



Report on the Impact of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme in County Roscommon between January and August 2010



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Acronyms

CCCs	City and County Childcare Committees
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECS	Early Childhood Supplement
LIPs	Local Implementation Plan
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
OECD	Organisation for the Economic Co-operation and Development
OMCYA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
PR	Public Relations
RCCC	Roscommon County Childcare Committee

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1. Introduction

On Tuesday, 7th April 2009, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews, welcomed the announcement of a new free pre-school year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). At the introduction of the scheme, Barry Andrews stated, “*The provision of a year’s free pre-school to all children will promote equality of opportunity at the most important developmental stage of children’s lives. Regardless of income or ability to pay, all children will be entitled to avail of this pre-school service*” (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA, 2009).

The Free preschool year in the ECCE sector followed on from the Early Childcare Supplement (ECS). The latter scheme, which began in August 2006, saw a quarterly payment of €250 made directly to parents for each of their children under the age of six to contribute towards childcare costs (OMCYA, 2006). The Early Childcare Supplement initiative ceased in December 2009, and the free preschool year in ECCE began in January 2010. Under this new scheme, the Irish government will contribute €2,425 to each eligible child’s preschool year. Capitation grants are paid directly to childcare services for each eligible child enrolled in their service. In return, childcare services must provide a pre-school year of appropriate programme based activities. Children attending a preschool sessional service will receive 3 hours per day, 5 days a week over a 38 week period, free of charge. Those enrolled in full-day care will receive 2 hours 15 minutes, 5 days per week, over a 50 week period, free of charge.

At a national level the OMCYA co-ordinates the implementation of this scheme, supported at a local level by 33 City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) around the country. In line with its mission statement, RCCC supported 54 childcare services access and implement the ECCE scheme during its first year. RCCC’s mission statement states the following:

Roscommon County Childcare Committee promotes the consolidation, development and delivery of high-quality childcare services and facilities which are affordable and accessible to local parents and their children and supports childcare providers, parents and other key stakeholders in line with the objectives of the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (RCCC, 2006: 4)

As the first year of the scheme draws to an end, RCCC decided to investigate childcare services’ opinions and experiences of the ECCE scheme.

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2. Research Aims

The three aims of this research project are to:

1. gain an insight into childcare services' opinions and experiences of accessing and implementing the Free Pre-school Year under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme in their service between January – June / August 2010.
2. discover any gaps, and by doing so, to identify how RCCC can further assist childcare services in the future to access and implement the ECCE scheme.
3. relate the findings of this study to the OMCYA regarding the implementation of the ECCE scheme in Co. Roscommon.

3. Methodology

To achieve the aims of this research project, a questionnaire was compiled by RCCC staff. In order to pilot the draft questionnaire, it was sent to the OMCYA, and four childcare services: two private and two community to ask for their advice on the questions set out. All involved were invited to add questions that they believed would be relevant or to make amendments to those already outlined. The final draft resulted from contributions made by RCCC staff, the OMCYA, and three childcare services.

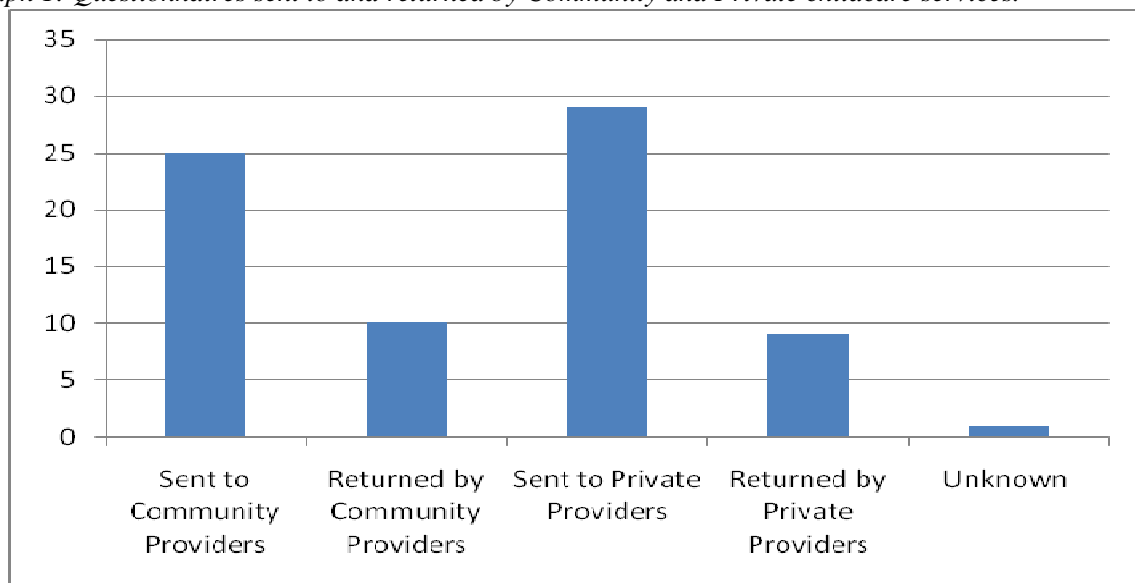
The questionnaire, which was distributed to 25 community and 29 private services, comprised of 19 questions. It contained both closed and open-ended questions. For the purpose of confidentiality, childcare services were advised that respondents' names and that of their childcare centre would not be used in any part of this project.

In order to gather a wide range of views, RCCC invited those who played a significant role in accessing and implementing the ECCE scheme: committee members, managers, owners, and preschool leaders, to complete and return the questionnaire. To achieve this, the questionnaire was emailed to 66 individuals. RCCC posted the questionnaire on their website, too. Respondents were asked to return the completed questionnaire by email or post to RCCC by Wednesday 30th June 2010. Due to a low response rate, this date was extended to Friday 23rd July 2010.

4. Findings

The findings of this project only consider responses from 20 completed questionnaires. The reason for this is that, on receipt of a further 3 questionnaires, the extension date had closed, and findings had already been analysed. The breakdown of returned questionnaires used in this project is as such: 10 from community providers, 9 from private services, and 1 unknown source. RCCC acknowledges that this is a low response rate, and, as a result, accepts that the findings in this report may not be representative of the entire childcare sector in County Roscommon.

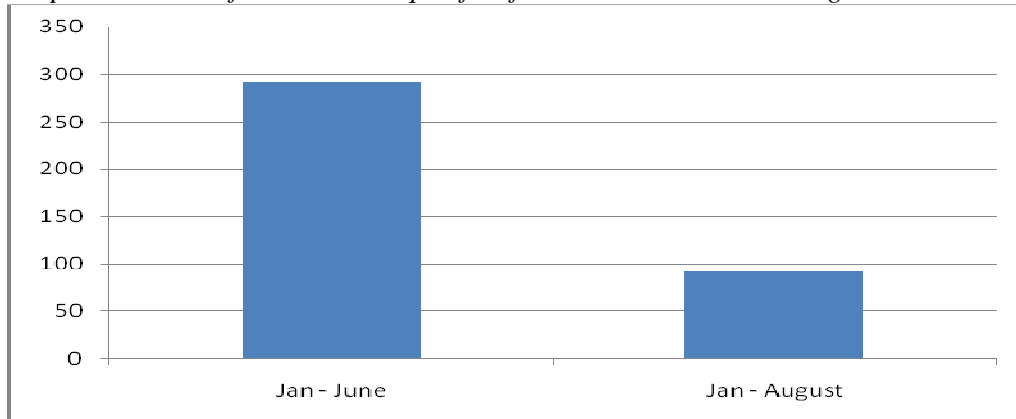
Graph 1: Questionnaires sent to and returned by Community and Private childcare services.



4.1 Number of Children who Qualified for the ECCE scheme

Results from the questionnaires highlight that from the 20 services who participated in this research project, a total of 292 children qualified for the ECCE scheme between January and June 2010. A further 92 children qualified for the scheme between January and August 2010. It must be noted that as only 20 out of a possible 54 childcare services responded to this questionnaire, the figures outlined here are not a true representation of the number of children who availed of the ECCE scheme during its first year. Furthermore, in their answers, some respondents stated that the same number of children availed of the scheme during both periods. This suggests that incorrect information may have been given in the questionnaire.

Graph 2: Number of children who qualified for the ECCE scheme during Jan – June and Jan – Aug 2010.



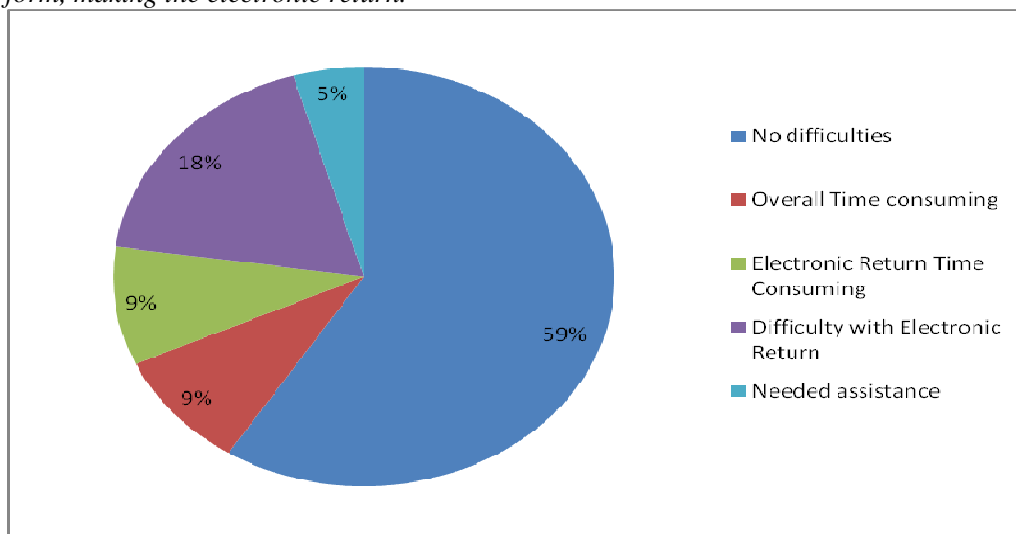
4.2 Number of Transfers

All, but one respondent, answered the following questions: *How many children transferred to your service? How many children transferred from your service?* Four services had a child transfer to their service. One service experienced the transfer of 3 children from her service. No reason for this was given.

4.3 Administration

Childcare services were asked to comment on how they found the administration of the ECCE scheme. A number of participants made more than one comment. Answers provided were categorised into 5 themes: No difficulties, Overall – Time consuming, Electronic Returns were Time Consuming, Difficulty with Electronic Returns, and Needed assistance.

Graph 3: How did you find the administration of the ECCE scheme? Example, filling in the application form, making the electronic return.

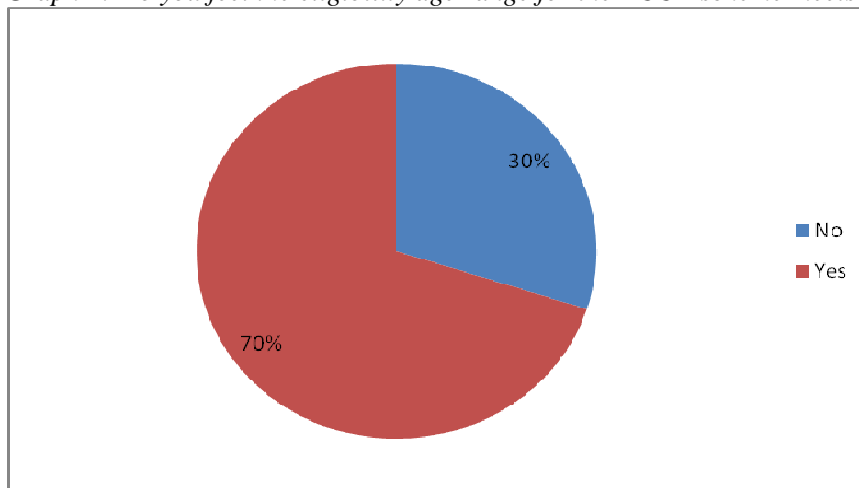


59% of respondents stated that they had no difficulties with the administration aspect of the ECCE scheme. 18% had difficulties with the electronic returns. 9% of respondents highlighted that they found the electronic returns time consuming. Another 9% found the overall administration work time consuming. One childcare service needed assistance from other people to complete the electronic return. The reason for this was because their computer was not compatible with the programme needed to access the electronic return. Another service felt that it would be helpful to be allowed to print off a summary of electronic returns for their records. One provider stated that the electronic return is better than the written version.

4.4. Age Eligibility

This research project wished to gather childcare services' views around the eligibility age range for the ECCE scheme.

Graph 4: Do you feel the eligibility age range for the ECCE scheme meets the needs of parents?



Of the returns submitted, 70% believed that the eligibility age range for the ECCE scheme meets the needs of parents, whereas the other 30% disagreed with this. Two childcare services noted that more flexibility is needed around the eligibility date of birth as some children missed out on the ECCE scheme by a few days or weeks. A parent in one service gave the wrong date of birth.

4.5 Concerns

This open-ended question asked *What have been the concerns of the ECCE scheme in relation to your service?* Three respondents did not answer this question. A further three services stated that they did not have any concerns. The answers given were varied, and RCCC did its best to

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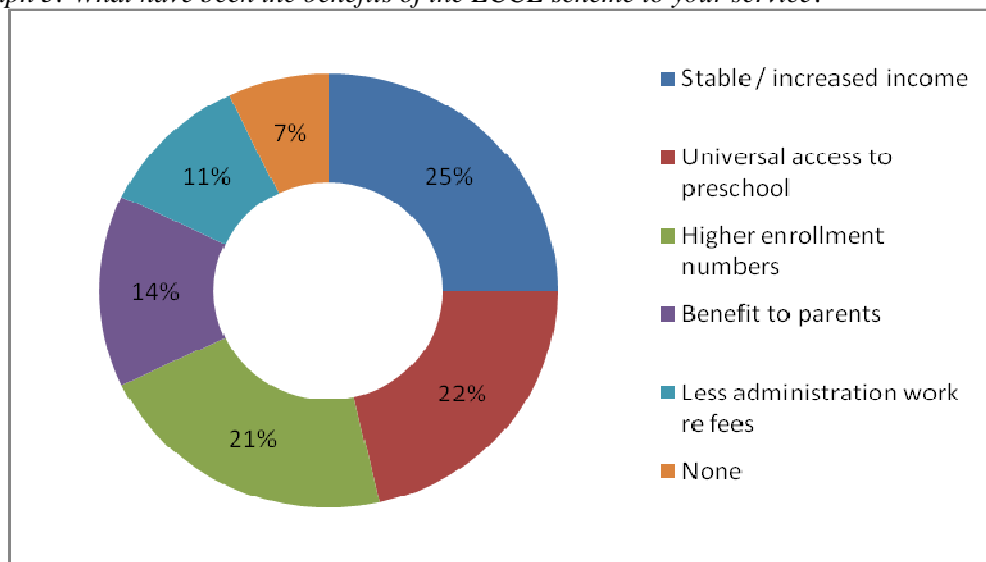
categorise them. Concerns that childcare services had regarding the ECCE scheme centred round the following:

- Parents will only send children to preschool for 1 year as it is free, whereas before, many children availed of two preschool years.
- Less value will be put on childcare as it is free
- Qualifications and staff training
- Eligibility - Date of birth
- Not enough income to cover overheads
- Extra administration work
- Discrepancy between opening hours for CCSS and ECCE
- Low numbers during holiday periods
- Síolta will be time consuming
- Rural areas may not fill places
- Initial confusion between 38 / 50 week model
- Initial confusion concerning different payments for 38 / 50 week model

4.6 Benefits

This open-ended question asked *What have been the benefits of the ECCE scheme to your service?* One respondent did not answer this question. Answers to this question were categorised.

Graph 5: What have been the benefits of the ECCE scheme to your service?

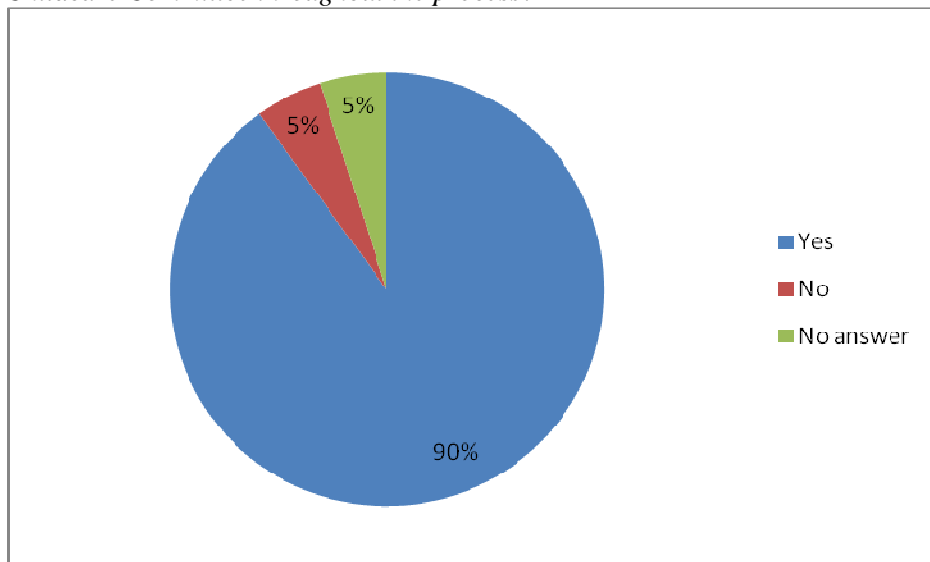


25% of respondents stated that the ECCE scheme had a positive impact on their income; increasing or stabilising it. 22% indicated that the ECCE brought about universal access to preschool for all children. 21% of respondents experienced higher enrolment figures. One service revealed that the number of days that parents sent their children to preschool increased significantly from January 2010, as opposed to from September to December 2009. 14% of childcare services stated that the ECCE scheme benefitted parents. 11% reported that as a result of receiving the capitation grant, they had less administration work regarding fees. One service explained that less time was lost ‘chasing up’ fees from parents. 7% of returned questionnaires found that the ECCE scheme had brought about no benefits to their service.

4.7.1 Support from RCCC

90% of respondents stated that they felt they received enough support from Roscommon County Childcare Committee throughout the ECCE process. 5% indicated that they did not receive enough support from RCCC, while another 5% did not answer this question.

Graph 6: Do you feel that your childcare service has received enough support from Roscommon County Childcare Committee throughout the process?

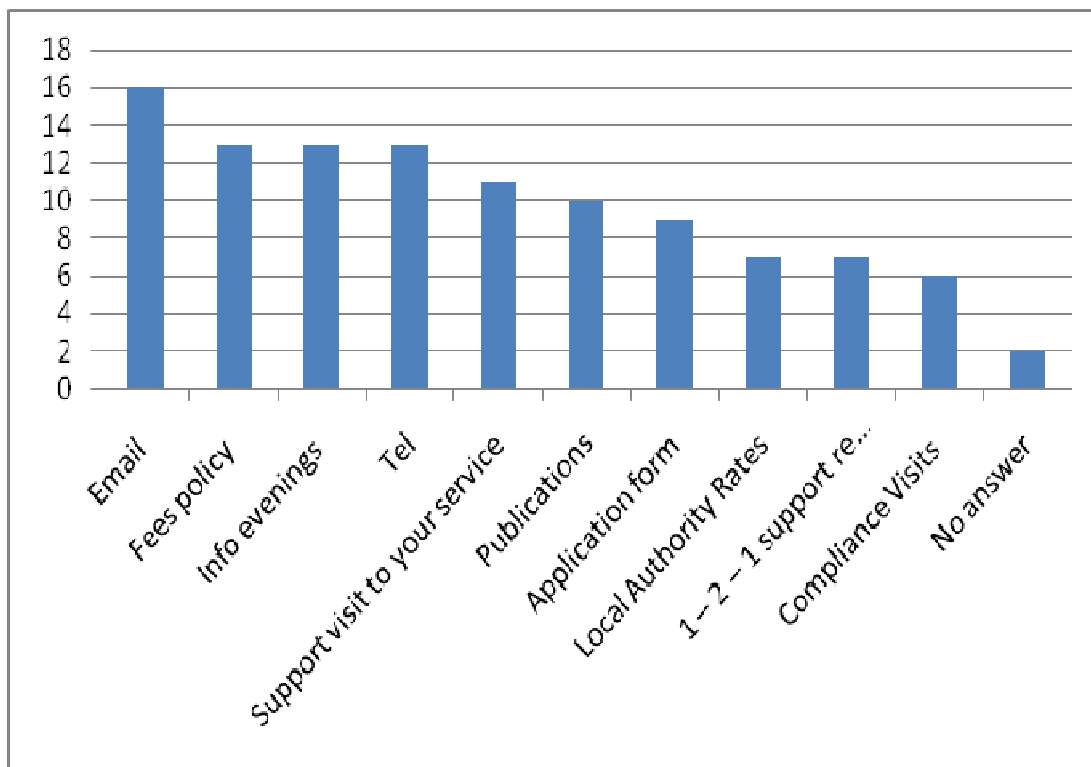


4.7.2 Types of Support Received by RCCC

To identify the types of support childcare services availed of, the questionnaire contained a list of ten support structures put in place by RCCC to support childcare services access and implement the ECCE scheme. Services were asked to highlight the type of support received, and to mention any other not specified in the list. See graph 7 for details.

16 respondents stated that they received support via email, while 13 were offered support over the telephone. 13 childcare services obtained support regarding their fees policy. A further 13 services received support during Information Evenings. 11 respondents acknowledged that they received support from RCCC staff during support visits to their childcare service. Publications produced by RCCC offered support to 10 respondents. 9 childcare services affirmed that they received support regarding their application form. 7 respondents highlighted that they had received support regarding Local Authority Rates, and 1-2-1 support to complete their Electronic Returns. 6 returned questionnaires revealed that services had received support concerning compliance visits. 2 respondents did not answer this question.

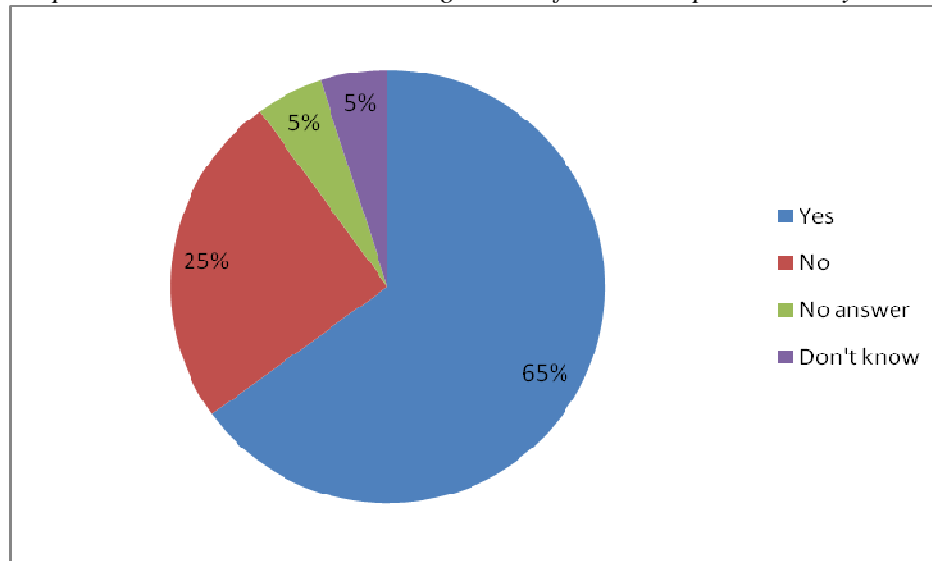
Graph 7: Types of support childcare providers received by RCCC regarding the ECCE scheme



4.8 Financial Implications

This research project aspired to discover whether the ECCE scheme had financial implications for childcare services. This part of the questionnaire contained a closed and open-ended question. Graph 8 highlights the first part of this section.

Graph 8: Has the ECCE scheme brought about financial implications to your childcare service?



65% of respondents stated that the ECCE scheme had brought about financial implications to their childcare service. 25% responded that it had not brought about any financial implications, while 5% did not know, and another 5% did not answer this question.

Respondents were asked to elaborate on the financial implications the ECCE scheme had brought to their childcare services. Answers were varied, and are listed below:

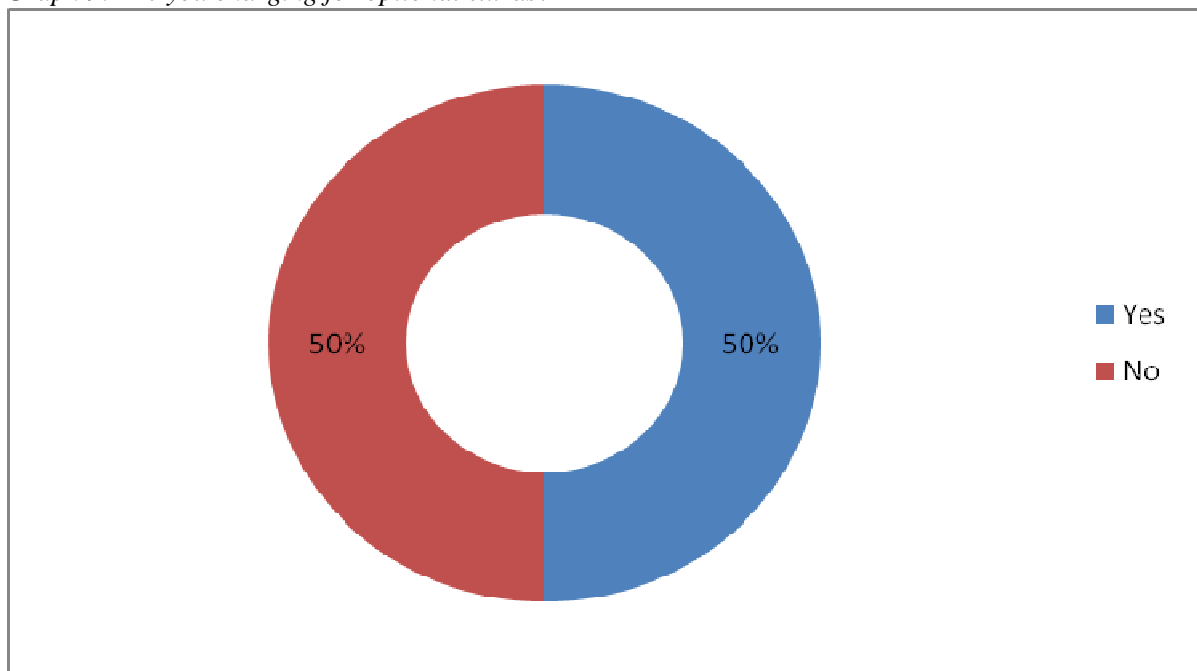
- Lower attendance during holidays, making it necessary to increase fees to cover all costs
- Parents less willing to fundraise or pay for optional extras
- Less value on pre-school by parents as they view it as 'free'
- Staff funding replaced by ECCE scheme has greatly reduced income
- Capitation grant lower than previous fees
- Concerned about future and inability to fill spaces
- Bulk payments instead of weekly caused some problems.
- Payment delay as participate in both CCSS and ECCE
- Payment delay had negative implications re staff getting paid.
- Felt penalised for participating in two schemes
- Felt unsupported by OMCYA re issues around payment

- More difficult to pay wages and bills
- No payment for bank holidays
- Enrollment figures have decreased
- Closing service due to insufficient funding
- Unsure at present.
- Secure income
- Capitation grant received in lump sum avoids chasing up fees from parents

4.9.1 Optional Extras

50% of respondents stated that they charged for optional extras. The other 50% opted not to. One childcare service asserted that while they did not charge for optional extras this year, they are considering doing so as from September 2010.

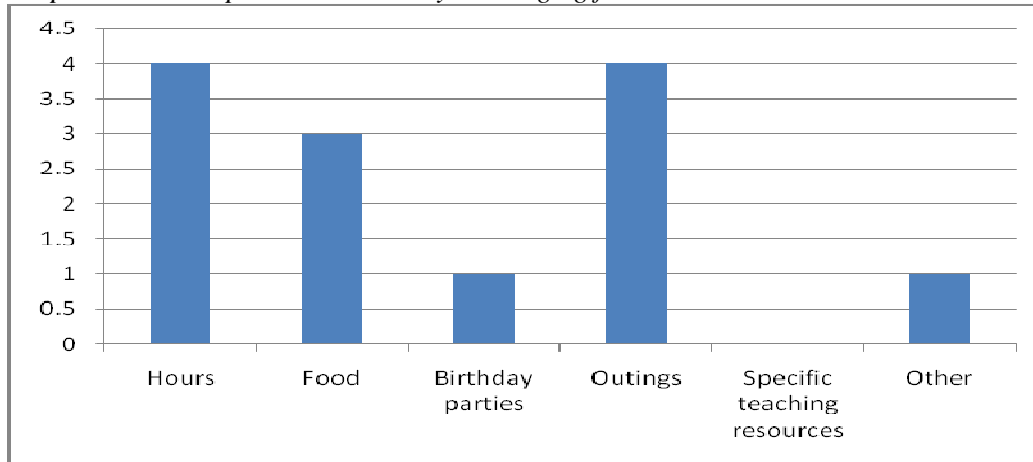
Graph 9: Are you charging for optional extras?



4.9.2 Optional Extras Services Charge

31% of childcare services responded that they charged for extra hours. Another 31% charged for outings. 23% of respondents stated that they charged for food. 8% charged for an end of year photo. 7% charged for birthday parties. No respondents charged for specific teaching resources.

Graph 10: Which optional extras are you charging for?



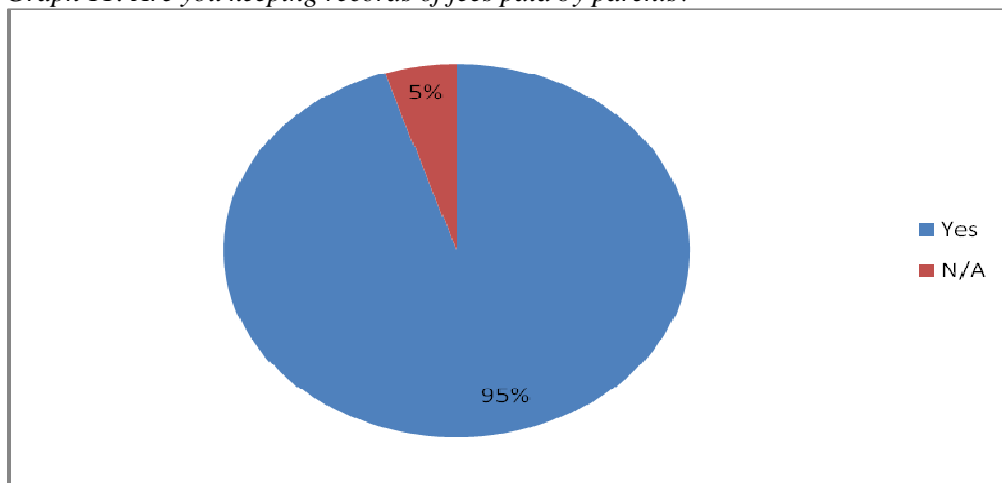
4.9.3 Parents' Responses to Optional Extras

As the charging of certain optional extras is allowed under the ECCE scheme, RCCC wished to learn parents' reactions to such charges. Six respondents stated that parents' responses were positive toward the paying of optional extras. One service stated that parents refused to pay for the extra half hour. One childcare service wrote that parents are not happy to have to pay for extra hours or holidays. Two respondents said that parents did not send their children in during holidays.

4.10.1 Fees Records

95% of respondents state that they kept records of fees paid by parents. The other 5% marked N/A.

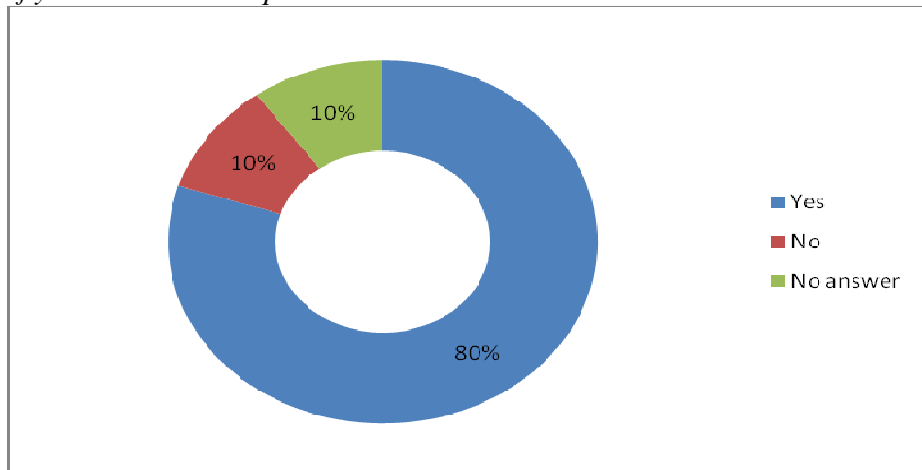
Graph 11: Are you keeping records of fees paid by parents?



4.10.2. ECCE Fees Policy

80% of childcare services stated that the fees they charged reflected their ECCE fees policy. 10% said no, and another 10% did not answer this question.

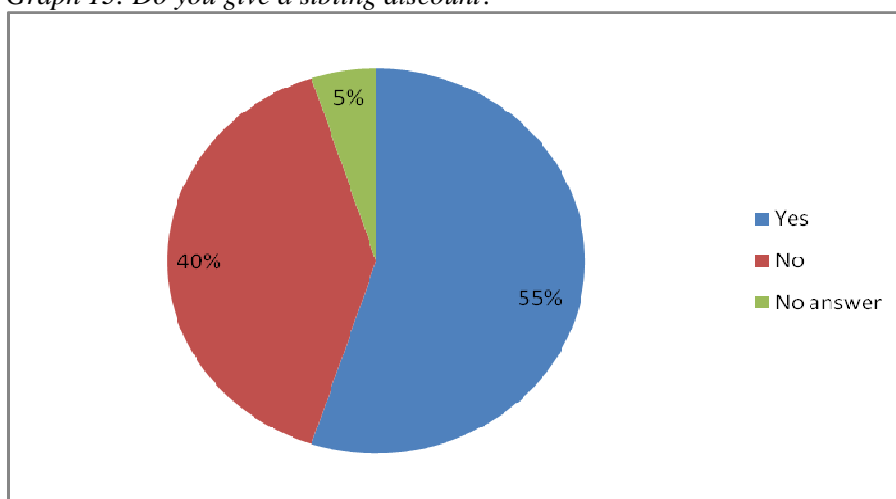
Graph 12: Do the fees being charged to parents reflect your services ECCE fees policy submitted as part of your contractual requirements to the OMCYA?



4.11 Sibling Discounts

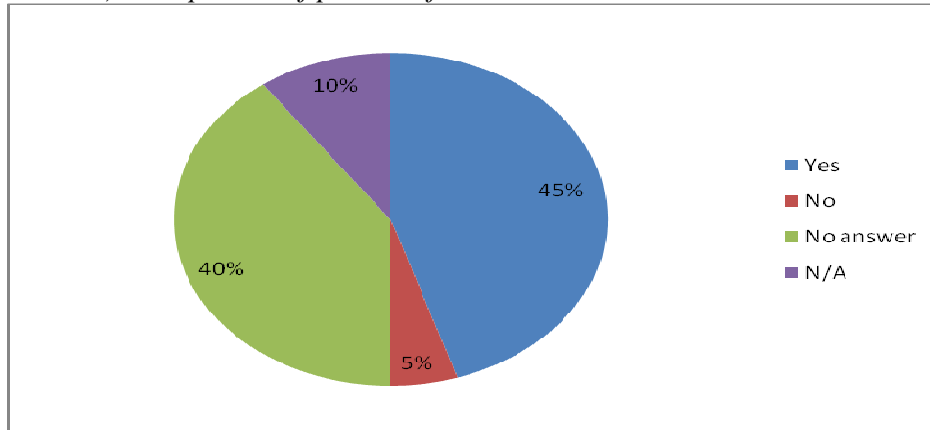
55% of respondents gave a sibling discount. 40% did not. 5% did not answer this question. One service revealed that although they give a sibling discount, this only applied to their afterschool service, and not to the preschool. Another service offered a sibling discount but only to those who attended the service for at least three days a week.

Graph 13: Do you give a sibling discount?



While many childcare services gave a sibling discount, this research project also set out to discover if they applied to all children.

Graph 14: Does your sibling discount apply to all children, ECCE (and CCSS – community services), irrespective of parents’ financial circumstances?

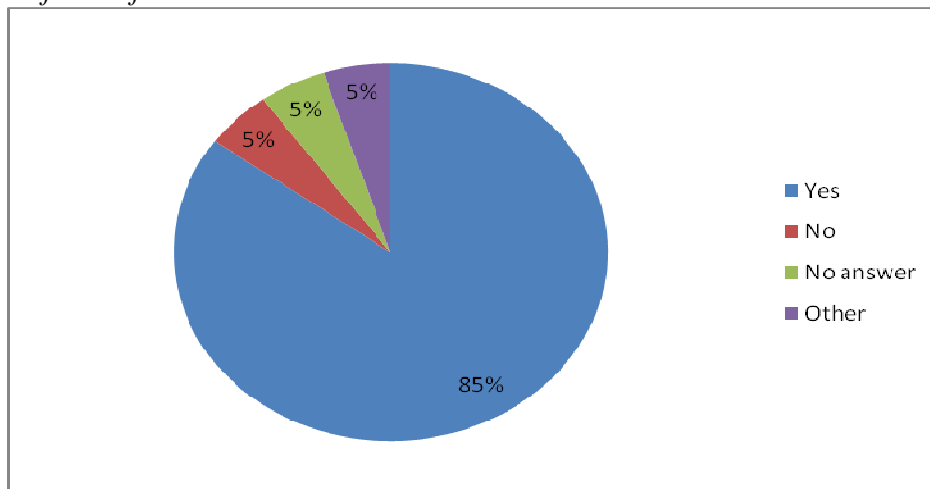


45% of childcare services affirmed that their sibling discount applied to all children. 40% did not answer this question. 10% responded that this did not apply to their service. This questionnaire found that 5% of respondents’ sibling discount did not apply to all children.

4.12.1 RCCC’s Parent Information Leaflet

In 2009, RCCC produced an Information Leaflet for parents regarding the free preschool year in Early Childhood Care and Education. The questionnaire asked childcare services for their opinion on it.

Graph 15: Did you find Roscommon County Childcare Committee’s ECCE Parent Information leaflet useful?



85% of respondents found Roscommon County Childcare Committee's ECCE Parent Information leaflet helpful. 5% answered no. Another 5 % did not answer this question. 1 childcare service stated that they had not got any feedback from parents.

4.12.2. Distribution of ECCE Parent Information Leaflet

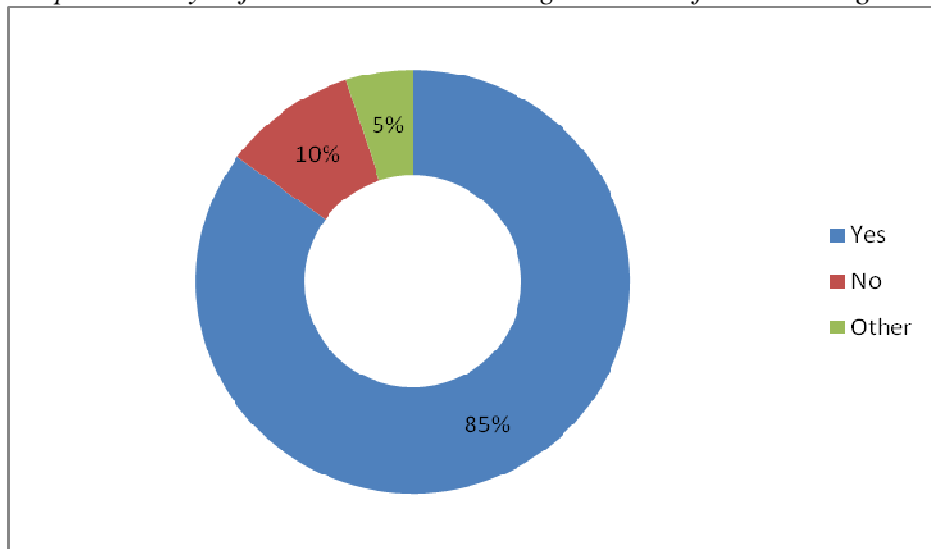
19 out of 20 respondents stated that they distributed the ECCE scheme information leaflets to parents. One service said that they did not receive the leaflet.

4.12.3 Parent Information Evenings

To heighten parents' awareness of the ECCE scheme, RCCC organised four parent information evenings; two south and two north of the county. Furthermore, RCCC supported 11 services to deliver parent information evenings in their childcare service.

This research project aimed to discover if services believed there were enough parent information evenings held in the county. 85% of respondents believed that there were enough information evenings for parents regarding the ECCE scheme. However, two stated that they should have been earlier in the year. 10% did not think that there were enough information evenings. One service stated parents would need to be asked this in order to be able to answer.

Graph 16: Do you feel that there was enough Parent information Nights on the ECCE scheme?



4.13. Compliance Visits

Throughout the first year of the ECCE scheme, RCCC supported many childcare services organise for a compliance visit. Support offered to services was given over the phone, and sometimes involved information being emailed to services. Childcare Development Officers also carried out on-site support visits to childcare services, meeting with senior childcare practitioners and committee members.

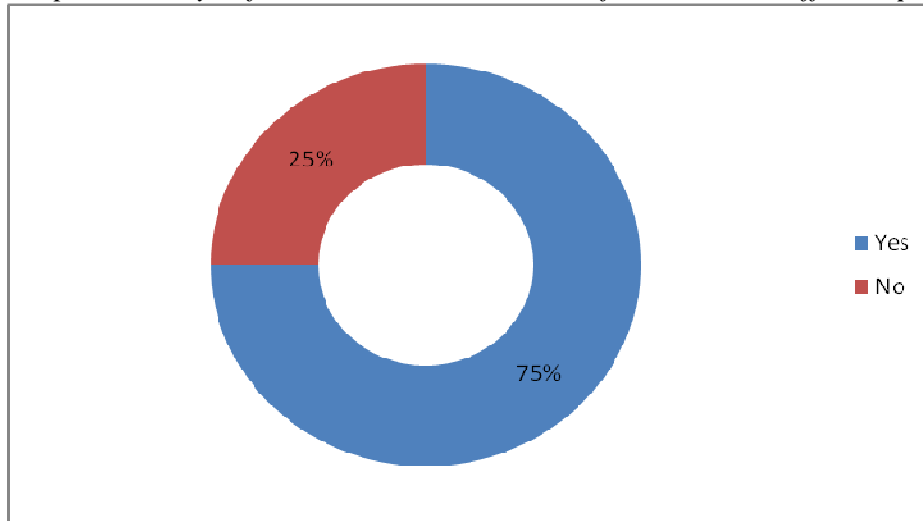
The questionnaire asked childcare services, *Have you had an ECCE compliance visit?* 55% of respondents had an ECCE compliance visit. 40% did not have one at the time that their questionnaire was returned to RCCC. 5% gave no answer. This question also asked those who had a compliance visit to elaborate upon their experience. Answers have been categorised.

- 8 services stated that it went well.
- 2 providers found the compliance visit to be very informative / helpful and their queries were answered.
- 1 provider networked with other providers who had had a compliance visit to find out the procedure and what was needed.
- 1 provider sought a copy of their fees policy from RCCC.
- 2 services gave no extra feedback.

4.14. Parent Declaration Forms

Childcare services were asked, *Did you find the Parent Declaration forms to be an efficient process?* 75% of respondents found the parent declaration forms to be an efficient process. 25% did not find it to be efficient. Reasons for this are as follows: 3 services stated that they were issued too late during the year. One service declared that parents commented on the lateness of the collection of data. Another service explained that she does not believe that there will be enough time to collect the information in time to do the Electronic Returns in Sept 2010 as her service is closed for the month of August. Two services stated that they were time consuming regarding the administration, collecting them back from parents and explaining them to parents. One service suggested that a Scanning system, similar to PPS cards in Post Offices, would eliminate the extra administration work involved in the process.

Graph 17: Did you find the Parent Declaration forms to be an efficient process?



4.15 Deferrals

The penultimate question asked providers if any parents decided to defer their child's start date until September 2010. One respondent did not answer this question. 12 childcare services said 'No'. 7 respondents stated that parents deferred their child's place until September 2010. According to the answers provided by respondents, a total of thirteen ECCE places were deferred.

4.16 Policies and procedures

RCCC set out to discover what policies and procedures services had in place. 19 respondents had a Fees payment policy for parents. 18 had an enrolment policy. 17 had a policy on Staff health and safety. 16 had one on staff training. 13 providers had a policy in place regarding data protection. 5 had a Communication policy in reference to support agencies.

The next chapter in this report draws conclusions from the findings, linking them to the project's aims.

5. Conclusions

This section links into the aims of this project. The first section concludes on the first aim:

- to gain an insight into childcare services' opinions and experiences of accessing and implementing the Free Pre-school Year under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme in their service between January – June / August 2010.

The second part of this chapter concludes on the second aim of this project:

- discover any gaps, and by doing so, to identify how RCCC can further assist childcare services in the future to access and implement the ECCE scheme.

The third aim which is to relate the findings of this study to the OMCYA regarding the implementation of the ECCE scheme in Co. Roscommon will be accomplished by sending a copy of this report directly to the OMCYA.

This research project set out to gain an insight into childcare services' opinions and experiences of accessing and implementing the Free Pre-school Year under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme between January – June / August 2010. While the ECCE scheme created some initial confusion, for the majority of childcare services, accessing and implementing the scheme appears to have been a positive experience.

Childcare providers indicate that benefits brought about, following the introduction of the ECCE scheme, include: less administration work, less time spent chasing parents for fees, higher enrolment numbers, increased income as the capitation grant is greater than fees previously charged, universal access to preschool for children in the year prior to commencing National School, benefiting both children and parents.

As well as benefits, childcare services point out positive aspects of the ECCE scheme. Services gave positive feedback regarding their compliance visit, finding them helpful and informative. At a local level, RCCC played a major role in supporting childcare providers to access and implement the scheme. This project can conclude that the majority of providers indicate that the support they received from RCCC throughout the whole process was of great benefit. It also notes that a number of parents took up the opportunity to defer their child's ECCE place to

September 2010. Finally, three quarters of respondents find the parent declaration forms to be an efficient process. However, providers are concerned that forms are issued too late during the year. Some find the process time consuming: the administration, collecting the forms from parents and explaining them to parents.

This project notes a number of concerns identified by childcare providers' regarding the ECCE scheme. Firstly, some services believe that the eligibility age range does not meet parents' needs, and that more flexibility is needed. Secondly, there is a concern that less value will be put on childcare as it is free, and parents will only avail of one preschool year, whereas before, many availed of two. Thirdly, many services charge optional extras, with extra hours and outings being the most popular. The findings indicate that parents' reactions to optional charges are mixed; some pay them, while others do not agree with them. Childcare services indicate that the optional charge for extra hours or weeks outside of the ECCE calendar has resulted in lower attendance numbers during the holiday periods, impacting negatively on their income, leaving services in a difficult position to cover their costs, including the payment of staff wages. Community childcare services voice concerns regarding the discrepancy between opening weeks for ECCE and CCSS, and delay of payments due to participating in both schemes, having negative financial implications for some.

This project set out to discover how RCCC can assist childcare services in the future to implement and access the ECCE scheme. Firstly, it is noted that fees being charged by some childcare services do not reflect their ECCE fees policy. So services are compliant in this area, and to ensure sustainability, RCCC will continue to bring awareness of the importance of charging fees set out in their ECCE fees policy to childcare services. Secondly, another aspect identified by RCCC is the importance of childcare services keeping records for optional charges as such information will be required during compliance visits. RCCC will work to bring this knowledge to the attention of services participating in the ECCE scheme. Thirdly, while the majority of respondents believe that RCCC held enough information evenings for parents regarding the ECCE scheme, some respondents believe that they should be earlier in the year. This is another area in which RCCC can further assist childcare services and parents in the future to access and implement the ECCE scheme. Fourthly, this project indicates that some

community services in Co. Roscommon have experienced negative financial implications as the operation weeks for CCSS and ECCE are different. RCCC will continue to work collaboratively with Pobal to support such services. Fifthly, some services experienced a delay in payment of monies. RCCC will continue to support childcare services communicate such concerns to both Pobal and the OMCYA. A sixth gap identified from this project is the difference between the number of weeks services are paid the capitation grant, and the week's services pay staff. While RCCC does not have a remit to make such decisions, it does make a recommendation to the OMCYA concerning this matter (see recommendations). A final gap detected in this study is that some services offer a sibling discount, but it is not across the board. RCCC will bring awareness of the criteria for giving a discount as set out in the fees policy for Sept 2010 to services participating in the ECCE scheme.

Finally, although time and consideration went into devising the ECCE questionnaire, RCCC found limitations to a number of questions.

- *Transferring to and from services*: this question needs to be expanded to discover providers' opinions on the transfer process.
- *Administration of the ECCE scheme*: this question set out a couple of examples, as guidelines only. On reflection, RCCC believes such examples may have limited the respondents' answers, as no other aspect of administration work is referred to or highlighted in the answers.
- *Record keeping of fees paid by parents*: this question needs to be expanded to investigate whether services also keep records of optional extras parents pay for.
- *Deferral process*: this question needs to be developed to discover childcare workers' opinions regarding this process.

6. Recommendations

The findings from this study highlight a number of significant issues relating to the operation of the ECCE which need to be addressed. This section outlines a number of recommendations to help the future implementation of the ECCE scheme. They are presented here taking into consideration the findings from this study, and national and international research. Therefore, the following section not only makes recommendations, but also gives a rationale for making them.

6.1 Recommendations to Support Future Implementation of the ECCE scheme

- **Recommendation 1:** To ensure financial sustainability of all childcare services and the retention of childcare staff, RCCC recommends that the ECCE capitation grant is paid over a 43 week period as opposed to the current 38 weeks.

Rationale: It has recently been brought to RCCC's attention by many childcare services, both community and private, that some fee paying parents, who would normally pay for Christmas and other holidays are opting not to do so in line with ECCE eligible children. Services state that this is impacting negatively on their service. Furthermore, a report by the Department of Education and Science states '*... the low rates of remuneration and poor working conditions in the sector are issues in staff retention*' (DES, 2009: 14).

- **Recommendation 2:** RCCC will develop or utilize an existing tool to support services on a one-to-one basis to conduct financial exercises to estimate their cost per place.

Rationale: To ensure income and expenditure projections and fees policies compiled by each childcare service will prove long term viability; RCCC will initiate this exercise immediately.

- **Recommendation 3:** As community childcare services voiced their frustration of delayed payments, RCCC recommends that a method to ensure timely payments of CCS and ECCE is introduced.

Acknowledgment: RCCC acknowledges that during the first year of the ECCE scheme payments to community childcare services may not always have been issued to services on time due to a number of factors, including the need to cross reference PPS numbers.

- **Recommendation 4:** RCCC recommends that the Higher Education Authority examine ways to provide further part-time courses in early childhood studies to employed childcare practitioners that are affordable and accessible.

Rationale: Under the Terms and Conditions of the ECCE scheme,

A higher capitation fee, equivalent to €75 per week for 38 weeks, will be payable to playschool sessional service providers where all Pre-school Leaders hold a bachelor degree in childhood/early education (minimum of Level 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or equivalent) and have 3 years experience working in the sector, and where all Pre-school Assistants hold a relevant major award in childcare/early education at level 5 on the NFQ or its equivalent (OMCYA, 2010)

However, currently, part-time degree courses are not easily accessible for childcare practitioners in Co. Roscommon, thus putting many childcare workers who have numerous years of experience at a disadvantage of obtaining the higher capitation grant. This leads directly into the fifth recommendation.

Recommendation 5: RCCC recommends that a capitation grant scale is introduced. The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure recognition of accredited training childcare workers have engaged in at level 5, 6 and 7 on the National Qualification Framework since the introduction of the ECCE scheme, and to entice others to upskill. Furthermore, it may have a positive impact on staff retention, already outlined in recommendation 1.

- **Recommendation 6:** To ensure that the area of ECCE retains its importance and value, RCCC recommends that the word ‘Free’ is omitted from the current title of the scheme, and that only the words ‘Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme’ appear in publications.

Rationale: The views of respondents to this research are echoed by researchers who state that values and attitudes toward early childhood care and education find their roots deep within cultural and societal beliefs having the potential to have a negative or positive effect on the sector as a whole (OECD, 2004, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; DES, 2009).

- **Recommendation 7:** RCCC recommends that, in the future, no action is taken that would eliminate small or rural services from participating in the ECCE scheme.

Rationale: Some childcare services in rural areas have made RCCC aware that they currently find it difficult to have the necessary complement of ECCE children, and are anxious that if this continues to happen, they may be denied entry into the ECCE scheme.

- **Recommendation 8:** As part of its Local Implementation Plan (LIPs), RCCC has a Public Relations (PR) strategy. Therefore, to further heighten awareness of the ECCE scheme to parents, RCCC recommends that information leaflets are distributed to parents at an earlier stage in the year. Also, the OMCYA, in collaboration with Roscommon County Childcare Committee's PR strategy, use media resources such as radio and newspaper to further promote the ECCE scheme. This strategy could be a national one, involving all CCCs.
- **Recommendation 9:** This project recommends that the OMCYA publishes information to both parents and childcare providers to highlight the rationale for choosing the current ECCE age eligibility range.
Rationale: The purpose for this is, traditionally in Ireland, half of all junior infant students are aged four. Each year RCCC receives numerous calls from parents in relation to the ECCE age eligibility who express their annoyance that their child will miss out on the scheme as they wish to send their child to school at aged four.
- **Recommendation 10:** Throughout the first year of the ECCE scheme, great collaborative work occurred and strong relationships were created between the OMCYA and RCCC. This project recommends that such work continues into the future.
- **Recommendation 11:** RCCC recommends that Childcare Development Officers are permitted to attend at least two compliance visits: one community and one private.
Rationale: So that CCC's have a better understanding of compliance visits, and to be able to offer further support to childcare services,

6.2 Recommendations for future study

- It is recommended that focus groups are held with parents to identify their views on the ECCE scheme.
- To gain more in-depth knowledge of opinions held by childcare services, RCCC recommends that a qualitative approach, in the form of in-depth interviews or focus groups is taken with both private and community services in relation to the ECCE scheme. Similarities and differences could then be explored and highlighted.

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