Training and upskilling/access to training	30	58%
Obtaining temporary staff cover	29	56%
Supervision and support for managers	17	33%
Hiring staff	16	31%
Retaining staff	11	21%
Staff supervision and support	8	15%

Managers were also asked if releasing staff from work to attend training was an issue. Seventy-two responded of which 48 (67%) indicated this was a difficulty.

Training needs: Sixty-five respondents indicated they would like more training in a number of areas. The main calls were for training in first aid (FAR), developing outdoor play areas, data protection, supporting children with additional needs and quality.

Further Training for Managers (N=65)

	Number of Online Respondents indicating Training Need	Percentage of Respondents
First aid (FAR)	36	55%
Developing outdoor play areas	29	45%
Data protection	25	38%
Supporting children with additional needs	25	38%
Aistear/Síolta/quality	25	38%
Child protection	19	29%
Developing policies and procedures	18	28%
Business planning	10	15%
Financial management	10	15%
How to use observation sheets	1	2%

The main sources of support for managers are KCCC (82%), Early Childhood Ireland (56%), and work peers and colleagues (56%). It is worth noting that Better Start, which provides free mentoring on application, was not named by any service in the ‘other’ option provided at the end of the question on supports or during interviews with services.

Sources of Support for Managers (N=82)

	Number of Managers (Site visits and online)	Percentage of Managers
KCCC	67	82%
Early Childhood Ireland	46	56%
Peers/colleagues	46	56%
AIM	28	34%
Other services	26	32%
Tusla	17	21%
Pobal	15	18%
Public Health Nurse	8	10%
Private consultancy	2	2%
Parents	1	1%
Social media	1	1%
Myself	1	1%

Sixty-eight (92%) respondents to the online survey indicated they had contacted KCCC in the last twelve months. Awareness of KCCC supports was generally high.

Awareness of KCCC Supports (N=72)

	Number of Online Managers	Percentage of Managers
Child protection supports	63	88%
Business supports	59	82%
Governance supports	55	76%
Quality supports	51	71%

Some respondents provided unsolicited positive commentary about KCCC's services. Some examples are provided below.

'Terrific service to have available to us.'

'I value so much the support I receive especially from KCCC.'

'A very supportive service, training programmes are always relevant and accessible to providers.'

'I find the support available from the County Childcare Committee particularly good and if they don't know the answer they will put you in the right direction. Their support is vital but limited to the confines of the current provisions for childcare nationally.'

'Very helpful and friendly.'

Support Needs of Childminders

Childminders feel under-valued and not respected in the current environment.

'We are seen as the cheap and last resort option.'

'We are seen as someone who puts the kids in front of the TV.'

'We are not seen as professionals.'

'We are doing more babies and wobblers as crèches don't want to.'

'The main challenge I face is people's perception of childminders. I am beginning to feel it affecting my confidence.'

'The Government doesn't value childminders.'

The reasons they believe parents choose them include flexibility, providing a 'home from home', smaller numbers of children, individual attention for each child, value for money, willingness to be on call to pick up sick children from school or childcare services, bringing children to and from childcare services or school, continuity of care and providing cover during out of term time.

Proposals²⁶ to regulate childminding is raising concerns about the practical implications for childminding in a home setting. Current regulations are not considered to take the home setting into consideration. There was anger that voluntary notification with Child Minding Ireland was no longer acceptable and access to schemes like ECCE and AIM was only available to Tusla registered childminders, of which there are only two in the entire County. Five online respondents (83%) indicated they would avail of a voluntary registration scheme if it were reintroduced.

The online survey and interviews asked about the potential impact of possible regulation of childminders. Childminders believe it will necessitate additional training for them and additional resourcing and possible adaptation of their homes if the current regulations applied to childcare services are applied to childminders. The majority also felt that it would support what they as childminders do and improve the quality of childminding. Some concerns were expressed that it could damage the 'home from home' aspect of childminding and that it could put some childminders out of business.

²⁶ Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector

Potential Impact of Introduction of Regulation of Childminders (N=6)

	Extent of Agreement with Statement Percentage of online respondents			Weighted average ²⁷
	Agree	Disagree	Not sure	
<i>It will require additional resourcing for childminders</i>	6 100%	0	0	1.00
<i>I would require additional training</i>	6 100%	0	0	1.00
<i>It will support what we as childminders do</i>	5 83%	1 17%	0	1.17
<i>I would be concerned that I may have to adapt my house</i>	5 83%	1 17%	0	1.17
<i>It will improve the quality of childminding</i>	3 50%	1 17%	2 33%	1.83
<i>It will make it difficult to maintain the 'home from home' aspect of childminding</i>	3 50%	1 17%	2 33%	1.83
<i>It will put many childminders out of business</i>	2 33%	1 17%	3 50%	2.17

Some quotes from childminders regarding regulation are provided below.

'I feel that childcare in people's own homes is a very valuable and needed service for working mums and there is a danger if it is regulated it will do harm.'

'We are a home-from-home service and do not wish to be turned into mini-crèches as we are completely different. Any regulations need to be tailored for childminders and any inspections need to be adapted to how unique childminding is.'

'Childminders need support, training, respect and recognition and assurances that our form of childcare will not be destroyed by bureaucracy. There are already a great deal of experienced minders already preparing to leave the industry out of fear and lack of information.'

Recognition of prior learning was identified as a need as well as support to update qualifications and training that recognised that childminders were self-employed and only available to train in the evenings or at weekends. Childminders would like to see funding ring fenced for initiatives to support childminders and to protect the provision of childcare in a home setting. Training needs included first aid, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), play therapy and supporting children with additional needs. Training was considered important as a confidence booster, opportunity to meet with peers and as a support mechanism.

Childminders feel their only support network is peers. Childminders would welcome the reinstatement of advisory support again particularly to help prepare childminders for possible regulation. KCCC is not considered a source of support at this time as it is felt its focus is on childcare services, with few training courses offered to childminders and only when places

²⁷ The lower the score the higher the agreement with the statement

are left over. Timing of training in the past limited accessibility for childminders, who prefer weekend options.

Support Needs of Community Childcare Boards of Management

County Kildare has comparatively few community childcare services. In all there are twelve. The chairpersons of these services were invited to provide feedback on the issues they face as members of a board of management of a community childcare service. Seven participated. Interviews focussed on the board of management, compliance, human resources, finances and planning.

Boards of management: Getting people with the right skills and experience was a challenge for most of the boards. Retaining board members was a much lesser challenge. However, some boards comprised of people who had been there a long time and who did not necessarily have the required competencies for the board of a modern childcare service. Three were part of a wider organisation with one board overseeing all operations of the organisation. Chairpersons commented about board members being passive and not fully engaged in some cases. There were also examples of committed and dedicated board members. Apart from one organisation which is going through a management crisis, board meetings had set agendas, took place regularly and were considered effective. Three identified strategic planning as a challenge. Generally there was clarity over roles, responsibilities and boundaries but examples of some instances of blurred boundaries between the board and management and staff were given. Risk assessment tended not to be a formal agenda item and was generally limited to financial risks and health and safety risks.

	Extent of Challenge			
	High	Medium	Low	Not a challenge
Getting people with relevant skills and experience to come on to the Board	3 43%	1 14%	2 29%	1 14%
Retaining people on the Board	1 14%	0	3 43%	3 43%
Having clarity over the roles and responsibilities of the chairperson, secretary, treasurer and other Board members	1 14%	1 14%	1 14%	4 57%
Having clarity over roles, responsibilities and boundaries between the Board, management and staff	1 14%	1 14%	1 14%	4 57%
Obtaining sufficient information to make decisions about your childcare service	1 14%	1 14%	2 29%	3 43%
Engaging in strategic planning for your childcare service	2 29%	1 14%	2 29%	2 29%
Identifying and mitigating risks for your childcare service	2 29%	0	4 57%	1 14%
Having regular effective meetings	1 14%	0	0	6 86%
Setting agendas for meetings	0	0	0	7 100%

Compliance: Good managers with open clear lines of communication with the board were considered very important in keeping boards apprised of developments, risks, new legislation or regulations, developing policies and procedures and providing performance and financial information. The majority felt that compliance was not a challenge. However, two named it as a medium level challenge in respect of childcare regulations and one each in respect of company law and policies and procedures because of the time commitment required.

	Extent of Challenge			
	High	Medium	Low	Not a challenge
Complying with childcare regulations	0	2 29%	0	5 71%
Complying with legislation, e.g. health and safety, company law, employment law, etc.	0	1 14%	1 14%	5 71%
Developing and updating policies and procedures for your childcare service	0	1 14%	0	6 86%

Human resources: Hiring qualified and experienced childcare staff was a challenge for just under half of boards. Retaining staff, however, was generally not a challenge. Service managers played an important role in managing human resources and in keeping abreast of employment law. Some indicated that financial constraints limited the training budget available for CPD of staff.

	Extent of Challenge			
	High	Medium	Low	Not a challenge
Hiring qualified and experienced childcare staff	3 43%	0	0	4 57%
Retaining staff	1 14%	0	0	6 86%
Managing staff resources in your childcare service	2 29%	0	2 29%	3 43%
Keeping up to date with employment law	1 14%	0	1	5 71%

Financial sustainability: The majority of boards are concerned about the finances and funding of their childcare service and rate it a high challenge. Most are only about breaking-even and some are not. Only two indicated they were generating on-going surpluses, even though in one case these were very small. Where a wider organisation was involved, payment for some costs associated with the childcare service such as heating or insurance might be paid out of other budgets within the wider organisation. A small number of children can make a big difference to the financial situation. For some, a dilemma was whether or not to expand the number of places because if too few children took up additional places, the fees would not cover additional staff costs required to comply with child: adult ratios. The cost of

repairs and maintenance and replacing toys and equipment was an on-going challenge for most.

	Extent of Challenge			
	High	Medium	Low	Not a challenge
Managing the finances and funding of your childcare service	5 71%	0	2 29%	0
Achieving break even, i.e. where costs are covered by income	4 57%	2 29%	1 14%	0
Managing the assets of your childcare service	3 43%	1 14%	2 29%	1 14%

Planning: Setting objectives, action planning or monitoring performance was not considered a challenge by the majority. However, in further discussion it emerged that some did not have formal written plans and only capacity in terms of uptake of childcare places was monitored.

	Extent of Challenge			
	High	Medium	Low	Not a challenge
Setting objectives for your childcare service	1 14%	0	1 14%	5 71%
Developing action plans for your childcare service	1 14%	0	1 14%	5 71%)
Monitoring performance against targets and actions	1 14%	1 14%	1 14%	4 57%

Training and support: One board oversees a school with a pre-school attached to it and has received training in governance from the Department of Education and Skills, which it found very useful. One had recently been supported by KCCC to develop a business plan. Another had received support from Kildare Local Enterprise Office with developing a business plan but the organisation is in crisis and needs more intensive support. Other sources of support have been parents, County Kildare LEADER Partnership, Early Childhood Ireland and Pobal. Chairpersons were asked if they would like additional training for their boards. All bar one would like further training but a number commented on the difficulty of getting board members to attend training. The training named was as follows:

- Strategic and business planning (3)
- Human resource planning and management (1)
- Financial planning and management (1)
- Developing policies and procedures (1)
- Governing a community organisation (1)
- Marketing (1)
- How to fundraise and source funding (1)

Service Development

Managers and staff were asked to name aspects of their service they would like to develop. A number of themes emerged:

- Sensory rooms, not just for children with additional support needs but for all children.
- More space for children.
- Outdoor spaces and activities²⁸.
- Before school opening hours to accommodate working parents²⁹.
- After school, particularly purpose built, with adequate staffing ratios and outdoor areas.
- Achieving a better balance between doing necessary paperwork and interactions with children³⁰.
- Developing strategies to engage more with working parents.
- Developing better links with health services.

Childcare as a Profession

Strong views were expressed by childcare managers, staff and childminders that the profession of early childhood care and education was not valued or adequately resourced.

This was reflected in pay, terms and conditions. Pay rates are generally low and many workers are not paid during holiday periods and have to sign on for social welfare. The cost of necessary qualifications was considered prohibitive. There is no resourcing for the provision for in-service training days. Some staff commented on insufficient non-contact hours resulting in paperwork being taken home and completed in their own time.

Childcare providers do not feel respected by other professionals, e.g. in education or health. They feel that their opinion and observations of children are not given due consideration when children have additional support needs.

They believe that children would benefit from a more integrated approach to care. For example, by Speech and Language therapists sharing notes on actions to be taken with children – this happens in some cases but not all. Another example was the detailed observations that childcare workers provide to parents could aid transitions to primary schools if shared with teachers (although staff do recognise potential data protection issues in this regard). Earlier assessment of needs and observation of children by health professionals within childcare settings was another example given of how a more joined up approach could

²⁸ Two managers commented that it was important that staff understand, value and are willing to engage in outdoor activities with children.

²⁹ Sessional services also expressed fears that by doing this they would become subject to rates and this could have a significant impact on financial sustainability.

³⁰ One suggestion was to cluster services into groups of five and have them serviced by an administrator on a job share basis.

be adopted. Again, some examples of where this had happened were given but these were exceptional and not the norm.

Gaps in Service Provision

Parents, childcare managers, childcare workers and childminders were asked about gaps in services within their areas. Gaps were identified in terms of age groups catered for, particular needs and in specific areas.

Views of Services

Managers and staff were very useful sources of information about service provision in specific areas. Many staff lived close to the service and were parents themselves with young children and had direct experience of accessing services. The picture that emerged from consultations with services was that some parts of the County are better served than others.

Municipal Districts: Areas that were generally considered well catered for in terms of childcare services were Kilcullen, Clane and Newbridge. Areas considered to be reasonably well serviced were Naas and Athy, although services for children aged under two were considered lacking in the latter and inadequate in Naas. Areas considered to be poorly serviced were Maynooth and Celbridge/Leixlip relative to the size of the population and trends in births, Kildare Town, Monasterevin, Kill, Prosperous and surrounding area. Examples of services that had closed or were planning to close or to reduce places were given for the Donadea area, Prosperous and Kildare. A number of the services interviewed had waiting lists and had expanded their services by opening additional rooms or offering more than one session.

Age groups: Places for children aged six months to two years were considered inadequate in all areas and parents relied on relatives or childminders. This was confirmed by feedback from parents and childminders. One service had recently expanded the number of places provided for children aged six months to two years as a result of demand from parents.

Places for pre-school children aged two and a half to four years were considered to be generally sufficient and this age group was the best serviced in the County. However, there were some calls for the number of hours covered by ECCE to be extended from three to four hours in order to accommodate working parents.

Children with additional needs: Staff named childcare services for children with additional support needs as the most frequent gap. Staff commented that services did not have sufficient resources to provide one-to-one support to children with additional needs on an on-going basis. AIM was welcomed as an initiative to support integration of children with additional needs. Being able to hire staff to support children already qualified under AIM Level 7 was a challenge for some services and examples of children who had missed out on AIM support were given because of this issue. Examples were also given of children with physical or intellectual disabilities who had been moved by their parents from one childcare service to another because the level of care and support was considered insufficient. Some concerns were raised about continuity of care under AIM once a child transitions to primary school.

There were also suggestions that AIM be extended to pre-school children and to after school children.

Staff also would like to see earlier intervention with children with additional support needs, particularly in respect of access to assessments for hearing, vision, speech and language. Staff noted that many parents were paying privately to access these services because waiting times were too long (two years was quoted frequently).

Afterschool: Access to after school services varied from area to area and was the second most frequently named service that there were gaps in across all areas. Generally the age group five to 10 years were considered reasonably well catered for by services either based in schools or outside schools. However, the 10-14 age group was not well catered for.

After school was generally considered to be an area that required further development, not just in terms of service provision, but also in respect of the type of service on offer. In general, staff believe that after school services should be regulated with clear staffing ratios. While a small number believe that after school activities should be programmed and structured in the way that pre-school now is, the majority, particularly those operating after schools, believe that this would not be beneficial. Children have already spent a considerable amount of time in school on a given day and they need a place where they can relax, 'chill out' and be amongst friends. Children should be able to plan their activities and to have a range of indoor and outdoor options available.

Providers of after school noted that older age groups really wanted to be outdoors and having adequate outdoor space for them to play games like football was important, but not always possible to provide in their current locations. Being able to provide separate areas indoors for different age groups was also a challenge. Older children (10-14) did not want to attend a childcare service, nor necessarily be with younger children, and a different model of after school service based elsewhere needed to be developed.

Staff also needed specific training in how to provide after school care to different age groups. Areas mentioned included emotional development and support needs, supporting children with additional needs and, if homework clubs were part of the service, having the necessary skills to support children with homework.

Views of Parents

Fourteen percent of parents indicated they had no difficulty accessing childcare services in their area. Access was particularly challenging for parents in Maynooth, Newbridge/Kildare and Leixlip/Celbridge.

Percentage of Parents Indicating No Difficulty Accessing Childcare Services

Athy	Leixlip/ Celbridge	Maynooth	Naas	Newbridge/Kildare	Total
5 out of 13 38%	17 out of 126 13%	7 out of 127 6%	13 out of 23 57%	3 out of 39 8%	45 out of 328 14%

The main services that parents had difficulty accessing were services that provide flexible hours (24% of parents), pre-school ECCE places (22%), places for children under 12 months (19%) and out of school term services (19%).

Difficulty Accessing Services Identified by Parents

	Percentage of Parents Indicating a Difficulty
Services with flexible hours	24%
Pre-school ECCE places	22%
Places for children under 12 months	19%
Out of school term/school holidays	19%
After school children aged 5-10 years	13%
Places for children aged 3-5 years	11%
Places for children aged 1 to 3 years	11%
Full day care	9%
Childminders	8%
Places for children with additional needs	3%
After school children aged 11-14 years	3%

Examples of some quotes from parents are given below.

'Affordable childcare is nearly non-existent. Private care is expensive and often there is no care during school holidays, Christmas and Easter time. Childcare places should be open Mon-Sat and should operate all days except bank holidays or national holidays.'

'Good quality services in the county. Good options for childcare over 12 months. Difficult to source childcare for under 12 months (especially full day).'

'Childcare is expensive. It would be great to see a government childcare scheme/crèche/after school in Celbridge to help parents work and afford childcare. I also think childcare should be tax deductible going forward. Celbridge has a large population but no option of cheaper/subsidised places for childcare in the summer months or term time.'

'While it was not a concern for me with my little boy at the time, I am concerned of the limited (no) childcare facilities for babies under 1 year old.'

'For children with ASD special needs it's very difficult to access classes for speech therapy etc. to help the child with development delays. The parents are expected to manage everything themselves.'

'Not enough places. It's necessary to enrol a child soon after birth to get a place by the time child is 2.5-3 years old. ECCE should start earlier with less rigid dates for intake. None of my 3 children receive 2 full years of free childcare because their birthdays fall outside the rigid time line.'

'Not enough space in afterschool clubs for parents who want to return to work.'

Types of Gaps

Appendix B gives a detailed breakdown of all responses from parents, childminders and childcare services to questions about gaps in services by Municipal District (MD). The table below provides an overall summary.

The main gaps identified were in respect of services that provide flexible hours (35%), places for children under 12 months of age (29%), out of school term time services (26%), places for children with additional needs aged three to five (24%), pre-school ECCE services (22%) and after school places for children aged five to ten (20%).

Difficulty Accessing and Gaps Identified by Parents, Childminders and Childcare Services

	Percentage of Respondents
Services with flexible hours	35%
Children under 12 months	29%
Out of school term/school holidays	26%
Places for children with additional needs aged 3 to 5	24%
Pre-school ECCE	22%
After school children aged 5-10 years	20%
Children aged 1 to 3 years	19%
Places for children with additional needs aged under 3	17%
After school children aged 11-14 years	15%
Full day care	15%
Childminders	15%
Children aged 3-5 years	12%
Places for children with additional needs aged 6 to 14	11%
Places for children with additional needs any age group	5%

MDs that had significantly higher than the average percentages given above were as follows.

Difficulty Accessing and Main Gaps Identified by Parents, Childminders and Childcare Services in Municipal Districts

	Main MDs
Services with flexible hours	Maynooth, Leixlip/Celbridge, Athy
Children under 12 months	Athy, Maynooth, Naas
Out of school term/school holidays	Newbridge/Kildare, Naas
Places for children with additional needs aged 3 to 5	Maynooth
Pre-school ECCE	Athy, Newbridge
After school children aged 5-10 years	Newbridge/Kildare
Children aged 1 to 3 years	Maynooth
Places for children with additional needs aged under 3	Maynooth, Leixlip/Celbridge
After school children aged 11-14 years	Newbridge/Kildare
Full day care	Naas
Childminders	Maynooth, Leixlip/Celbridge
Children aged 3-5 years	Maynooth, Naas
Places for children with additional needs aged 6 to 14	Leixlip/Celbridge
Places for children with additional needs any age group	Newbridge/Kildare

Some quotes about gaps are provided below.

'I feel there is a huge need for more full day care and After school and school holidays. It's difficult for parents to get care for young babies in childcare services.' [Athy]

'There is a recent surge in ECCE services opening in Naas, to the detriment of other childcare needs. Three have opened in recent times with multiple rooms all ECCE and one after school. Getting care for babies seems near impossible as it seems many crèches no longer offer this service.' [Naas]

'Services tend to support ECCE years, a lack of before and after school services.' [Maynooth]

'Not enough full-time crèches in Kildare town. We currently have a waiting list of 9+ months.' [Kildare]

'I feel there is a lot of children not getting the ECCE. I had to turn away 6 children since January. I feel with the number of young families moving to the Leixlip area that there are not enough early years services available. Particularly parents are looking for ECCE places and after school places. Some are also looking for breakfast clubs.' [Leixlip]

'Full day care poor in my particular area.' [Athy]

'Not enough places. It's necessary to enrol a child soon after birth to get a place by the time the child is 2½-3 years old.' [Leixlip]

'There is not enough choice of crèches in Maynooth. Very difficult to get part time crèche places. Hours offered by crèches are often not suitable for people commuting to Dublin (e.g. 8am opening is too late, 6pm closing is too early).' [Maynooth]

'I have had to go with an afternoon slot for my child in his ECCE playschool and even at that we were on a waiting list first. Originally when he was under one I had to use a crèche in Celbridge because nowhere in Maynooth would take under 1 yrs and nowhere had space.' [Maynooth]

'I wish there were more child care options in Leixlip area.' [Leixlip]

'Very limited over expensive unregulated after schools.' [Maynooth]

'I found it so difficult to find a childminder for my under 1yr baby – crèche not an option as I work shift work.' [Leixlip]

'I would like to see more after and before school services provided within primary schools.' [Newbridge]

'Not enough space in after school clubs.' [Newbridge]

External Stakeholders

Consultations were held with CYPSC, Tusla (inspectorate, prevention and family support), County Kildare LEADER Partnership, Kildare Local Enterprise Office and Kildare and Wicklow Education Training Board.

The main themes to emerge from these discussions were:

- **Compliance** in childcare services with staffing requirements such as Garda vetting, qualifications and checking of references requires improvement.
- **Pay and conditions** of staff are impacting on motivation, morale and the ability to hire staff.

- *Staff development* is needed including CPD, supervision, support and mentoring.
- In-depth understanding by childcare workers needed to be developed about what the regulations mean and why they are important to follow in practice. It was felt that current *training* provision did not adequately prepare childcare workers for understanding and complying with regulation. Compliance with childcare regulations is currently not a module and this needs to be addressed. It was also felt that there needed to be a greater emphasis in training on the care and development aspects of childcare.
- *Financial sustainability* of childcare services, particularly smaller services, is a concern. Capitation rates may be inadequate to support these services going forward.
- Gaps in services for children aged *0-3* and the skills necessary to manage these services were noted.
- Gaps in *after schools* service provision and the skills necessary to manage and care for children in these settings were noted.
- Concerns were expressed about the impact of *paperwork* on service provision (non-contact versus contact time), particularly compliance with Pobal requirements, e.g. administering schemes. Basic *IT skills* were also identified as a challenge that requires further development. This will become increasingly important as more services and statutory agencies move online.
- Time poor *working parents* and the stress they are under was a concern. Services need to understand and to be supportive of parents and start from a position that parents are trying their best for their children.
- Concerns were expressed about some children being in *childcare from very early ages*. Extending entitlements to parental leave for children up to the age of three was considered one possible option to support parents to remain at home longer.
- Dominance of private services in the County with relatively few *community childcare* services was noted.
- *Childminders* also need support and the reintroduction of the Childminder Advisory service was put forward as a possible solution.
- Inadequate investment in areas that are not designated disadvantaged was an issue, particularly in *prevention and early intervention* ranging from speech and language and motor development to child protection and family support. An example of pre-

school parent co-ordinators used in Tallaght to identify issues and engage with parents was given as a possible model that might be considered for Kildare. Another example was parent and toddler groups run by Public Health Nurses in Drimnagh. Family resource centres, staff training, parent and toddler groups and programmes like Strengthening Families were also named as potential models of supporting parents. The Parenting Forum website, www.parentingsupport.ie is also a source of information about courses for parents. Given that most services in Kildare are private, guidance on providing parenting supports was considered necessary.

- *Interagency collaboration* was seen as an important mechanism to address County-wide issues and gaps and to provide resources. However, it was acknowledged that little progress could be made without the inclusion of the main service providers. In Kildare these are private individuals and organisations and they often find it difficult to release staff for training, let alone to engage with interagency structures. Resources to enable them to engage were considered necessary.
- *Development officers* to support community organisations or to enable community infrastructure to be put in place were in short supply in the County. An interagency approach to resourcing this was considered a possible way forward. The LCDC also has a role through the planning process in the physical development of childcare services that is not left solely to the marketplace.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section examines the main findings from this needs analysis and other research recently carried out in Kildare and identifies key actions that should be progressed in the coming years.

What This and Other Pieces of Research Tell Us about Needs in Kildare

In 2016, KCCC conducted an online survey of services on its database. The top issues to emerge from the findings for childcare providers were **financial sustainability** (including funding), **staffing** (including pay rates), **regulations** and **paperwork**. The feedback indicated a sense of anger, **frustration** and low morale with calls for the profession to be valued and for more **investment** in quality childcare. All of these issues have been re-affirmed in this needs analysis.

Managers particularly highlighted challenges in hiring and, in some cases, retaining qualified and experienced staff. Parents commented about affordability and the high cost of childcare. Wage rates were acknowledged by parents and service managers to be low but many services struggle with financial sustainability. Childcare overseas, working for statutory agencies, inspectorates and special needs assistants in schools were all named as attractive alternatives for qualified childcare workers. Low wage rates may also be impacting on the gender balance within childcare services, which is now nearly completely dominated by female workers.

In 2017, Kildare CYPSC and Kildare/West Wicklow Parenting Forum commissioned research to identify the needs and concerns of parents of children aged 6 to 12³¹. Childcare was named as an area of fairly serious concern for some parents. The main areas of concern were **affordability**, **access** to childcare, notably in areas such as Monasterevin, Athy and Leixlip, suitability and services for children with **special needs**, **choice**, **availability** and **timing** and transport links to childcare services. Parents also expressed concerns about having **time** to give to their children, financial security, access to parental support, keeping their children safe from harm and the impact of social media. Once more, all of these issues emerged in the needs analysis.

Working parents have emerged as a key group that need supports specifically targeted at them. There are many schemes and initiatives available for low income or unemployed households, but very few for working parents. Feedback from some working parents described considerable financial strain meeting childcare costs, long days due to commute times and inflexible service hours that do not cater for their needs.

³¹ 'Needs and Concerns of Parents in County Kildare: Report from the Research and Consultation Process', Kildare Children & Young People's Services Committee and Kildare/West Wicklow Parenting Forum, 2017.

There was a strong call from working parents for provision of flexible hours in childcare provision and out of school term hours that accommodate parents who commute or who are on shift work or flexi-time. Many parents have to rely on multiple sources of childcare including crèches, pre-schools, grandparents or other relatives, childminders and after school services to meet their needs.

The key **parental support** named by parents in the needs analysis was information about what childcare is available followed by opportunities to meet other parents and to take part in parenting programmes.

Childcare providers also felt that parents needed information about child psychology, development and behaviour. It is important that childcare services do not develop cultures of blame whereby parents are seen as a problem in relation to their child's development or behaviour. Supportive environments have strategies to engage, inform and work with parents and understand the financial, time and emotional pressures parents face in modern Ireland.

Family support infrastructure in Kildare in general is poor and there are limited opportunities for parents to access these types of support. Kildare recently was awarded contracts for two Family Resource Centres (one mid-County and one in the south) but this still leaves a gap in the north of the County where there is a high concentration of population.

While community childcare services see family support as an integral part of what they do, they are very much in the minority in terms of both service provision and the range of services they see as being part of their remit. Ninety-four percent of services in Kildare are provided by private individuals or organisations. The majority of those interviewed see family support as someone else's job. If a more integrated model of childcare that includes family support is to develop, then private childcare providers need to be included in any interagency approaches to addressing needs in the County.

Gaps in services were particularly evident in the **commuter belt** of north Kildare, where the growth in a wide range of services, including childcare has not kept pace with population growth. Housing planning therefore has a role to play in ensuring new housing developments are adequately catered for in terms of childcare.

There were also some indications that some smaller services in **rural areas** were struggling and gaps in services are beginning to emerge, notably in the middle to north of the County. The economics of childcare is very finely balanced, particularly for sessional services where the addition or loss of a few children can be the difference between economic success or failure.

In other parts of Ireland, **community childcare** plays an important role in addressing gaps in service provision. The current model of community childcare based on voluntary boards of management however may need to be revised. Community and voluntary organisations in general are finding it increasingly difficult to attract people with the right mix of skills, experience and interest. Co-operative models or clustering of services under one umbrella

may need to be considered as options if community childcare is to play a sustainable role in addressing gaps in the County.

Some areas, notably South County Dublin, have addressed the economic question by encouraging services to merge. Some of the private services interviewed for this needs analysis proposed shared services models where core administration, finance and payroll were shared between a number of service providers.

Other gaps to emerge in the need analysis were provision for **children aged two and under** and growing demand for places for **babies** as women return to work. The competencies necessary for caring for very young children and babies are different from those required for pre-school children.

More **after school** services were called for as well as guidelines on how they should operate and how best to cater for the needs of juniors (aged 5 to 10) and seniors (aged 11 to 14). The competencies necessary for after school care are also different from pre-school. Staff require skills to address emotional needs of different age groups and to be able to effectively support children with homework.

Outdoor play areas for children of all ages is an investment need, yet many services indicated they struggled to keep abreast of maintenance and repairs let alone investing in new infrastructure. However, some services have been innovative in the use of recycled materials and the creative use of space to develop interesting outdoor play areas at very low cost. Sharing learning between services might be a useful way forward.

Additional support needs emerged, particularly for children where English is their second language, children with allergies, speech and language for young children in pre-school and supporting children with disabilities of all ages. Concerns were raised by childcare workers about the impact of screen based devices on the communication and motor skills of children from very young ages. Staff would like additional training in how best to meet the full range of additional needs. There were also some suggestions to support early intervention through visiting speech and language therapy, visual and hearing tests conducted in pre-school and expanding AIM beyond ECCE.

Birth date eligibility criteria means that some children will not get full benefit and/or will attend school too early. Parents with children in this category would like to see a flat two year access to ECCE that is not linked to birth date for any child under the age of four.

Additional **supports needs for services** included mentoring on quality, data protection, applying for funding and Tusla compliance. Staff called for additional training about first aid, allergies, child psychology, supporting children with additional needs, providing family support, child protection, equality and diversity, play therapy, understanding speech and language, child behaviour and Tusla's quality framework. The main challenges identified by managers related to human resources, particularly hiring staff, quality assurance and data protection. Financial sustainability was also a major concern for some.

Childcare workers' **perceptions** were that other professionals such as teachers and therapists do not value childcare. They believe that childcare is the poor relation of school. Many childcare workers interviewed described their roles as 'teachers' or 'educators'. This may partly reflect the introduction of a curriculum and education inspections but also the type of **training** received by childcare workers when they are qualifying. It is important that childcare is seen as different and separate from school, with its greater emphasis on minding, play, emotional development and creativity, and that this is reflected in the training provided to childcare workers. From the child's perspective, no matter what age, they want to **play**, have fun and be with **friends**. What is important to parents in childcare provision is that their children are **happy and safe**, have **time devoted** to them by **experienced staff** in a **reliable and affordable** service that is **proximate** to where they either live or work.

Some concerns were raised that **investment** in ECCE had been at the expense of other types of childcare services. The 'them and us' situation that appears to be present between childcare services and childminders is not healthy or productive and needs to be addressed. Both are equally valid forms of childcare and the many parents use both types. It is important that all forms of childcare receive the **recognition** they deserve and are adequately resourced.

Proposed **regulation of after schools and childminders** has the potential to create a huge problem if not handled carefully with supports put in place to enable services to see the benefits and to comply. Both these services are different and distinct from pre-school, which is what regulations currently address. They therefore will require different types of regulation tailored to their circumstances.

Challenges and Barriers to Development of Kildare's Childcare Sector

There are many challenges and barriers to development of a vibrant childcare sector in the County.

Different perspectives prevail about the role of childcare. For some it is primarily about education; for others it is about care; yet others focus on the child's development and some believe it is all of these things. A national dialogue about the role of childcare and the type of childcare provision we want is necessary in order to develop a clear vision for the sector going forward. Sight must not be lost of the role of parents as the primary educators and carers of their children. Given the importance of the first three years of life, mechanisms to support parents during this critical stage should be developed. We make one such proposal in terms of extending entitlements to parental leave.

There are different regulatory and quality frameworks governing the childcare sector. This increases the administrative burden on providers. Streamlining would support greater efficiency.

Investment in the childcare sector is not keeping pace with demand. On the one hand, parents are struggling to meet the cost of childcare, yet on the other, childcare services are struggling with financial sustainability. Financial and other pressures mean that many women return to

work as soon as possible but they find it difficult to access childcare for babies and young children outside of relatives or childminders. Services do not provide such services because staffing ratio requirements make it financially challenging. Research is currently underway by the DCYA into the cost of childcare and a review is also being conducted of the County Childcare Committees. These pose a challenge as no decisions on investment will be made until they are completed.

The County is also under-resourced in terms of surrounding services that can support childcare such as family resource centres and various therapies like speech and language. Waiting lists for access to assessments and therapy mean that issues identified in pre-school are not being addressed early.

At a County level, much of the work on childcare development has been left to KCCC. However, the needs are exceeding its resources. The current staff of eight³² is fully taken up with work related to national programmes and schemes, AIM, Síolta, Aistear, child protection, training and supporting services. Addressing gaps in supply will require an inter-agency approach on a County-wide level.

A major challenge in Kildare is that the majority of childcare services are privately owned. Without their involvement in an interagency approach it will be difficult to make progress. Ways to encourage and engage with private providers need to be found if gaps in provision are to be addressed.

CYPSC and KCCC have key roles to play as co-ordinators of interagency actions. The local authority also has a key role in ensuring that planning for childcare facilities is incorporated into new housing developments. KCCC and County Kildare LEADER Partnership have a role to play in supporting the development of community childcare facilities to address identified and emerging gaps in supply. KCCC also has a role in identifying and encouraging private service providers that are capable of expansion. Kildare Local Enterprise Office has a role to play in the provision of training and in strategic mentoring³³.

Parents want their children to be happy and safe and children want to play and be with friends. While parents choose experience over qualifications, research shows that higher qualified childcare providers give better experiences for children, particularly in regard to play-based and child-led provision³⁴. Many staff interviewed considered their primary role to be that of ‘educator’ and it is important that sight is not lost of the role of play in the care of pre-school children and the caring skill-sets required to look after very young children and babies.

The skill sets required for after school provision are also different. Staff should be able to support children with homework, to address emotional needs and to provide age appropriate

³² Four full time and four part time.

³³ Because mentoring is an expensive resources, KLEO only provides mentoring that is of a strategic nature and that covers areas not addressed already within training programmes.

³⁴ OECD 2012

activities. At the moment, the main age range that goes to after school is children aged 5 to 10. This begs the question where are the 11 to 14 year old children going after school? Is after school not used for them because they (and/or their parents) do not consider it an age appropriate option, are they ‘latch-key kids’, are they with childminders? A challenge is how to develop an after school sector that is attractive and relevant to this age group. The after school sector is also currently unregulated. There are plans to regulate the sector and this is to be welcomed but it is important that the regulations are specific to and take into consideration the needs and ethos of after school.

The demands on the childcare sector from government and parents are increasing. On-going CPD is an important tool to support staff to meet these demands. However, a challenge for services is being able to release staff for training and who should bear the cost of CPD.

Recommendations

The recommendations set out below are presented by stakeholder group.

Recommendations for the DCYA:

The recommendations in respect of the DCYA are presented under three themes: policy, investment and training.

Policy:

1. In the context of the National Early Years Strategy, develop a clear vision for the childcare sector.
2. Encourage streamlining of various regulatory and quality frameworks that govern the sector.
3. Consider extending entitlements to parental leave for up to three years.
4. Review the use of predefined birth dates for the two free ECCE years to determine if it would be possible to introduce a more flexible arrangement that enabled all children under the age of four to access two free years.
5. Extend the AIM programme to younger children and to children attending after school.
6. In the context of the General Data Protection Regulation which comes into force in May 2018 and calls from services for information and training in data protection, DCYA should provide direction to County Childcare Committees about their role in providing such information and training and provide additional funding if they have a role to play.

Investment:

7. Broaden investment in childcare beyond ECCE to include very young babies and children, after school provision and childminders.

8. Review pay and conditions, which are directly linked to resourcing and investment, to determine at what level they need to be for the sector to be attractive to new entrants.
9. Take the needs of working parents into consideration in the design of any programmes or investment initiatives. Resources need to be adequate to accommodate flexible and out of term time provision.
10. Speech and language delay was identified as an emerging need. A visiting speech and language service that goes into pre-schools should be developed.
11. Reintroduce a county-based Childminding Advisory Officer post to support childminders to prepare for the introduction of regulations and inspections.
12. Review with Pobal the adequacy of resources provided to meet process and reporting needs associated with the administration by County Childcare Committees of national programmes and schemes.

Training:

13. Review training for childcare workers under the QQI National Quality Framework to ensure there is adequate emphasis on the caring and developmental aspects of children of different ages.
14. Training should ensure that childcare workers have a good understanding of childcare regulation. Achieving an understanding of the regulations and their application should be a stated learning outcome for courses in childcare, including short courses and online courses.
15. Review the adequacy of the bursary provided through Pobal to childcare workers.

Recommendations for Local Agencies:

The issues identified in this needs analysis are beyond the resources and remit of any single agency to address. A collaborative approach is necessary.

Childcare Working Group:

16. This needs analysis should be used by KCCC to bring stakeholders in the County together to convene an inter-agency working group on childcare.
17. The working group should develop a plan of action for inter-agency collaboration including resourcing of new actions that address the recommendations in this report.

Family Support:

18. Family support needs to be strengthened both as a separate service and as an integral part of childcare provision. KCCC should advocate for the appropriate body to provide Family Support Workers to work with services to support parents.
19. If the DCYA believes that County Childcare Committees are the appropriate body then sufficient resourcing must be put in place to enable them to fulfil this role.

Training:

20. There was mixed levels of awareness about Tusla's quality framework. Tusla should engage in a programme of information giving to services (managers and staff) to help them become familiar with the new framework or provide funding to KCCC to deliver information and training about the quality framework.

Community Childcare:

21. KCCC and County Kildare LEADER Partnership should identify the potential for developing community childcare.
22. Community childcare should form part of the mix of solutions to addressing gaps in provision. However, considerable development work is required to assist community childcare groups to form and develop. The possibility of inter-agency funding for a development worker who would be based in KCCC should be explored.
23. The current organisational model of community childcare that involves voluntary boards of management is proving challenging to maintain. Other options such as co-operative models or encouraging existing providers to come together into one organisation need to be explored by County Kildare LEADER Partnership and KCCC.

Planning:

24. The Local Authority should consult with KCCC to determine if there are additional needs for childcare facilities.

Recommendations for KCCC:

KCCC's resources are already stretched and if it is to address the needs identified in this report along with other stakeholders it will require additional funding.

Organisational Review:

25. KCCC should conduct an organisational review to identify gaps in its current resourcing in the context of meeting needs and to make recommendations on how to address these gaps.
26. The review should examine funding requirements and possible funding models and opportunities to work collaboratively and share resources with neighbouring County Childcare Committees.

Learning Communities:

27. KCCC should expand its Community of Practice to support sharing of learning amongst more services and childminders. Areas of shared learning could include effective strategies to engage and support parents, innovative development of outdoor play areas, approaches to addressing additional needs, etc.

28. KCCC should develop a Managers' Network to support childcare managers/owners and a Childminders' Network to support childminders.
29. The Managers' Network and Childminders' Network should be represented on the inter-agency working group recommended above. This could be achieved by either the networks nominating one of their members to sit on the working group or a member of staff from KCCC meeting with the networks to bring forward their contributions to the working group.

Training:

30. KCCC should continue its collaboration with Kildare Local Enterprise Office to offer training for the childcare sector. The availability of such training should be promoted by both organisations.
31. Explore the issue of releasing people to attend training in the Managers' Network and Childminders' Network.
32. Explore the use of an online learning platform that provides and encourages sharing of resource tools and practical tips for managers and staff.
33. The needs analysis provides a range of training needs that should form the basis of a prioritised list of training to be provided by KCCC in the coming years.

Parents:

34. Parents called for more information about childcare. KCCC should review the layout of its web site to make it easier for parents to find information of relevance to them.
35. Promote the availability of information on KCCC's web site widely to parents through KCCC's own and other networks.
36. Target parents more as a specific strand of KCCC's work.
37. Conduct further research with parents and children about after school needs for the 11 to 14 age group.

Supporting Service Sustainability & Development:

38. Develop specific supports for the childminding sector.
39. Continue to provide KCCC's business mentoring service.
40. Explore opportunities for KCCC and Kildare Local Enterprise Office to work jointly in bringing services together to see if they can develop shared administration or merge to achieve scale.

Recommendations for Service Providers:

Parents were generally very positive about the quality of childcare provision in County Kildare. It is important that services consider parents as much their clients as their children are.

Supporting Children:

41. Play and friends are important to children and are the main things they like about childcare provision. Services need to maintain a strong focus on play for children of all ages and, in particular, for children of pre-school age.

Supporting Parents:

42. Services need to be as supportive of parents as possible and to develop positive and supportive organisational cultures.
43. Actively engage with the Managers' Network and expanded Communities of Practice recommended above to share learning and strategies that help parents to address their children's support needs.
44. Services should examine how they can provide flexible opening hours and out of term time provision to meet the needs of working parents.

After School:

45. Some children reported being bored in after school and services need to consider how best to provide after school care for children from different age groups.
46. Split after school into juniors (5-10) and seniors (11-14) with appropriate staffing ratios, supports and activities for each group.
47. A small number of children did not like after school because others were mean to them. Adequate staffing ratios are important to ensure that children are appropriately supervised and that any bullying or mean behaviour is spotted and addressed.
48. Given that children can be out of the home from early in the morning to the evening time they may not be getting adequate food during the day and some children expressed a preference for food being provided in after school. Some services provide it and others do not. Services providing after school should consult with parents and children about the need for food to be provided and at what level (e.g. snacks, hot meals, etc.).
49. While children did not like having to do homework in after school they did appreciate that they did not have to do it when they went home. Over half of children indicated they did not receive support with their homework. Services providing after school should offer homework support and should ensure that staff are competent to provide such support.

Recommendations for Parents:

50. While recognising the time pressures modern parents face, they need to be mindful of the importance of communicating with their children.
51. Parents need to be aware of the impact of screen-based devices on speech and language development.

Appendix A: Supports Needs of Parents by Area

Support Needs of Parents Identified by Parents, Childminders and Childcare Services (N=196)

	Athy	Leixlip/ Celbridge	Maynooth	Naas	Newbridge/ Kildare	Total
Information about what childcare is available in an area	4 out of 10 40%	35 out of 61 57%	42 out of 61 69%	9 out of 29 31%	18 out of 35 51%	107 out of 196 55%
Parenting programmes	4 out of 10 40%	22 out of 61 36%	27 out of 61 44%	17 out of 29 59%	20 out of 35 57%	90 out of 196 46%
Opportunities to meet other parents (peer-to-peer support)	5 out of 10 50%	18 out of 61 30%	25 out of 61 41%	9 out of 29 31%	12 out of 35 34%	69 out of 196 35%
Parent and toddler groups	2 out of 10 20%	13 out of 61 21%	20 out of 61 33%	8 out of 29 28%	8 out of 29 28%	53 out of 196 27%

Appendix B: Gaps in Services by Area

Difficulty Accessing and Gaps Identified by Parents, Childminders and Childcare Services by Municipal District

Provision for:	Source of data ³⁵	Athy	Leixlip/Celbridge	Maynooth	Naas	Newbridge/Kildare	Total
Children under 12 months	P, C, S	10 out of 15 67%	16 out of 100 16%	32 out of 68 47%	11 out of 35 31%	8 out of 46 17%	77 out of 264 29%
Children aged 1 to 3 years	P, C, S	1 out of 10 10%	4 out of 61 7%	20 out of 61 33%	6 out of 29 21%	7 out of 35 20%	38 out of 196 19%
Children aged 3-5 years	P, C, S	3 out of 10 10%	7 out of 61 11%	14 out of 61 23%	5 out of 29 17%	5 out of 35 14%	24 out of 196 12%
Pre-school ECCE	P, C, S	3 out of 11 27%	11 out of 57 19%	3 out of 15 20%	5 out of 29 17%	9 out of 32 28%	31 out of 144 22%
Full day care	P	1 out of 8 13%	11 out of 82 13%	3 out of 58 5%	8 out of 10 80%	4 out of 24 17%	27 out of 182 15%
After school children aged 5-10 years	P, C, S	2 out of 15 13%	21 out of 100 21%	10 out of 68 15%	6 out of 35 17%	15 out of 46 33%	54 out of 264 20%
After school children aged 11-14 years	P, C, S	2 out of 10 20%	4 out of 61 18%	6 out of 61 20%	6 out of 29 21%	9 out of 35 26%	40 out of 196 20%
Out of school term/school holidays	P, C, S	2 out of 15 13%	29 out of 100 29%	12 out of 68 18%	11 out of 35 31%	15 out of 46 33%	69 out of 264 26%
Services with flexible hours	P	2 out of 8 25%	31 out of 82 38%	24 out of 58 41%	2 out of 10 20%	4 out of 24 17%	63 out of 182 15%
Childminders	P	0 out of 3 0%	9 out of 43 21%	7 out of 51 41%	0 out of 4 0%	1 out of 13 8%	17 out of 114 15%
Places for children with additional needs any age group	P	0 out of 3 0%	1 out of 43 2%	3 out of 51 6%	0 out of 4 0%	2 out of 13 15%	6 out of 114 5%
Places for children with additional needs aged under 3	C, S	1 out of 7 14%	4 out of 18 22%	4 out of 10 40%	3 out of 25 12%	2 out of 22 9%	14 out of 82 17%

³⁵ P= parents, C=childminders, S=childcare services

Places for children with additional needs aged 3 to 5	C, S	1 out of 7 14%	4 out of 18 22%	4 out of 10 40%	6 out of 25 24%	5 out of 22 23%	20 out of 82 24%
Places for children with additional needs aged 6 to 14	C, S	0 out of 7 0%	5 out of 18 28%	1 out of 10 10%	1 out of 25 4%	2 out of 22 9%	9 out of 82 11%

Appendix C: Gender Breakdown of Pre-School Children's Likes and Dislikes

	Like			Dislike			Unsure		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Playing with friends	90%	96%	93%	5%	0%	2%	5%	4%	4%
Painting	75%	96%	87%	20%	0%	9%	5%	4%	4%
Being inside	70%	60%	64%	10%	36%	24%	20%	4%	11%
Playdoh	77%	84%	81%	15%	5%	9%	8%	11%	9%
Drawing	75%	80%	78%	10%	8%	9%	15%	12%	13%
Reading	75%	80%	78%	5%	12%	9%	20%	8%	13%
Playing with sand	75%	76%	76%	25%	12%	18%	5%	8%	7%
Home corner	65%	76%	71%	15%	20%	16%	20%	8%	13%
Dressing up	70%	76%	71%	15%	20%	16%	10%	16%	13%
Table top	70%	72%	71%	20%	28%	24%	10%	0%	4%
Being outside	70%	60%	64%	10%	36%	24%	20%	4%	11%
Playing with blocks	70%	52%	60%	20%	16%	18%	10%	32%	22%
Playing alone	45%	40%	42%	5%	8%	7%	50%	52%	51%