

School-Age Childcare in Dublin City

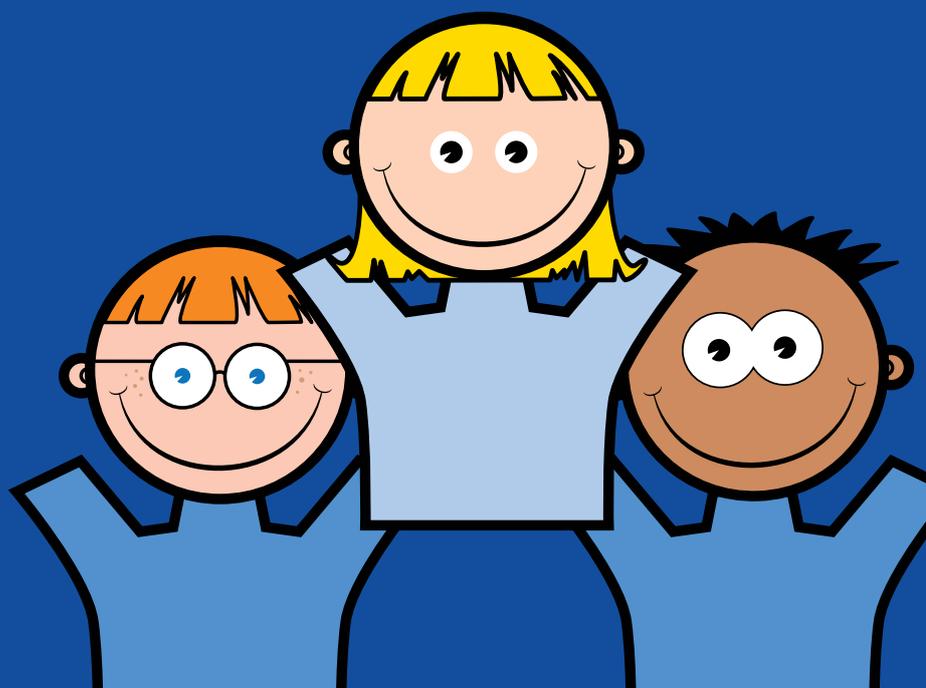
Executive Summary (October 2009)



Dublin City

CHILDCARE COMMITTEE LTD

COISTE CÚRAIM LEANÁÍ CHATHAIR BHAILE ÁTHA CLIATH



Foreword

The following report examines School-Age Childcare and its provision in Dublin City. It is an executive summary of the research into School-Age Childcare undertaken by the Dublin City Childcare Committee and its Thematic Working Group on School-Age Childcare in 2009. For the full research report please visit <http://www.childcareonline.ie>

During the course of the research, input was received from 168 providers of school-age childcare services through postal and telephone questionnaires. A further 63 interested parties contributed to the research through a set of structured interviews and focus groups. These were comprised of parents, childcare practitioners, statutory and voluntary workers, youth workers, teachers and school completion co-ordinators.

This executive summary analyses the level of service provision in Dublin City, outlines the demand for services and explains the challenges associated with provision.

During the research process and with the kind assistance of members of the working group and School-Age Childcare providers, a set of recommendations was also put in place to assist with the development of services in Dublin City. These recommendations are outlined at the end of the report and work has already begun on their implementation.

It is the hope of the working group and the Dublin City Childcare Committee that we can continue our work on school age childcare by implementing our recommendations in full over the coming months.

The working group would finally like to express a great deal of gratitude to all of those who participated in the research for their generous contribution over the course of the last year. We would also like to give special thanks to Eilis Murray, our research consultant for all of her hard work on this project.

School-Age Childcare Thematic Working Group

2009

Dublin City Childcare Committee Ltd

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KEYS

HSE	Health Service Executive	DCCC	Dublin City Childcare Committee
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation	SAC	School-Age Childcare
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions	LCRC	Local Childcare Resource Centre
IPPA	Irish Preschool Playgroups' Association	SCP	School Completion Program
KWCDT	Kimmage, Walkinstown, Crumlin, Drimnagh, Terenure Partnership	DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
NCNA	National Children's Nurseries Association	NCIP	National Childcare Investment Program
NOSHA	Australian National Out-of-School Hours Services Association	SACTWG	School-age Childcare Thematic Working Group
OFSTED	Office of Standards in Education	CDVEC	City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee
OMCYA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs	DHC	Department of Health and Children
QDOSS	Quality Development of Out of School Services	DJELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
HSLO	Home School Liaison Officer	EOCP	Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
		FÁS	Fóras Aiseanna Saothair – National Training and Employment Authority

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About the Dublin City Childcare Committee

Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC) is the body set up with the specific objective of coordinating the delivery of quality childcare to the citizens of Dublin City.

Thirty three City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) were established in 2001 under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000-2006. The main focus of the CCCs is to encourage the development of childcare locally. A wide variety of services are offered to the public including, advice on setting up a childcare business; childcare information sessions; training courses and advice and support on applying for funding under the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP).

DCCC operates within the policy context of the National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010. It receives direction and is mandated at policy level by the Childcare Directorate of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and by Pobal. The National Childcare Investment Programme provides the framework to support the Strategic Plan of DCCC over the period of 2007-2013. The NCIP aims to develop 50,000 new childcare places at national level to respond to the local need, as articulated via the City and County Childcare Committees' strategic plans. DCCC plays an essential role in identifying local childcare needs and supporting applicants to maximise funding opportunities afforded by the NCIP.

Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC) is made up of representatives from agencies with interest in the childcare sector. DCCC is responsible for implementing part of the Dublin City Development Board Strategy. There are close links between DCCC and the Dublin City Development board via board representation and consultation with the Dublin City Childcare Focus Group. Since its inception in 2001, DCCC have created a very efficient and action orientated committee.

VISION

'A Dublin with a system of early childhood care education that values all children equally in the context of families and communities, where children's rights and needs are upheld in all aspects of service provision.'

MISSION

'To create an environment that values all children, by guiding the ongoing development of an infrastructure of high quality edu-care that supports the holistic development of children in a family and community context throughout Dublin City.'

Report Terms

'Guiding' is based on the recognition that DCCC is just one of a large number of Stakeholders involved in childcare in Dublin city and that its role involves harnessing the efforts of other stakeholders to achieve a common goal.

'Infrastructure' describes the physical environment, geographic location and human resource dimension of its work. It has been developed, in collaboration with our five Local Childcare Resource Centres (LCRCs), where local supports and services can be accessed. This support is also intended to contribute positively to the physical location and development of childcare services in local communities. DCCC recognises the importance of building and strengthening capacity among service providers, be they home-based or centre-based, community or private providers.

'Edu-care' describes our vision for childcare, as it treats education and care of young children from a developmental perspective, which is holistic, yet tailored to suit individual needs.

'Family' is in its widest sense, inclusive of immediate family members such as parents, but also includes other family members who may be involved in childcare, such as grandparents and siblings. DCCC recognises that families can have different structures and that the presence of adequate childcare supports can make an important positive contribution to the child's environment. Finally, DCCC's understanding of community reflects the diverse nature of the population of the city.

DCCC agreed the following as its core principles for the period 2007 to 2010:

- The holistic development of the child
- Parental choice
- Equality, inclusion and diversity
- Innovation
- Co-ordination

Dublin City Childcare Committee Strategy 2007-2010

Dublin City Childcare Committee's Strategic Plan 2007-2010 was developed in line with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs/National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010 / National Childcare Investment Programme.

Strategic Objectives of Dublin City Childcare Committee

- To co-ordinate and facilitate the development of the childcare sector within Dublin City
- Promoting the provision of quality and affordable childcare in Dublin City
- Enhancing the capacity of childcare providers engaged in all forms of childcare provision, be it home-based or centre-based
- Supporting the development and integration of citywide childcare infrastructure
- Researching, developing and disseminating best practice about innovative models of childcare delivery and childcare supports

1.2 Background and Stakeholder Input Into The Research

In its strategy 2007-2010 Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC) initiated the establishment of a School-Age Childcare Thematic Working Group (SACTWG). This arose out of an acknowledgement that School-Age Childcare (SAC) was a growing area of concern. Demand for such care was on the increase while it did not appear to be matched by provision in the childcare sector. There was a desire to focus on SAC provision in order to gain a common understanding of the nature of the need, the current range of services being provided and how this area of activity could or should be supported.

The development of a School-Age Childcare thematic working group was one of DCCC's objectives in its Strategic Plan 2007-2010. School-Age Childcare was one of the most cited forms of 'ideal' childcare among the parents surveyed in Dublin City in 2006. This group has responsibility for gathering data on the current level of school age childcare available in Dublin City, exploring barriers which are preventing provision, and recommending proactive strategic responses.

A cross-section of stakeholders were invited to participate in the School-Age Childcare Thematic Working Group (see appendix 2). The group met on a number of occasions in late 2007 and early 2008, exchanging information, knowledge and ideas. A brief was drawn up by the group for the completion of a School-Age Childcare Audit and Needs Analysis.

The analysis included the input of more than 168 school-age childcare providers operating in Dublin City using a postal and telephone questionnaire. In addition three SAC services participated in three separate two-hour structured interviews to describe their models of good practice. Finally, five focus groups were held in the five separate administrative areas of Dublin City. These focus groups captured the input of 60 interested parties.

This report outlines the findings of the School-Age Childcare Audit and Needs Analysis and uses the input of all participants to summarise findings and make recommendations. The research undertaken for this report focuses on services with children up to 14 years of age. However in a small number of cases, some children in the services surveyed were aged up to 17 years.

1.3 Brief

The overall aim of the School-Age Childcare Audit and Needs Analysis was to undertake research into the provision of School-Age Childcare in the Dublin City Area with a particular focus on establishing needs and the framing of initial responses to the needs identified.

Aims & Objectives of Research

The stated aims and objectives of the research were as follows:

- › to complete a base line study of existing SAC services in Dublin City;
- › to develop a database for current and future mapping of SAC services;
- › to review national and international models of good practice of SAC providers, and
- › to inform DCCC policy /position on what SAC could be in the future.

Methodology

The following were the key tasks identified and agreed for the completion of the report:

1. **Literature Review** - to include a maximum of three National and three International reports on School-Age Childcare services/models.
2. **Audit of Dublin City Provision** – to include a circulation of questionnaires to all identified current providers for creation of a database of current provision. Some comment on analysis of those questionnaires is provided in this report.
3. **Examples of Current Models** – to include a review and interview with three current models of good practice as identified by Dublin City Childcare Committee to provide comparative examples of service provision.
4. **Stakeholder Consultation** – to include completion of five focus group sessions, one in each of the five administrative areas in Dublin City, with key people who develop, manage or use School-Age Childcare, to obtain feedback on their experiences of demand and key issues arising in provision.
5. **Recommendations** – The future role DCCC can play in relation to supporting school-age childcare in Dublin City in association with the School-Age Childcare Thematic Working Group.

2. COMMENT ON SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE

This section seeks to provide some general comment on selected literature pertaining to school-age childcare. It is not intended as a comprehensive or in-depth literature review or analysis, which would be beyond the scope of this piece of work, but rather as a reflection on the SAC debate to provoke thought and inform future direction in implementing actions arising from this report.

2.1 Defining School-Age Childcare

In recent years there have been quite a number of papers, reports and comment in relation to the provision of care for children of school going age. A common feature and thread running throughout is the lack of a common internationally held understanding or definition for School-Age Childcare. This is primarily due to the fact that there are varying school age ranges across countries and the development of care for this sector has evolved in varying ways in different countries. The SACTWG defines School-Age Childcare as follows;

Out-of-school services refer to a range of organised age appropriate structured programmes, clubs and activities for school-age children and young people (4-18) which take place within supervised environments during the times that they are not in school. As such, out of school services can take place before school, after school, at weekends, during lunch hours and during school holidays. Out of school services therefore can be offered in a variety of settings, attached to schools and non school environments, including home based childminders, community centres, child-care centres, places of worship, libraries, parks etc. Out-of-school services are sponsored by inter alia, statutory and non-governmental agencies, schools, community based groups, faith-based organisations and other voluntary sector groups.

2.2 School-Age Childcare Policy

In recent years there has been much attention and debate in Ireland about the care and education of pre-school children. While there is an increase in the level of debate about SAC, it is still in the early stages and only gathering momentum.

The 2005 Report of the Working Group from the Childcare Directorate in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), 'Developing School-Age Childcare', under its terms of reference developed guidelines for the School-Age Childcare sector, are set out in an annexe to that report.

These include detailed recommendations on:

- > Physical Environment;
- > Programme of Activities;
- > Health and Safety;
- > Adult Child Ratios;
- > Fostering Partnerships;
- > Training



These have yet to be formally adopted and developed as official guidelines and standards for the provision of quality School-Age Childcare in Ireland. Since the publication of this report the childcare remit has since moved to the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) within the Department of Health and Children (DHC). It is unclear whether the DHC intends to formally adopt these recommendations and/or implement them as standards for the sector. To date the sector remains self-regulated resulting in varied standards of provision across services.

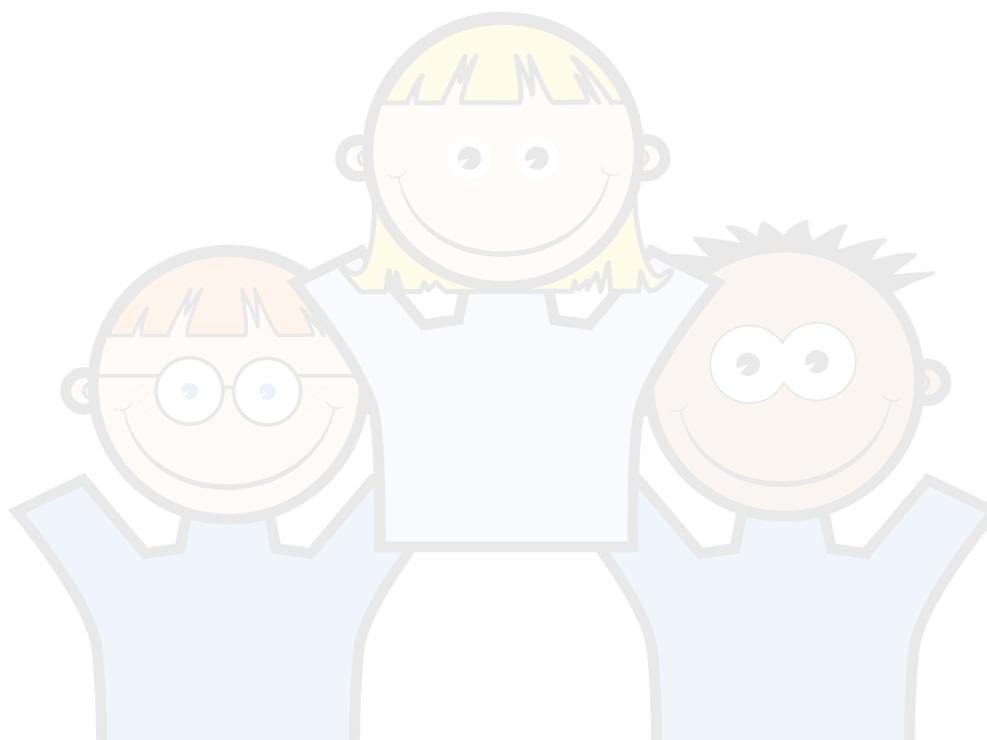
There is a distinct lack of focus and resultant policy in relation to SAC provision in Ireland. This situation is in contrast to many of our counterparts in the EU and beyond.

2.3 Quality of Services

SAC service provision has different forms and conditions. These include centres separate from the school; school-based activity; varying hours; varying funding structures; varying objectives in relation to the primary focus of provision. With such a divergence in the form and conditions of services provided, addressing the question of what constitutes quality becomes more challenging. Despite all these variances however, there is a broad level of consensus in relation to key factors that need to be addressed to ensure the delivery of a quality service.

These include:

- > variety in the programme of activity, based on themes and projects, and flexibility with a range of options and differences each day;
- > provision of free play time and child's own time out;
- > appropriate physical environment, suitable to age ;
- > standards of training for employees in the sector;
- > close relationships and communication between providers and the client child, with the child being actively consulted and participating in the programme design and development;
- > close relationships and communication between providers and the client parent ensuring the parent is aware of what to expect from the service and mutual support roles;
- > regulation within the sector.



Examples of International Guidance Standards in School Aged Childcare

Quality assurance guidelines based on best practice have been developed by the Australian National Out-of-School Hours Services Association (NOSHA). They address six key areas as quality indicators for Out-of-School Hours Services as follows:

Areas for Consideration

- Development
- Emotional Environment
- Physical Environment
- Interactive Environment
- Framework
- Community

The principle underlying these guidelines is that best practice is ‘child focused and results from interactions between those whose primary concern is the well –being of the whole child’.

In Britain the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED) regulates facilities that provide childcare, up to the age of eight years. They have identified twelve standards for childcare as follows:

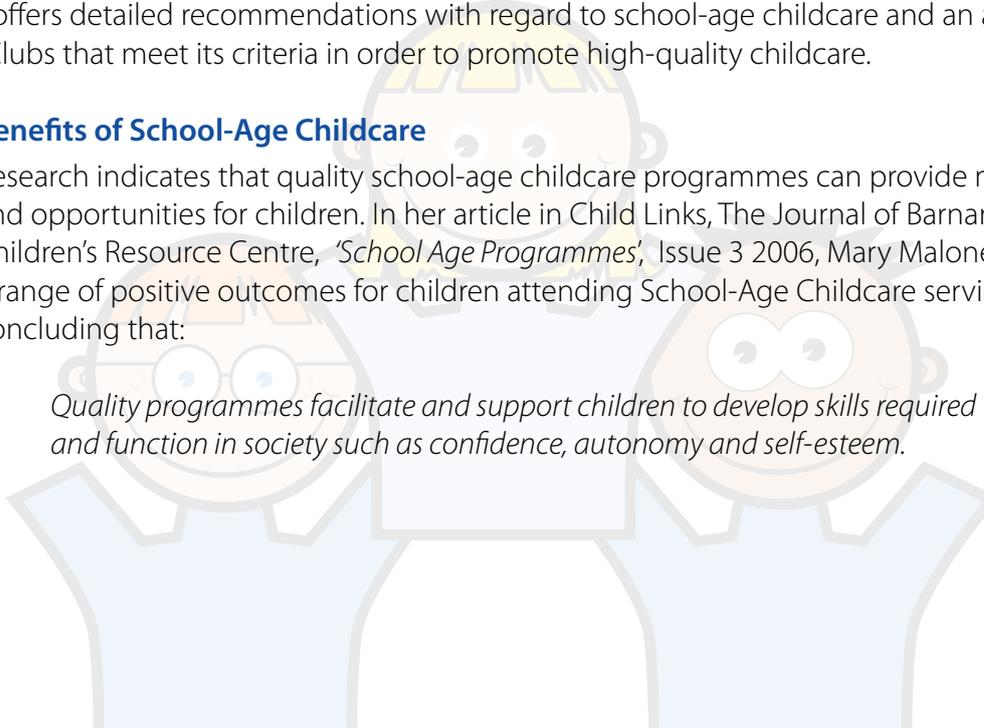
• Suitable Person	• Health
• Organisation	• Food and Drink
• Care, Learning, Play	• Equal Opportunities
• Physical Environment	• Special Needs
• Equipment	• Behavior
• Safety	• Working in Partnership with Parents & Carers

In addition the ‘Kids Club Network’ in England, an initiative that is targeted solely at out-of-school provision, offers detailed recommendations with regard to school-age childcare and an accreditation facility to Clubs that meet its criteria in order to promote high-quality childcare.

2.4 Benefits of School-Age Childcare

Research indicates that quality school-age childcare programmes can provide many benefits and opportunities for children. In her article in Child Links, The Journal of Barnardos National Children’s Resource Centre, ‘School Age Programmes’, Issue 3 2006, Mary Maloney, identifies a range of positive outcomes for children attending School-Age Childcare services, concluding that:

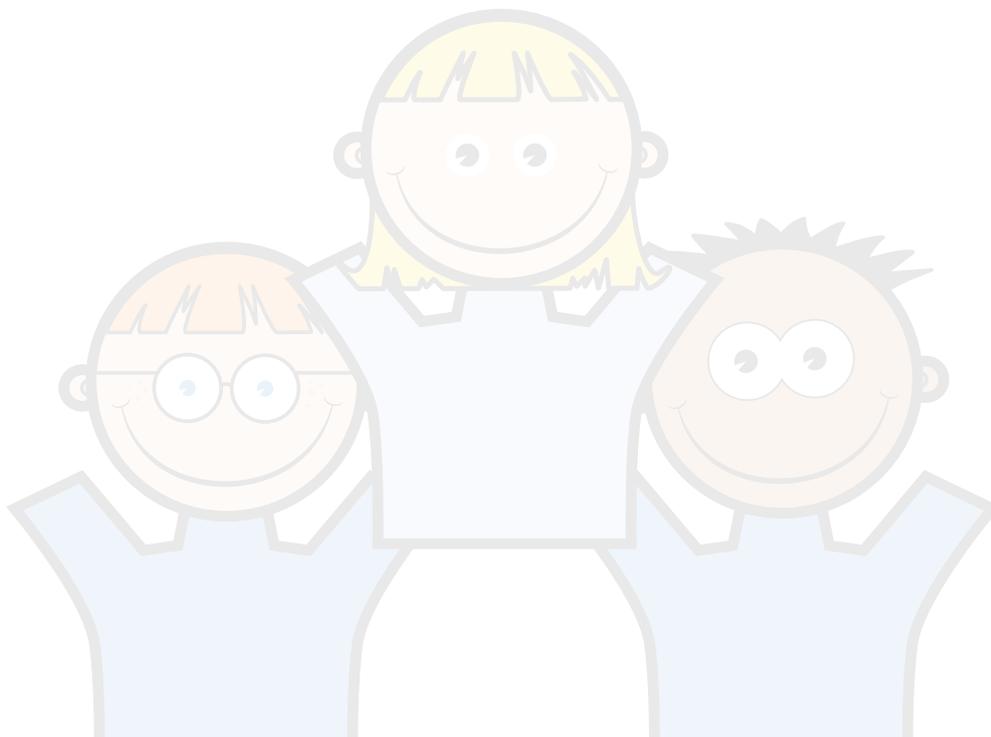
Quality programmes facilitate and support children to develop skills required to live and function in society such as confidence, autonomy and self-esteem.



In the same article, Maloney also refers to research indicating that the development of the child is shaped and influenced by a number of experiences including home, pre-school, school, friends, community and School-Age Childcare settings. It is the mix of experiences that lead to healthy development of the child and his/her competencies both social and personal.

2.5 Conclusion

School-Age Childcare is a growing childcare sector in Ireland. While there is no internationally agreed definition, there are commonalities among definitions currently in use. In Ireland, much can be learned from the more advanced development of the sector in some European countries and Australia. A key area for development is the implementation of agreed and recognised standards and practices in the sector. However, without agreed national policy and procedure, commitment is lacking in directing resources and focus on the needs for quality School-Age Childcare provision. There is consensus among childcare professionals on the value and the need for such provision, the challenge now is to use this as a basis for developing the sector.



3. DUBLIN CITY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE PROVISION

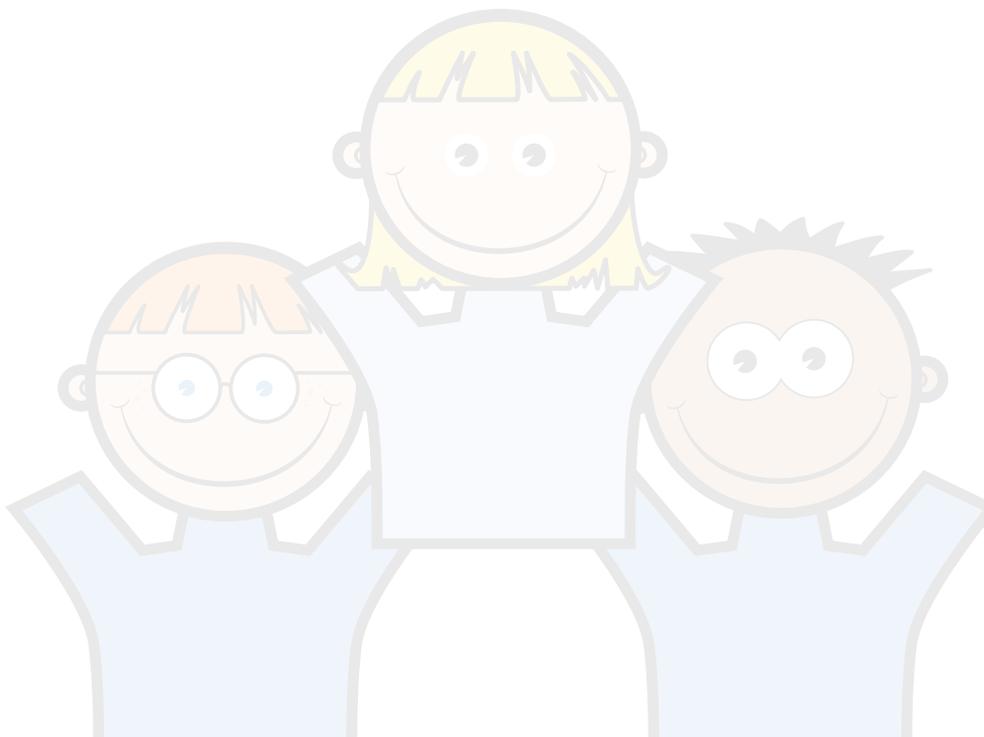
3.1 Overview analysis

The objective in undertaking an audit of service provision in the Dublin City area was to establish a more accurate picture of the actual number, range and location of services. A questionnaire was designed by DCCC and circulated to over 170 known childcare providers in Dublin. These were followed up with telephone calls. Out of 170 questionnaire responses received, 168 were used as part of a comparative analysis. DCCC then categorised the responses by Local Childcare Resource Centre (LCRC) area and by service-provider, community, school, and private. This section provides a selected analysis of these responses.

Five particular categories of information were selected for analysis:

1. **Number of Services** – including the number of responses, the capacity of services and the number of waiting lists for services as an indication of outstanding demand for services.
2. **Age Range** – to provide an indication of the age categories catered for by services
3. **Nature of Service** – identifying the number of services which offer part-time, sessional and full-time care.
4. **Operating Days and Weeks** – including the number of days per week the service operates and the number of weeks in the year.
5. **Special Features** – included in this category is a number of key features identified by practitioners including availability of an open area, collection service, and receipt of Government Funding and whether the service is specifically for a particular target group of children.

Using each of these categories the information is presented as an overall Dublin City analysis.



3.2 Number of Services

Table 3.1 shows the number of children receiving School-Age Childcare in the 168 childcare providers that responded to the questionnaire as well as the number of waiting lists in operation.

Table 3.1 - Number of Children receiving School-Age Childcare in Dublin City

PROVIDER TYPE	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL	CAPACITY	CAPACITY AS A % OF TOTAL	NUMBER WITH WAITING LIST	WAITING AS A %
COMMUNITY	51	30%	1,897	36%	24	27%
SCHOOL	67	40%	2,483	48%	35	39%
PRIVATE	50	30%	835	16%	30	34%
TOTAL	168		5,215		89	

Table 3.1 shows that while there is no major difference in the number of providers in each category, there is a substantial difference in the capacity of provision. School providers have the highest capacity, three times that of private providers. Another feature of note is the relatively similar split between all providers in terms of the number with waiting lists. Over half of the total numbers of providers indicate they have current waiting lists. This is an indication that current supply of places is clearly not meeting demand.

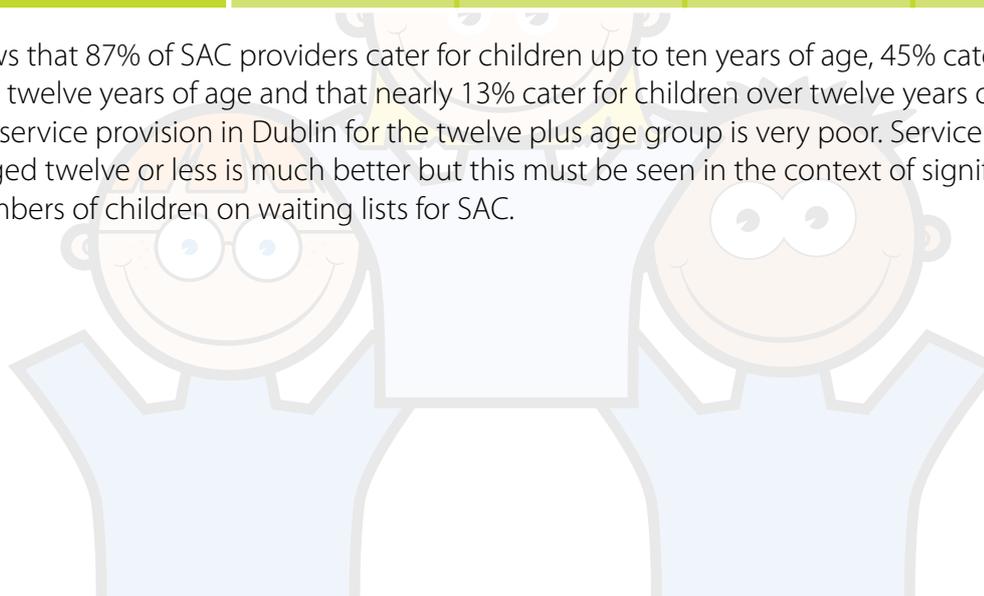
3.3 Age Range

Only 166 SAC providers give details of the age of children in their care. Table 3.2 summarises the data provided, with the age categories reflecting the information provided by respondents.

Table 3.2 - Age profiles of Children receiving School-Age Childcare

PROVIDER CATEGORY	AGE UP TO 10	AGE 10 - 12	AGE 12-14	AGE 14+
COMMUNITY	18	22	5	5
SCHOOL	17	37	8	4
PRIVATE	34	15	1	0
TOTAL	69	74	14	9
TOTAL as a %	42	45	8	5

Table 3.2 shows that 87% of SAC providers cater for children up to ten years of age, 45% cater for children up to twelve years of age and that nearly 13% cater for children over twelve years of age. This suggests that service provision in Dublin for the twelve plus age group is very poor. Service provision for children aged twelve or less is much better but this must be seen in the context of significant if unknown numbers of children on waiting lists for SAC.



3.4 Nature of Service

In this category the intention is to identify the basis on which providers operate under three particular headings. It should be noted that there are likely gaps in the figures as presented as there were no common definitions given as to an understanding for each of the headings. For example, what constitutes full-time care? It is reasonable to assume therefore that similar services may have selected either the part-time or the sessional category. Nonetheless, it does give some broad picture of the nature of services being provided. It should also be noted that a number of respondents indicated more than one type of service.

Table 3.3 - Nature of Service

PROVIDER CATEGORY	PART-TIME	SESSIONAL	FULL-TIME
COMMUNITY	32	12	6
SCHOOL	21	44	2
PRIVATE	45	9	9
TOTAL	98	65	17
TOTAL as a %	58%	39%	10%

It would appear that while there is a good supply of sessional and part-time services, fulltime services are very limited. It is difficult to draw any conclusion from this, as it is probably reasonable to assume that in the absence of definitions, many providers may not see their service as full-time given that the child will always have school time.

3.5 Operating Days and Weeks Per Year

Table 3.4 - gives an indication of the number of days and weeks that services make available in their provision.

Table 3.4 - Operating Days and Weeks of SAC Providers in Dublin City

PROVIDER TYPE	5 DAYS PER WK	4 DAYS PER WEEK	LESS THAN 4 DAYS P.W.	46-52 WKS p/a	41-45 WKS p/a	40 WKS p/a
COMMUNITY	38	6	7	37	7	7
SCHOOL	33	15	16	8	6	51
PRIVATE	48	1	0	46	2	1
TOTAL	119	22	23	91	15	59
TOTAL as a %	73%	13%	14%	55%	9%	36%

Private and community providers are more likely to provide a year-round service with the majority of schools operating to the school calendar year. Most private and community providers operate five days per week whereas only half of the school services operate for a full week.

3.6 Special Features

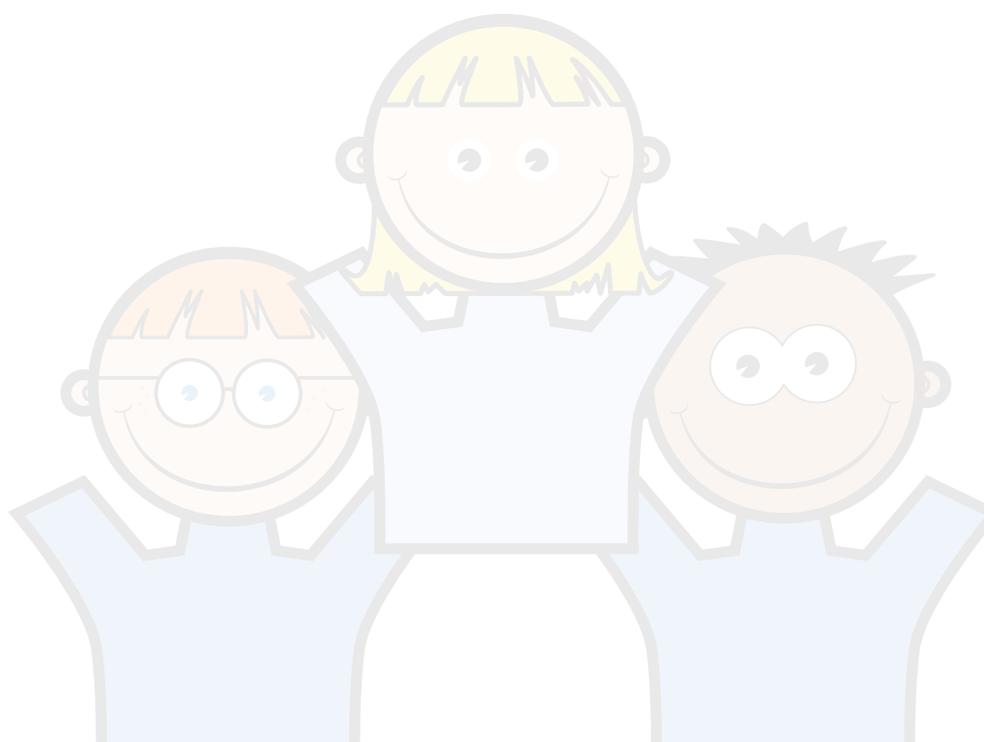
As indicated above, the special features identified are reflective of key areas that are considered by childcare practitioners to be important in the effective provision of School-Age Childcare. Target groups included those open to school pupils only, children at risk and services for homeless children.

Table 3.5 - Special Features of School-Age Childcare Provision in Dublin

PROVIDER TYPE	ACCESS TO OUTDOOR PLAY AREA/PARK	COLLECTION SERVICE	RECEIVED GOVERNMENT FUNDING	LIMITED TO SPECIFIC TARGET GROUP
COMMUNITY	36	22	36	20
SCHOOL	56	9	46	39
PRIVATE	45	39	14	2
TOTAL	137	70	96	61
TOTAL as a %	82%	42%	57%	36%

Although the figure of 82% of providers with access to an outdoor area is very positive and encouraging, from anecdotal evidence it is likely that a substantial number of these are not dedicated spaces but rather public park areas.

When the school providers are excluded from the analysis of the collection service figure (schools are less likely to have the need for the service as they are located on site), the percentage of private and community providers rises to 75%. This is reflective of the demand for such a service. The majority of private providers indicated that the government funding they received was in the form of once off capital grants.



4. MODELS OF CURRENT PRACTICE

It is acknowledged that there is a wide range of quality School-Age Childcare services in operation throughout the city of Dublin. Such variance and mix succeeds in providing a variety of choice for many seeking to access a range of services, meeting a range of needs. In this regard the models chosen for analysis should not be viewed as chosen examples of best practice but rather as comparative examples of good practice for information and learning in the delivery of SAC.

The models were chosen by the research sub-committee based on a number of criteria including:

- type of service provision, i.e., school-based, private, community, etc;
- location;
- size;
- purpose designed and developed;
- operating structures and mechanisms, including funding.

The framework used for the analysis of the services is outlined below.

4.1 Framework for Model Analysis

Overall Aim

To undertake analysis of three selected School-Age Childcare services in Dublin to identify and establish a comparative basis of information and learning from services currently in operation.

This will contribute to an overall analysis of School-Age Childcare needs being undertaken on behalf of the DCCC. Other key elements of that research include:

- analysis of documented research on best practice in School-Age Childcare provision in Ireland and Europe;
- consultation sessions with key stakeholders including service providers, parents, workers, etc.

Framework for Analysis of Service

1. What is the Service You Provide:

- Target group and numbers catered for
- Opening hours
- How is the service accessed, including criteria?
- Nature of activities provided
- Staffing & physical resources

2. Background to Establishment of Service:

- How was the need for the service identified?
- Who initiated and led the development of the service?
- What research was undertaken (including business plans etc. if any)?
- Outline process by which service was established including timeline
- What supports were received?
- Key learning from establishment process

3. Operation of Service:

- Outline of management structure
- What policies/procedures/regulations are in place
- Funding structure
- Comment on future sustainability
- Key learning from operation of the service

4. Outline SWOT Analysis of service

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

5. Future Planning:

- What if anything would you like to change and why?
- Where do you see the service in the future?
- What advice if any for other services seeking to establish their service?

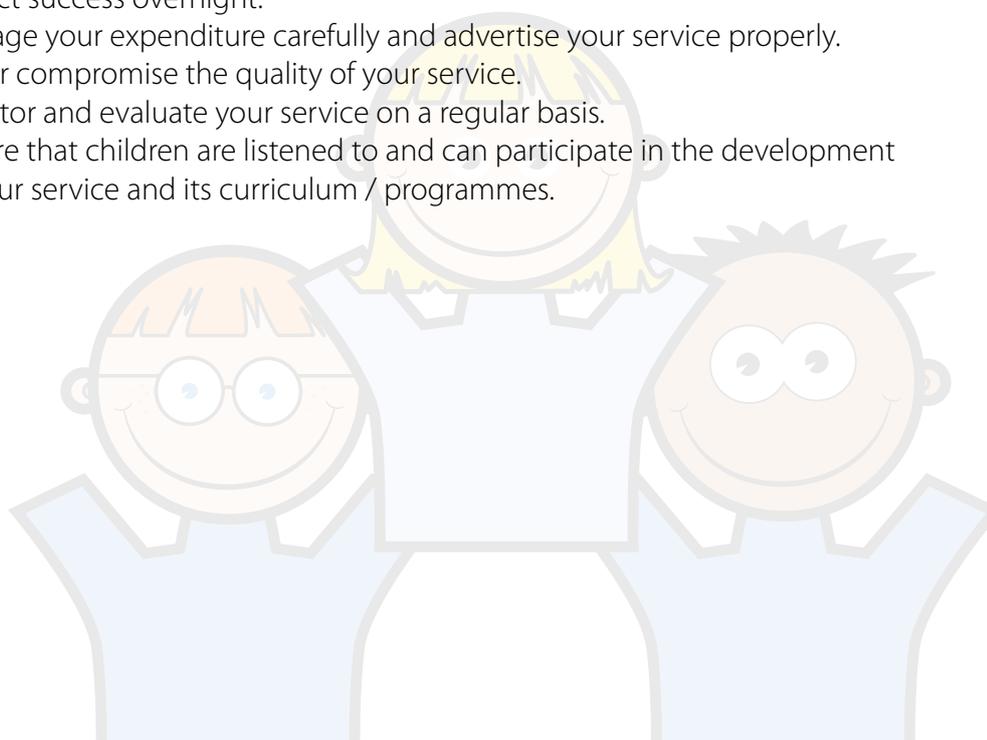
4.2 Conclusions

In summary, services interviewed concluded that:

- More financial support will be required to maintain the quality standard achieved to date, including greater commitments from government funding.
- There is a need to build and expand on what has been already achieved by adding additional services such as breakfast clubs.
- There is a need to add specialised staff, such as family support workers, to support families and young people as well as their children.

The three services interviewed also outlined recommendations for other providers looking to begin or expand their School-Age Childcare service as follows:

- Ensure you get the right people at planning stage, qualified staff and committed board members with an articulate vision and plan for the development and sustainability of the service.
- It takes time to develop the service and get things right. Be patient and don't expect success overnight.
- Manage your expenditure carefully and advertise your service properly.
- Never compromise the quality of your service.
- Monitor and evaluate your service on a regular basis.
- Ensure that children are listened to and can participate in the development of your service and its curriculum / programmes.



5 FOCUS GROUP INPUT FROM STAKEHOLDERS

This section seeks to provide an analysis of comment from the stakeholders who participated in the focus group sessions. Participants were drawn from and were representative of a number of childcare-related backgrounds – childcare practitioners, private and community, parents, statutory workers, voluntary workers, youth workers, teachers, school completion programme co-ordinators. This section reflects an overall analysis of feedback and comment obtained.

5.1 Demands for SAC

A key note at all of the sessions was the ongoing change in our economic environment at present which will undoubtedly have an impact on the demand for SAC over the coming months and possibly years. While there was growing demand for services in recent times this was fuelled primarily by women returning to the workforce and/or education and training. With the changed economic climate, this demand may be affected.

Demand appears to outstrip supply and this looks set to continue. As a result, informal arrangements and combined systems of care appear to be a common feature of School-Age Childcare. Key issues in relation to demand were as follows:

- Session participants indicated a greater demand for community-based services across the city. While it is hard to come to a conclusion why, it is probably reasonable to assume that cost is an associated feature – fees in such services tend to be lower than private services. It should be noted, however, that the questionnaire analysis indicated almost equal demand between community, school and private provision
- Demand for private services showed no consistent trend across the focus groups. Some private services indicated increasing challenges in attracting children, while others indicated they had a waiting list for services.
- The facility to collect and transport children from school to the service was consistently identified as a critical feature impacting on the demand for services. Services which cannot provide this facility clearly lose out to other services, regardless of quality of service. In this regard, school based services have a distinct competitive edge over all other service providers. In addition this can be a restriction for parents in their choice and the availability of services to meet their needs.
- There is an increasing demand for childminders. Several reasons for this were cited. Principal among them was the flexibility afforded by such an arrangement – the child can still participate for example in local after-school activities; transport to and from school will be provided; there is greater opportunity to dip in and out of such a service; it can be less costly particularly where two or more children are being minded.

As one participant commented:

“The childminder is a much more flexible option. For example if the child is sick, he/she can still go to the childminder. Or better again if the minder comes into the home – some of the chores can even be covered.”

- The greatest demand for services is from parents of children aged 4-10, with those starting school being the greater cohort within this age range. Thus demand far exceeds supply for

the after school service which is school-based and bridges the gap of the hour between collection of a younger child and an older child. After the age of 10, it is felt that most children do not like the structured service with which they were traditionally familiar as a young child.

As one stakeholder commented:

“Children outgrow the services that are structured. They then need a different environment”

The challenge for providers is to meet the demand from the child for a different environment while meeting the demand from the parent for a structured safe environment for their child.

- Specialist referral services are reporting a large increase in demand for their services. Almost all of such services indicated waiting lists for access.
- Space for the provision of services – private, community, school-based, voluntary, etc., was identified as a key feature in dictating the supply of places to meet the demand. The demand is there, but adequate affordable space is at a premium. This may change with the changed economic climate, ultimately to the benefit of providers.

5.2 Nature of Services

There are significant variations in the nature of childcare services being provided for school-aged children across Dublin City. While all are valuable in that they are meeting a need, the difficulty is in tracking such services for the purpose of creating a basis for comparison. Such comparisons are possibly futile as the range reflects:

- the belief that there is no one size fits all;
- the fact that different services are needed at different stages of the child’s development;
- parental needs can be quite diverse, reflecting the need for choice;
- the fact that combined approaches can often best suit the desired balance between parental and child needs. Again, flexibility is the key.

The range of services identified in the course of the consultations included:

- Full afternoon and school-holiday care, i.e., care for all times out of normal school hours in the course of what would be considered a ‘normal’ working day. Such services tend to be used by full-time working parents.
- Part-time service which caters for children on particular afternoons per week, typically 3 to 4 and for a shorter number of weeks in the year, typically for the school calendar year. Such services play a key role in accommodating the part-time working parent. The majority of private providers are happy to take children on a part-time basis also. Included in this category are summer camp-type services.
- Club and/or sessional service, i.e., part-time care for a couple of hours on a couple of afternoons in the week. This could include homework clubs, reading clubs, activity themed clubs, etc. Such services tend to be community-based and are designed to target or create access for a greater number of children in an area.
- Services for target groups only, e.g., homeless children, children at risk, etc. They may run on a full-time or part-time basis and generally operate on a referral basis only. They are intended to make a particular intervention in the child’s life for a specific period of time.

The type of activities provided by the services did show some common themes in terms of approach and mix of activity. Club-type service is the only exception with an obvious focus on the theme of the club only. Other services provide a mix of:

- developmental activity, e.g., arts, crafts, cookery, drama, etc.;
- physical activity, primarily outdoor where possible;
- recreational time, e.g., games, computer time, etc.;
- homework support for an agreed period ;
- free time for the child's own decision;
- food, physical nourishment.

There was agreement that whatever the schedule of activities provided by a service, they must be attractive to the child and the child must want to be there. It is more difficult the older a child becomes to retain them in a service where they are not finding it stimulating and reflecting their needs.

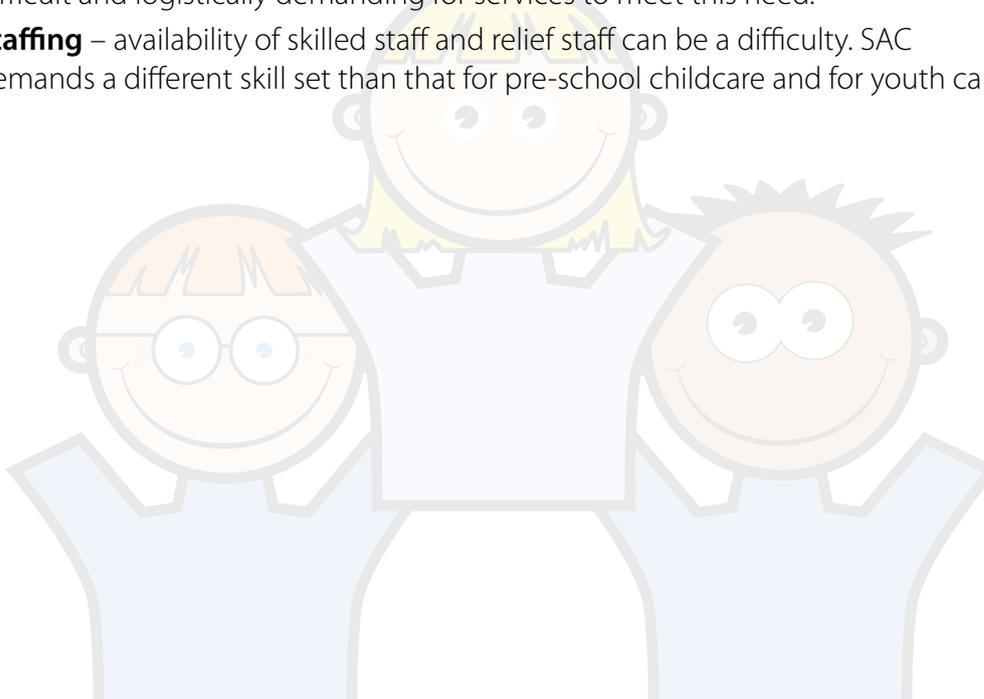
Children in full-time care in particular can find it a very long day where they are going from school directly to a service until possibly late in the evening. This provides a greater challenge for providers to accommodate their needs and to ensure they retain their interest. They need the service to become more and more home from home the older they get. This includes a greater amount of space and free areas to just 'chill'.

In conclusion stakeholders feel that the school-age child needs routine but balanced by a greater amount of choice and input to the activity schedule. Children of school-age, particularly those at the upper end of the age scale, tend to need different activities everyday to stimulate and retain their interest. Most importantly they need time out to themselves, giving them the space and time required to relax and 'do nothing'

5.3 Challenges in Service Provision

Some common themes emerged across all stakeholders in terms of the challenges faced in providing quality School-Age Childcare. These included:

- **Premises** – the lack of availability of appropriate and adequate premises is a serious difficulty for providers.
- **Transport** – collection from school and transport to the after-school service is a priority for service users. Some services can facilitate this demand but it is difficult and logistically demanding for services to meet this need.
- **Staffing** – availability of skilled staff and relief staff can be a difficulty. SAC demands a different skill set than that for pre-school childcare and for youth care.



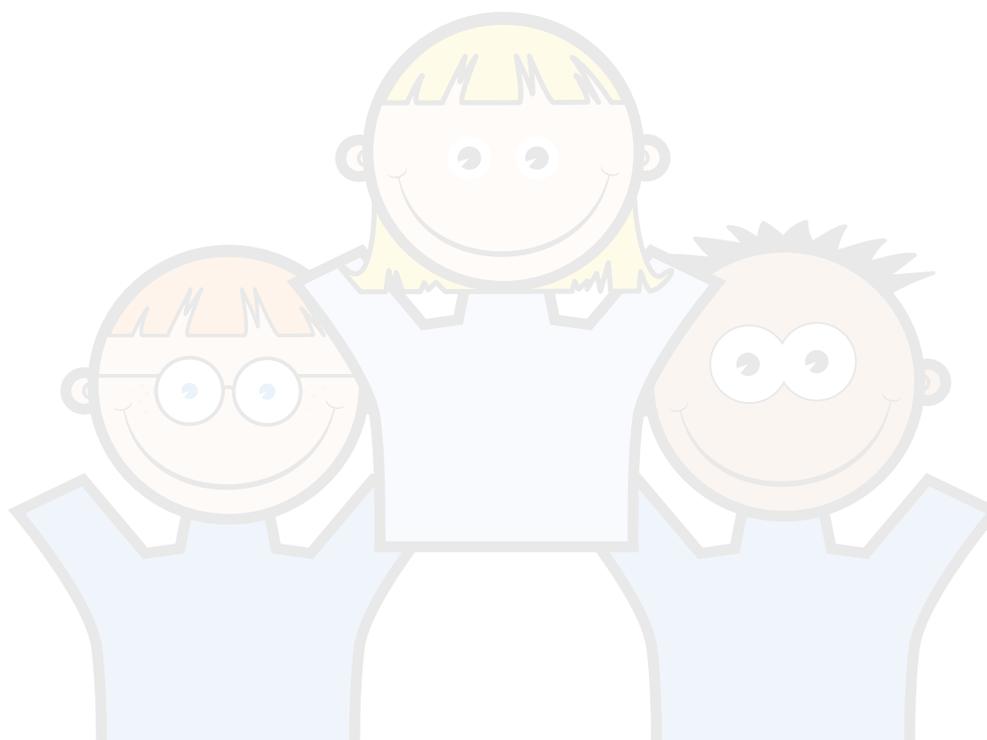
For example, the school-age child can present different behavioural challenges; the mix in the age range brings differing demands which need to be balanced, etc. A commonly reflected comment was:

“School-Age childcare is a totally separate and specific area, to be approached in a very different way to ‘childcare’”.

- **Cost of Service** – the costs for the provision of a SAC service can be significantly higher than pre-school childcare.
- **Standards** – while it was acknowledged that the majority of providers are striving to meet high standards, nonetheless there are no regulations to guide providers.
- **Informal Childcare** - this refers to parental arrangements for care of school-age children that are not clearly identified as childcare *per se*. It could include for example, an arrangement for a child to go on ‘play dates’ on particular afternoons; a grandparent to collect and care for the child; an older sibling to collect and care for the child; the child being allowed to let him/herself in and remain in the house alone.
- **School-based services** – there is an ongoing challenge of creating an environment which is separate and distinct from the school environment.
- **Specialised Services** - those targeted at particular children identified access to linked services as a particular challenge.

In conclusion, the focus group feedback identified three key areas of support which would be welcomed in the provision of SAC:

- Facilitate dialogue on School-Age Childcare provision and provide leadership in the ongoing debate.
- Advocate for access to school premises, buildings and grounds, for use during out of school time in a manner which is mutually beneficial
- Promote the development of guidelines and standards of practice in the provision of SAC.



6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the debate is open and developing in relation to the needs and supports for the School-Age Childcare sector, much remains to be done. Of primary importance is the need to keep the debate alive and focused.

While the SACTWG and DCCC can undoubtedly play a key role in advancing the debate, supporting providers and seeking to achieve key steps to ensure ongoing commitment to the development of a quality sector, they cannot do it alone. It must be achieved in partnership with other key players. In looking to the future, the recommendations below have been considered in the context of what can realistically be achieved by the working group and the childcare committee within a reasonable timeframe.

1. Achieve Agreed Definition

There are a number of definitions of School-Age Childcare, all of which are valid. However, to help attain a common voice and understanding of the sector, it would be useful if a common definition, functional for the Irish context, could be agreed and recognised.

2. Promote the Agenda for Regulation

There is a clear and strong desire from practitioners, providers, parents, and all interested stakeholders for the establishment of policy in relation to SAC and a supporting framework of guidelines and regulations for this sector of childcare.

3. Training Development

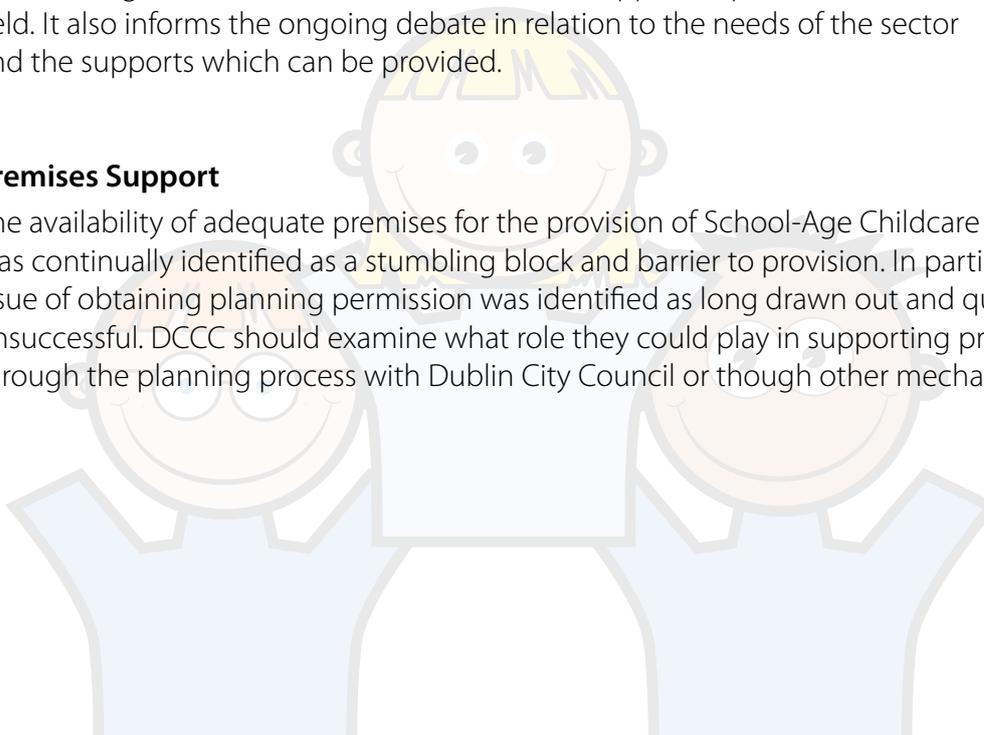
It is recognised that practice in SAC has particular specialities, some of which are similar to childcare and youth work, but many of which are also unique to the role. Much has been achieved in the development of new training and development materials for School-Age Childcare workers. This training needs to be made more widely available and accessible to both current and future practitioners.

4. Networking & Dissemination of Information

The exchange of information can act as a direct support to practitioners in the field. It also informs the ongoing debate in relation to the needs of the sector and the supports which can be provided.

5. Premises Support

The availability of adequate premises for the provision of School-Age Childcare services was continually identified as a stumbling block and barrier to provision. In particular the issue of obtaining planning permission was identified as long drawn out and quite often unsuccessful. DCCC should examine what role they could play in supporting projects through the planning process with Dublin City Council or through other mechanisms.



7. APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1 - Dublin City Childcare Committee Board Members

Statutory Agencies

Rita Byrne, Health Service Executive

Vacant, FÁS

Rachel Devlin, Health Service Executive

Vacant, Dept. of Social, Community & Family Affairs

Kathryn Cleary, City of Dublin VEC

Máire Igoe, Dublin City Council

Martin Kavanagh, Dublin City Council

National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative

Martin Heffernan, National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA)

Carmel Brennan, Irish Preschool Playgroups Association (IPPA)

Anne Conroy, Barnardos

Dublin City Childcare Focus Group

Sharon Byrne, Parent Representative

Bernadette O'Donoghue, Parent Representative.

Geraldine Brereton, One Family

Social Partners

Ethel Buckley, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Brigid Ruane, Community Forum

Area Based Partnerships

Mary McGuane, Area Based Partnership Representative

Declan Dunne, CEO, Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership

Equality and Diversity

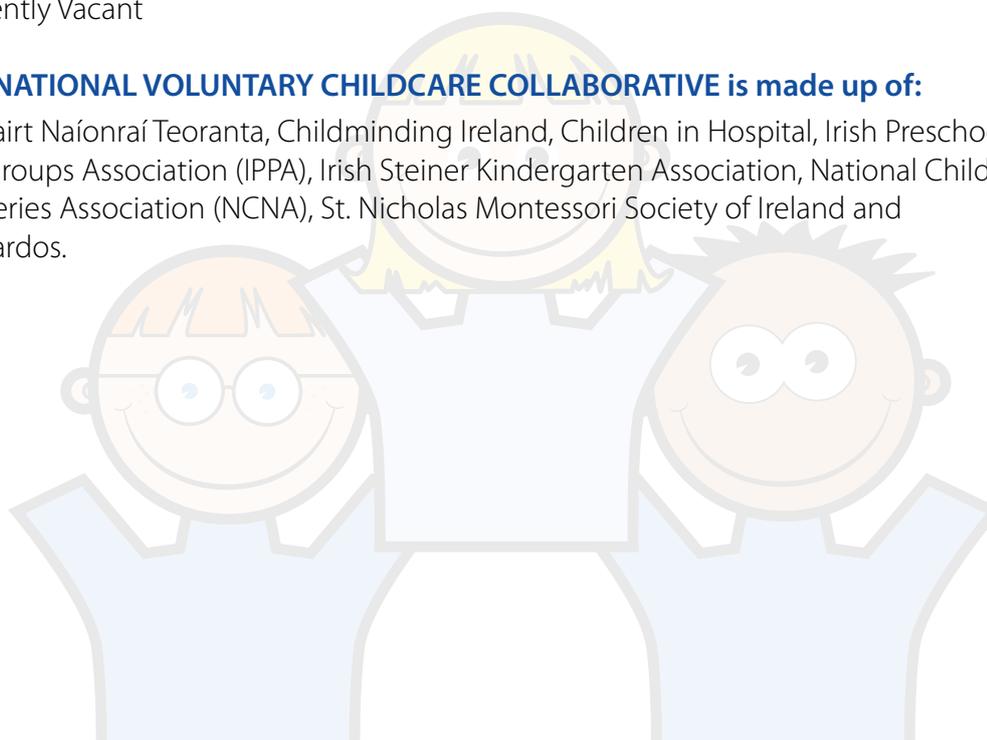
Currently Vacant

Employer bodies/IBEC

Currently Vacant

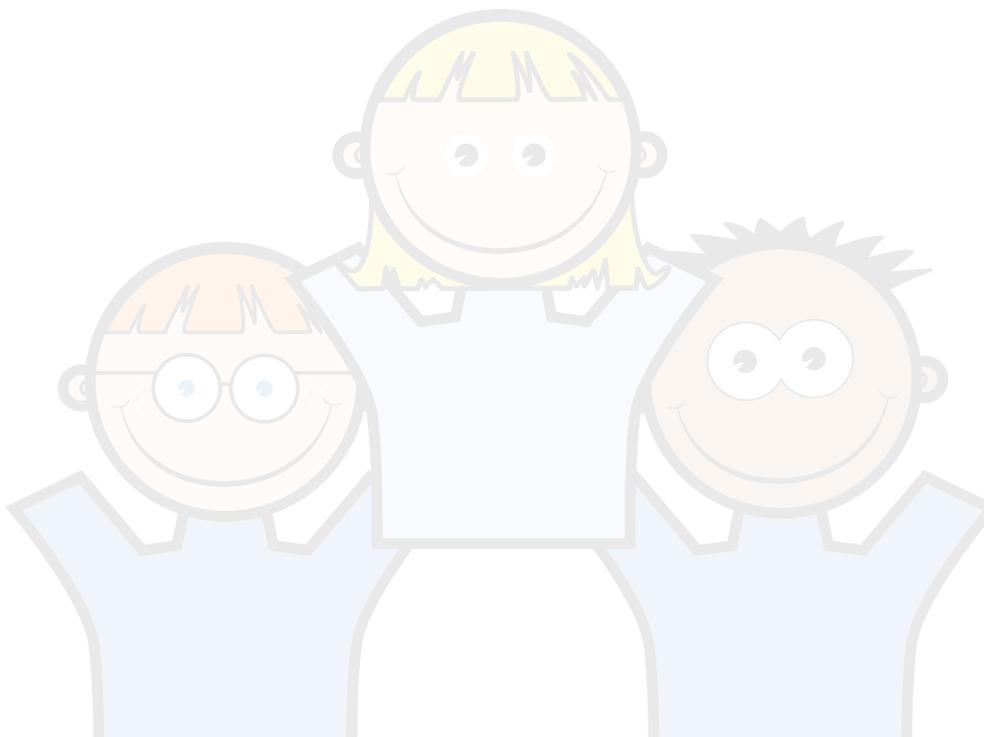
The NATIONAL VOLUNTARY CHILDCARE COLLABORATIVE is made up of:

Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta, Childminding Ireland, Children in Hospital, Irish Preschool Playgroups Association (IPPA), Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association, National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA), St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland and Barnardos.



7.2 Appendix 2 - School-Age Childcare Thematic Working Group Members

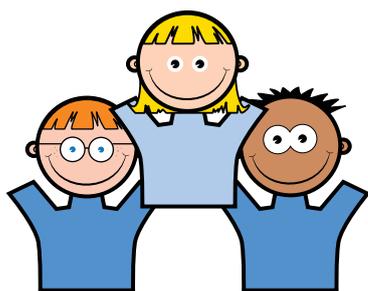
- Stephen Barry, Business Support Officer, Dublin City Childcare Committee
- Joe Rynn, Manager, Dublin City Childcare Committee
- Ann Carroll, Childcare Co-ordinator, Community After-School Projects (CASPr)
- Margaret Caul, Manager, North Central Local Childcare Resource Centre
- Paul Downes, Quality Development of Out-of-School Services (QDOSS), and Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra
- Valerie Gaynor, Project-Coordinator, South Central Local Childcare Resource Centre.
- Maire Igoe, Children's Services Unit, Dublin City Council
- Bernadette Kelly, Coordinator, Dublin North West Local Childcare Resource Centre
- Valerie McLoughlin, Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra
- Teresa Quigley, Coordinator, South East Local Childcare Resource Centre
- Sr. Malene da Velle, Aisling Project, Ballymun
- Joan Whelan, Principal, Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School
- Trish McCann, Childcare Co-ordinator, KWCDT Partnership
- Phil Lynch, Irish Preschool Playgroups Association
- Breda Kenny, Central Local Childcare Resource Centre
- Michelle McDermot, Barnardos



Your Plan – Your Future

www.childcareonline.ie

This website provides constantly updated information on: grants and supports available for providers and parents; training and career path planning for childcare workers; services of voluntary and statutory agencies; information on the work of Dublin City Childcare Committee; and links to childcare providers through our searchable directory.



Dublin City

CHILDCARE COMMITTEE LTD

COISTE CÚRAIM LEANAÍ CHATHAIR BHAILE ÁTHA CLIATH



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