

*School Age Childcare -  
A Case Study of Galway City  
and County*

**2014**

*A Research Project*

*Facilitated by*

*Galway City and County Childcare Committee*

*&*

*The Local Development Companies, Galway City and County*



Galway City Partnership  
Comhpháirtíocht Chathair na Gaillimhe





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## **Introduction**

This research report focuses on the topic of School Age Childcare<sup>1</sup> in Ireland. In particular, the report addresses the complexity of language and definitions in place in relation to the provision of School Age Childcare in this country. Within an Irish social policy context, there has been significant ambiguity as to which Government Department has responsibility for the provision of such services to children. Historically, the Department of Education and Skills (previously Department of Education and Science), Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (previously Department from the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs), Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Health have been directly and indirectly involved in the provision of these services. The interaction with differing Departments has contributed to the variations in language and content of curriculum within after school provision.

This research report explores, through reviewing literature, the variations in language and definitions, government policy and provision in Ireland with the simple aim of highlighting the need for a comprehensive national discussion on this topic. The primary data collection element of the research focuses on the level and type of provision which occurs in Galway City and County.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Developing a Historical Context**

In order to review the current provision and funding, a historical context of School Age Childcare in Ireland must be explored. Important legislative changes have taken place in the past thirty years which have shaped the provision of services to children in Ireland including the Childcare Act (1991), the Education Act (1998) and the (Pre-School Services) Regulation Act 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> School Age Childcare is a term developed by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in 2005 and will be generically used throughout this report as a term to cover all afterschool provision.

The Childcare legislation, in particular the Pre-school Services regulation, have provided a legal framework which focused on the development of children, the physical environment for children's services, safety and emergency aspects, and appropriate record keeping. The purpose of these Regulations is to set minimum standards throughout the sector.

The Education Act (1988) introduced and defined the topic of Educational disadvantage within Irish legislation. Educational disadvantage is defined in the legislation as *"the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools."* Subsequently, tackling educational disadvantage became a central focus of government policy within formal and informal education in Ireland. Furthermore, Boldt and Devine<sup>2</sup> state that *"educational disadvantage must take into account the individual deriving less benefit from the education system, and of the diminished life chances of the individual who has left formal education without recognised qualifications"* (1998 p.10). The central role many School Age Childcare settings play in tackling the issue of Educational Disadvantages has been recognised within research and policy development in Ireland. This recognised the provision of such support as the Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) and School Completion Programmes.

Pugh (1999)<sup>3</sup> completed an investigation of after-school services for children aged 4–12 years in the Dublin area and identified four types of group-based service which were available:

- The first of these is crèches that operate in the private sector and usually incorporate after-school provision with the provision of care to younger children.
- Crèches are typically used by families in middle to high-income groups, as the charge for the service can be very substantial.

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<sup>2</sup> Boldt, S. and Devine, B., 1998. Educational Disadvantage in Ireland: Literature Review and Summary Report. In Boldt, S., Devine, B., Mac Devitt, D. and Morgan, M. (ed.) *Educational Disadvantage and Early School Leaving: Discussion Papers*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

<sup>3</sup> Pugh, E. (1999). *What happens after school? An investigation of after-school services for children aged 4–12 years in the Dublin area*. Dublin: Centre for Social and Educational Research, DIT.

- A second type of service is provided by primary schools in the form of cultural or sporting activities. The nature of the activities can vary considerably and may be offered free or involve a cost to parents.
- The third type of service is community-based after-school projects in disadvantaged areas that cater for the needs of the children within the context of the needs of the local community. Their emphasis is on providing a service that parents will find accessible and affordable.
- The fourth type of service is generally called a 'homework club' and exists primarily as a support service to children in disadvantaged areas. These services are typically offered by local partnership areas and may provide help with homework, other academic work (such as reading or numeracy), non-academic activities such as drama and art or some combination of these.

Pugh (1999) noted in his research that "*All the clubs participating in the present study could be classified as homework clubs*". Furthermore, Pugh (1999) noted that after-school services in Ireland are not regulated and an important consequence is that no formal statistics exist on the number of these services, the number of children and families that they cater for or their distribution around the country.

In 2004, Holt and Pugh noted that there are different ways afterschool projects can be organised and in different settings. They say the most common types of services are where "*children and young people are cared for in a safe and secure play and recreational environment*" and "*Mixed environments where children and young people can play, do homework and are supported in all activities*". Hennessy and Donnelly (2005) believe that after-school services have a potentially important role to play in disadvantaged communities where they can serve as an important link between families, schools and a variety of community services. They can offer children a safe environment in which to learn new skills, to spend time with friends and to have a good time. They can play a valuable supporting role for families. While there are examples of excellent after-school services across the country there is as yet no coherent national policy on the development of these services. If the sector is to

develop its full potential and meet the needs of disadvantaged communities then such a policy is essential.<sup>4</sup>

In 2005, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform developed a Working Group on School Age Childcare to review existing provision, develop guideline and make proposal for the development of School Age Childcare services Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005. The working group defines School Age Childcare as being:

*“Childcare for school going children provided outside of normal school hours where the same children attend the childcare facility on a regular basis and access to the service is clearly defined by agreement with parents and guardians” (p7).*

This working group identifies a significant amount of areas which needed to be developed in Ireland in order to fully meet the needs of this age group. Significantly, the working group identified the need for school age childcare services to plan and provide a range of play opportunities and activities to foster the development of children’s social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional capabilities. Therefore, the need for homework supports was not specifically highlighted.

In contrast in 2005, the Department of Education and Science developed a report on Best Practice in relation to the work of School Completion Programmes (SCP) in Ireland. The report provides an overview of best practice in relation to what they call ‘afterschool provision’ in SCPs. Therefore, the Department of Education and Science (2005) and projects funded by this Department refers to such support as ‘after school provision’ and not ‘school age childcare’. This Best Practice Report emphasises the following:

- After-School Supports should be well resourced with quality equipment, experienced personnel and have enough flexibility in the support to employ

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<sup>4</sup> Hennessy, E. and Donnelly, M. (2005) *After-School Care in Disadvantaged Areas: the perspectives of children, parents and experts*, Combat Poverty Agency Working Paper Series 05/01, ISBN: 0-95422-775-1, April 2005

specialist individuals who can offer activities such as Drama, Pottery, Dance, Music, Sport and Leisure.

- Use the After-School setting as an opportunity for care teams to get to know the needs of high-risk target students with emotional and behavioural problems.
- After-School Supports should offer, where possible, a hot meal or a sufficiently filling snack.
- Create on-going contact with parents or guardians in order to make them aware of the positive outcomes from the young person's participation in an After-School Support.
- Parents or guardians may be invited to exhibitions of the pupil's artwork, shows or sports events to become familiar with staff and the activities their son/daughter is engaged in during the After-School Support.

Two key developments occurred in 2006 and 2009 which impact on service delivery and curriculum within School Age Childcare settings. The first development was Síolta (2006) the National Quality Framework for all services in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland. Síolta was designed to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice in ECCE settings where children aged birth to six years are present. These settings include:

- Full and Part-time daycare services,
- Childminding services,
- Sessional services,
- Infant classes in primary schools.

The second key development occurred in 2009 when the Department of Education and Science, through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, developed Aistear. Aistear is the curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. It provides information for adults to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others. Aistear describes the types of learning (dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding) that are important for children in their early years, and offers ideas and suggestions as to how this learning might be nurtured. The Framework also

provides guidelines on supporting children's learning through partnerships with parents, interactions, play, and assessment. In supporting children's early learning and development Aistear:

- identifies what and how children should learn, and describes the types of experiences that can support this,
- makes connections in children's learning throughout the early childhood years and as they move from one setting to another,
- supports parents as their children's primary educators during early childhood, and promotes effective partnerships between parents and practitioners ,
- complements and extends existing curriculums and materials,
- informs practice across a range of settings, disciplines and professions, and encourages interdisciplinary work.

It is worth noting that School Age Childcare is often interpreted as homework support and clubs. Daly, Green, Shannon and Share<sup>5</sup> (2009) identified the nature of support provided to young people to help with homework completion tended to differ between community and school homework clubs. Homework support seemed to be more 'interventionist' in the community homework clubs, where more one-to-one help was given. This contrasted with school homework clubs, where some young people who had gone to a school homework club in the past reported that they had to figure out problems on their own. Again such literature highlights the levels of variations in service delivery and curriculum within the School Age Childcare sector. Consequently, it is clearly evident through the data presented that there are inconsistencies within policy and practice as to what constitutes School Age Childcare. The inconsistencies extend to the language and funding sources for the provision of such services.

As noted earlier in this report, there have been a myriad of Departments involved in provision of service to children and young people but in June, 2011 the Government decided to create this dedicated Department and, in doing so, to consolidate a range of functions previously discharged by various Government Ministers. The Department

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<sup>5</sup> Daly, F., Greene, S., Shannon, S. and Share, M. (2009) *Baseline Research for the Development of the Rialto Learning Community, Final Report*, Children's Research Centre, Dublin.

was called the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The Department brings together a number of key areas of policy and provision for children, young people and families. The Child and Family Agency (CFA), which became operational since January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, developed from changes to the constitution as a result of the Children's Referendum. It will bring a dedicated focus to child protection and family supports in coming years. The Agency will assume responsibility for child protection and domestic violence, previously the remit of the Health Service Executive. Preschool Protection Services and the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) will also come under the umbrella of the Agency.

### **School Age Childcare – Emerging Regulation System of Early Years Services**

The Child and Family Agency Act 2014 was enacted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2014. PART 12 of the Child and Family Act 2014 makes an amendment to part VII of the Child Care Act 1991 by the insertion of "PART VIIA": Supervision of Early Years Services. Registration essentially replaces the current notification model with a pre-approval model. This legislation serves to introduce and implement the registration of early year's services on a statutory basis, replacing the current notification system.

This enactment makes it illegal to operate an early year's service that has not been registered, and offers a range of enforcement options to the regulator without recourse to the courts. This will mean that services will not be permitted to commence operation until approved to do so by the registration body. Services who are notified under the current system of regulation will be under transitional arrangements contained within the legislation considered as registered once operational on January 1st, 2014. Such services will be required in time to re-register, and arrangements for same will be duly advised.

The enactment of this legislation means that new services opening in 2014 and onwards will not be permitted to commence operation until approved to do so by the registration body. All new services intending to establish in 2014 will receive a pre registration inspection visit and report and will be required to complete as a first step a "Notice of intention to Register an Early Years Service" form. (This form will be available when officially signed into being). In addition, the Agency is moving towards the development of a standards based inspection model which will enhance

both the quality of service provision and the care and welfare outcomes for children who attend. The Agency will consult with services and representative bodies as the Registration system is implemented to ensure that the system is robust, transparent and effective.

### **Economic Context to Service Delivery**

Much of the documentation outlined within this report relates to a pre-recessionary period. Recent surveys have identified the significant changes within Irish families and their incomes in recent years. The Income and Living Conditions Survey in Ireland (2013) has identified that average annual equivalised disposable income has decreased and the 'at risk of poverty' rate has increased. The Growing Up in Ireland (2012) survey, relating to 11,000 children, notes that the number of families experiencing difficulties making ends meet increased hugely in the period after the start of the downturn. The survey illustrates that in late 2008/early 2009, 44 per cent of the families interviewed considered that they were having financial difficulties. When they were re-interviewed just over two years later, that figure had risen to 61 per cent. The first interviews were conducted when the children were nine months old - the second batch around the children's third birthdays. Almost two-thirds of the families said that the recession had had a big effect on their lives since their first interview - as a result of reductions in wages and cuts in working hours and social welfare payments.

It is imperative that government policy on School Age Childcare reflects the needs of families and children which have been hugely affected by the economic environment which currently exists in Ireland. Furthermore, provision of School Age Childcare needs to be appropriate for the changing nature of the Irish society and the families within it.

## **Methodology**

### **Rationale**

The rationale for this research has emerged from the growing need for clarification, regulation and resourcing of the School Age Childcare sector in Ireland. Local Area Based Partnerships and the Galway City and County Childcare Committee are directly and indirectly involved in the provision of after schools and homework clubs in Galway City and County. Through this work with after schools and homework club providers, and previous research reports developed in relation to this area, the need for a more comprehensive and broad survey was identified. The focus of the survey was to identify the following:

- The activities which take place in after schools services in Galway City and County,
- How these services are staffed,
- The funding sources for these services,
- The qualification of staff working in these services,
- The level of child protection in place within these services.

### **Survey**

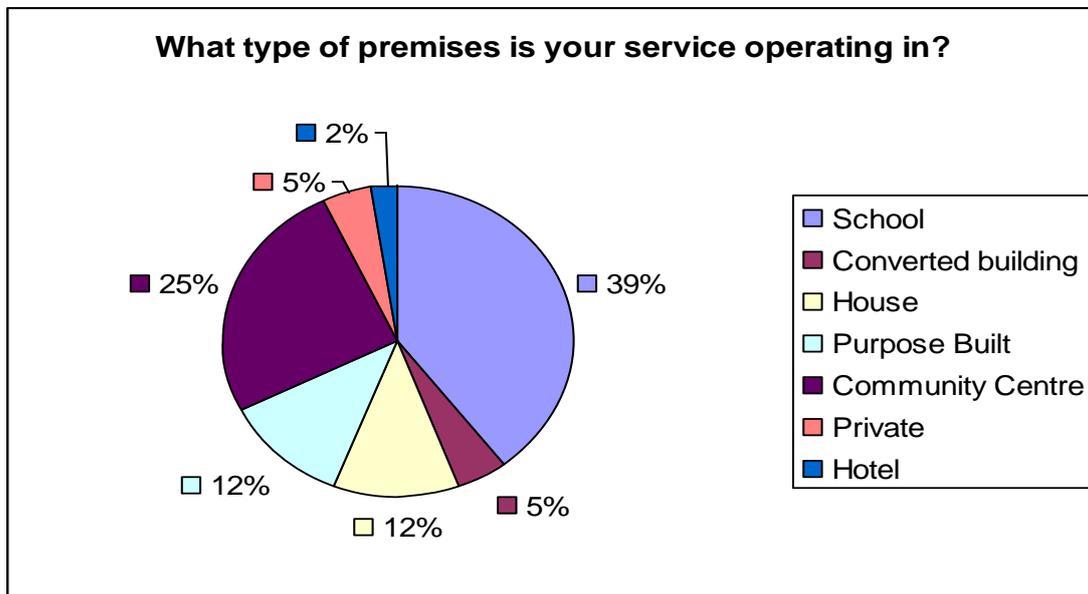
Staff from the Galway City and County Childcare Committee and the Local Area Based Partnerships developed a questionnaire (See Appendix One). The Galway City and County Childcare Committee and Local Area Based Partnerships developed an opened list of services which were involved in after school provision. The survey was forwarded to these services with a cover letter (See Appendix Two) and stamped address envelop in which to return the survey. The questionnaire was forwarded to 50 services in the City and County.

### **Response Rate and Data Analysis**

To date 43 questionnaires have been returned which is an extremely high response rate of 86%. The high rate of responses could potentially be an indication of the importance placed on these issues by services based in Galway City and County. All questionnaires were returned to Galway City and County Childcare Committee; where a spreadsheet of all the data was recorded. The data is presented under key headings within the questionnaire.

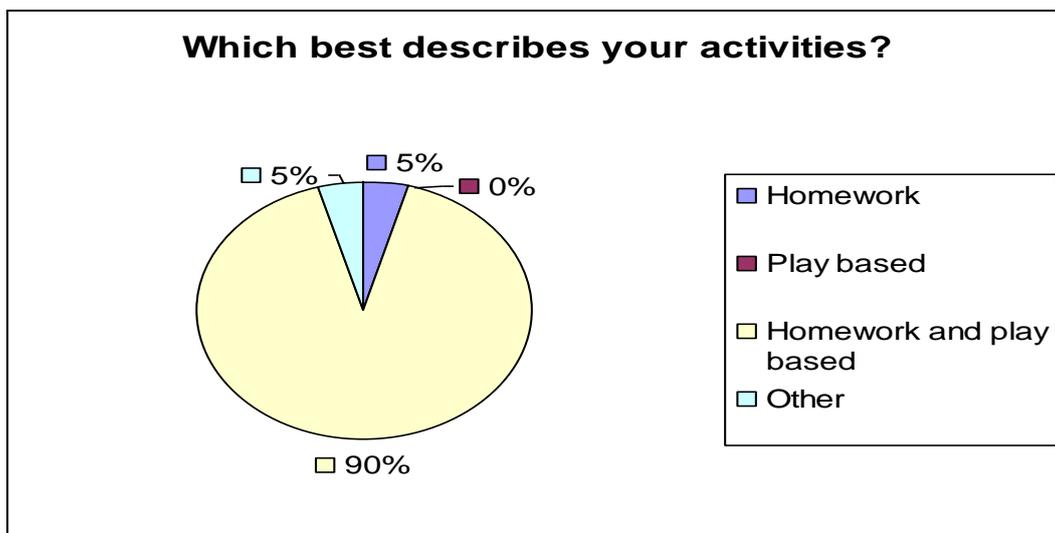
## Presentation of Data

### Location of Service



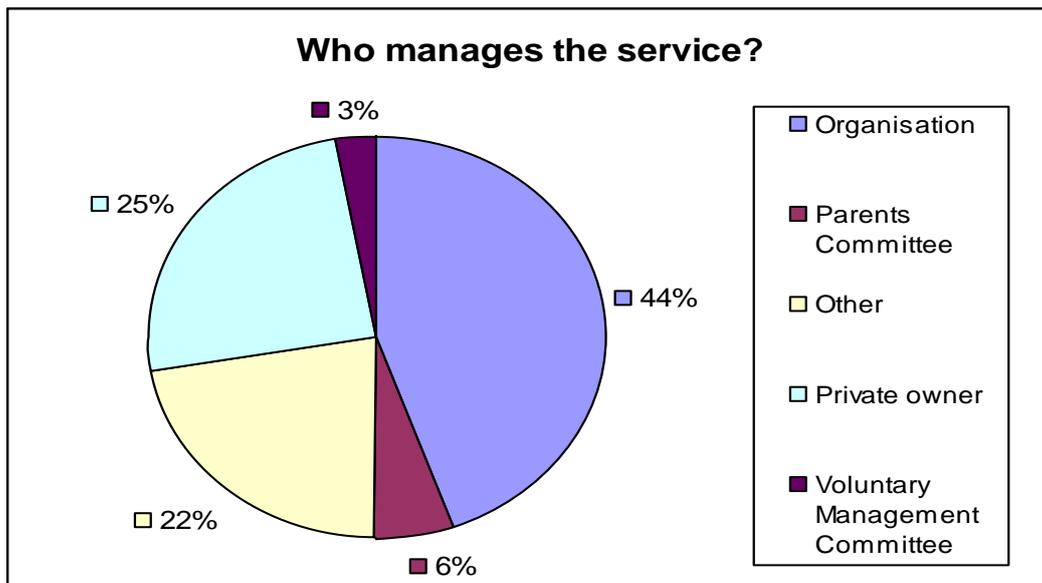
- The majority of services were located in Schools (39%) followed by Community Centres (25%)

### Description of Activities Provided



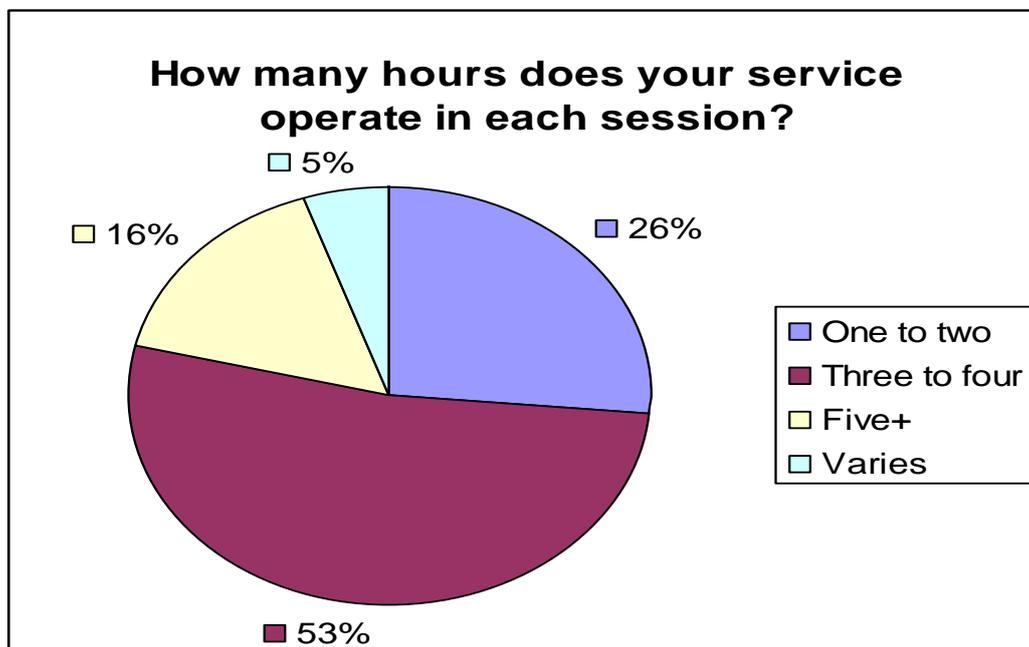
- The vast majority of the respondents highlighted that that the services was homework and play based (90%).

### Management of Service



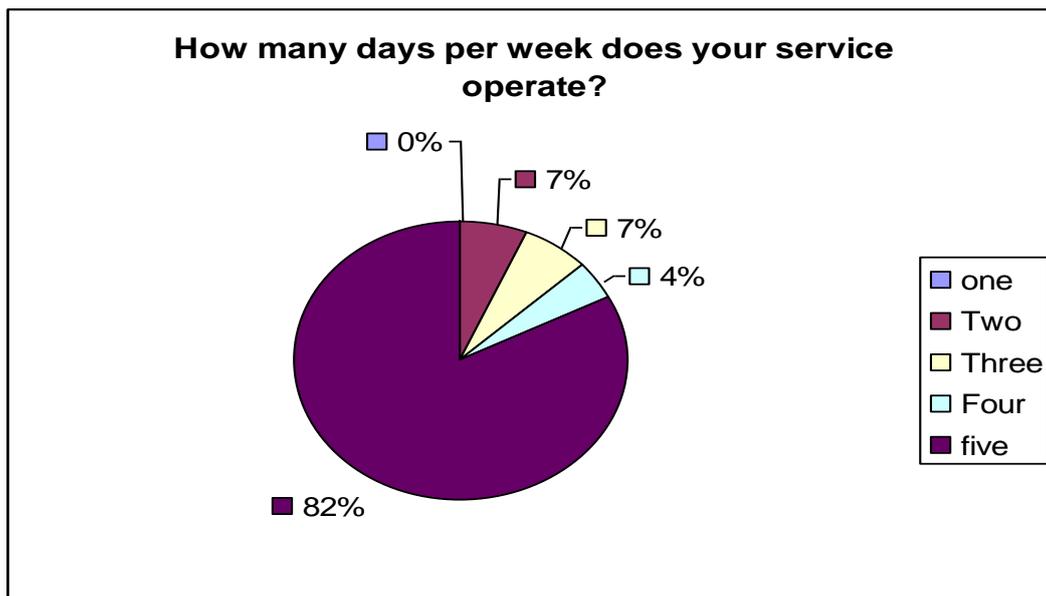
- 44% of Services are managed by a specific organisation, with 25% being privately owned.

### Number of Hours Service is available



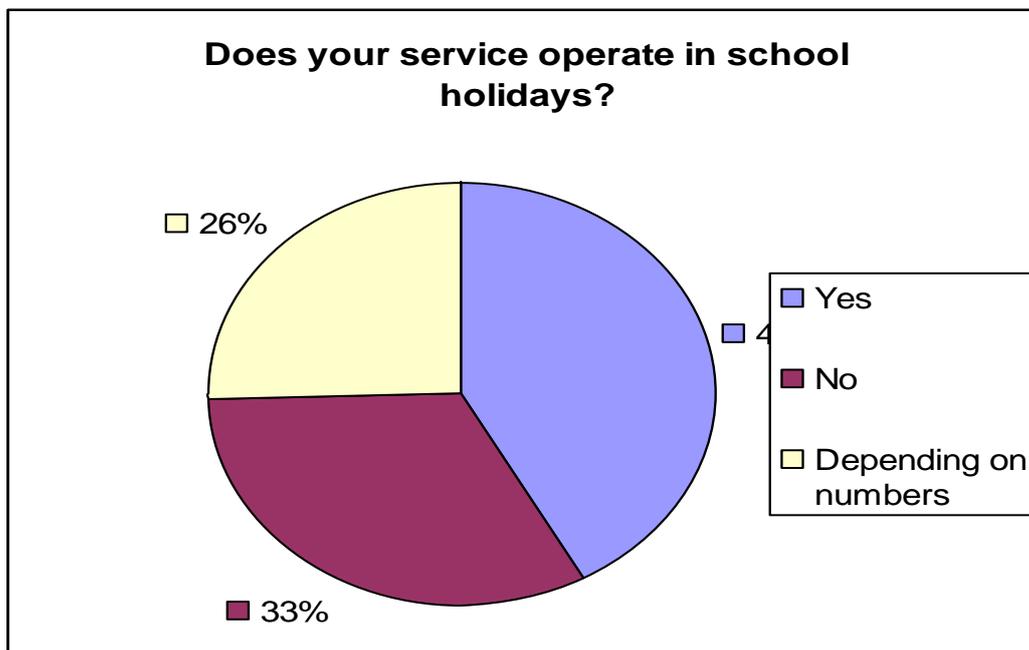
- Over half of the services are opened for three to four hours. With 26% opened for one to two hours.

**Days per week service is open.**



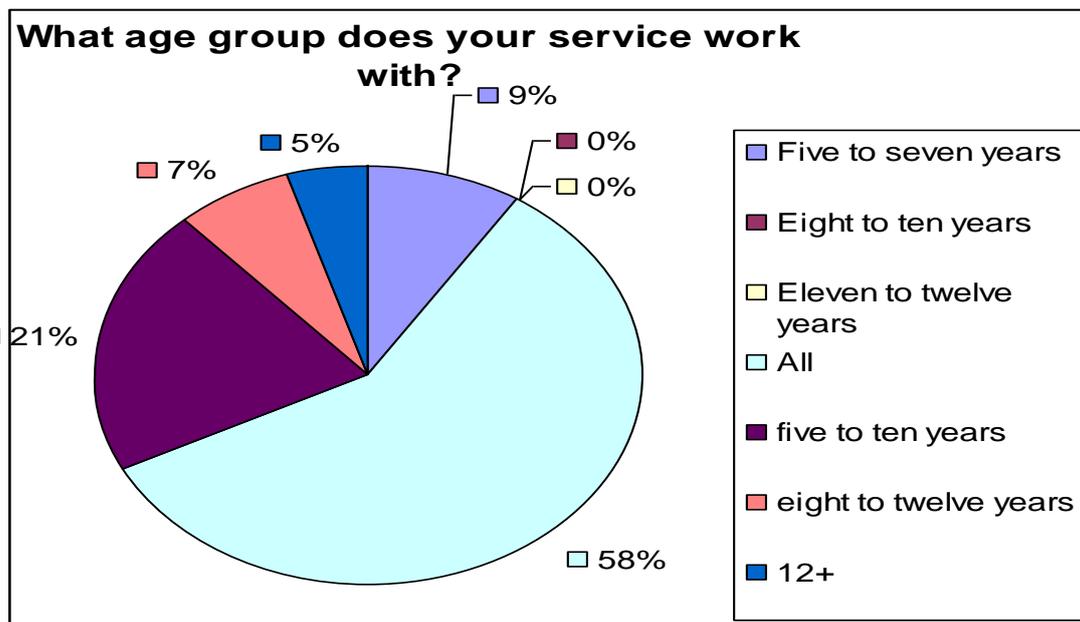
- Significantly, 82% of services are opened five days per week.

**Service Operating During School Holidays**



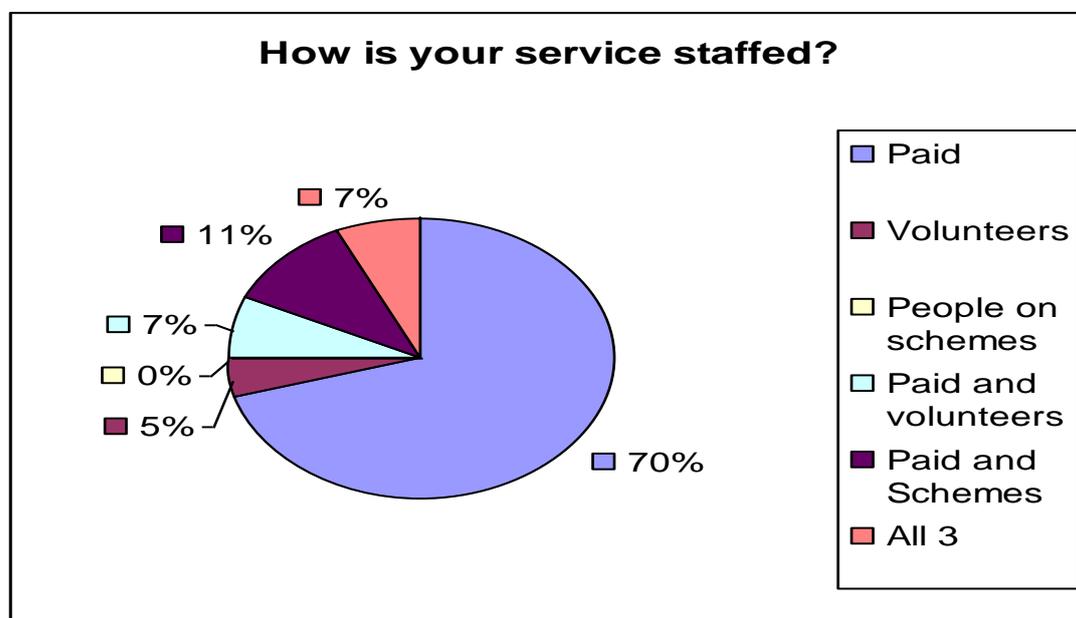
- 41% of services are opened during school holidays with a further 26% available to open depending on number.

### Age Profile of Children Involved in Services



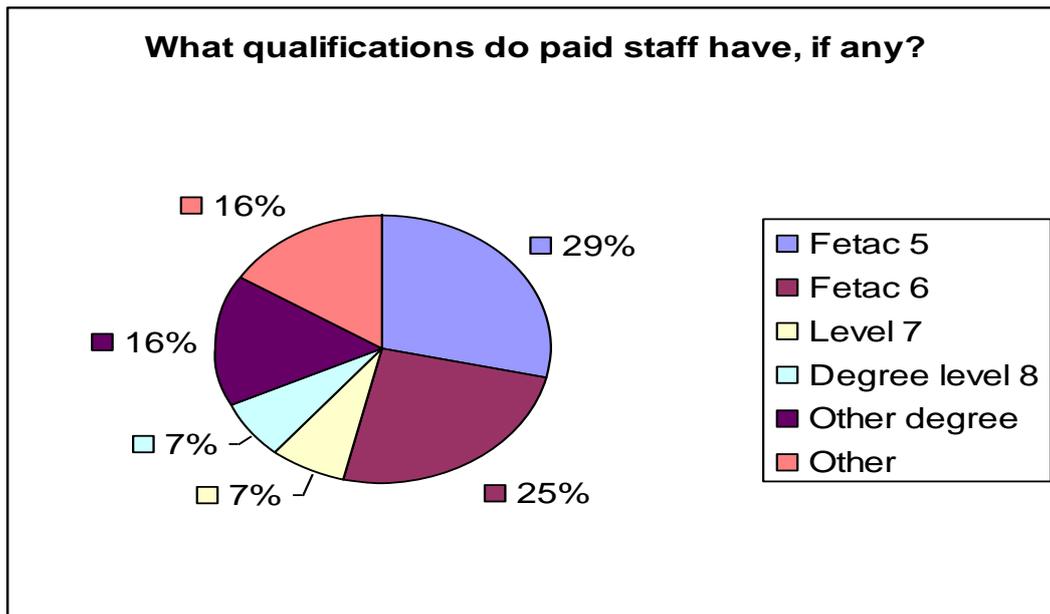
- 58% of services catered for all age groups between the ages of 5 and 12, followed by 21% which catered for five to 10 year olds.

### How are services Staffed



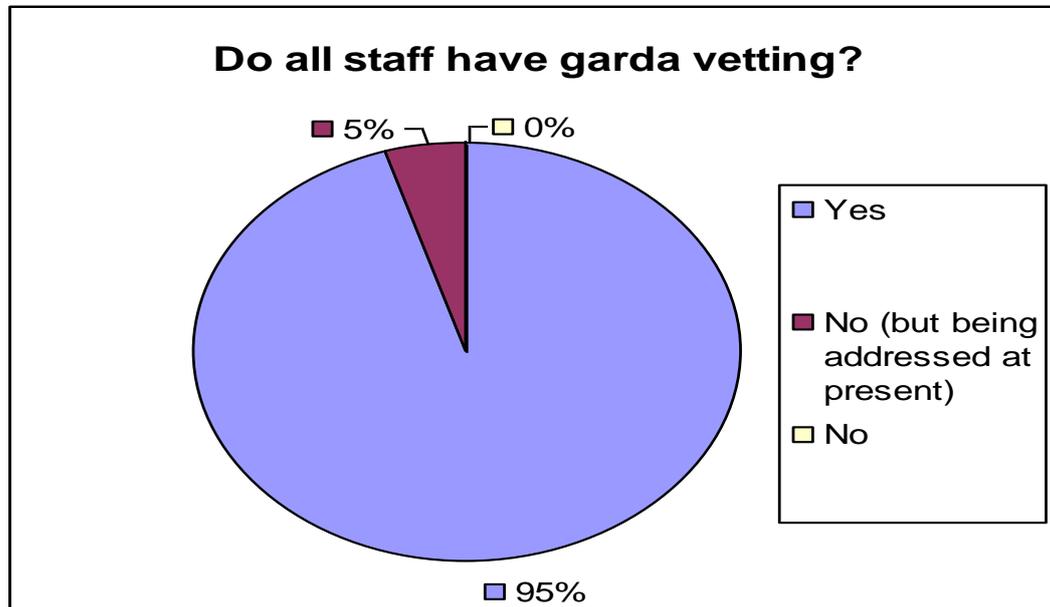
- 70% of services are staffed through paid employed. The other options for staff included were volunteers and people on schemes. With some services using a mixture of the options.

### Qualifications of Staff

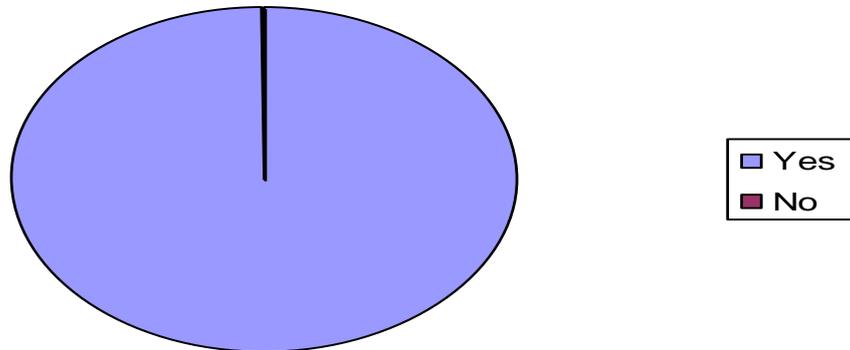


- The survey identifies a high level of qualifications among staff with the vast majority having a minimum of a Level 5 FETAC qualification.

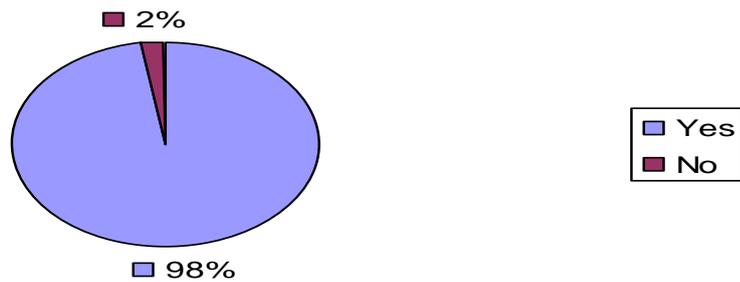
### Garda Vetting and Child protection



**Do you have a child protection policy in place?**

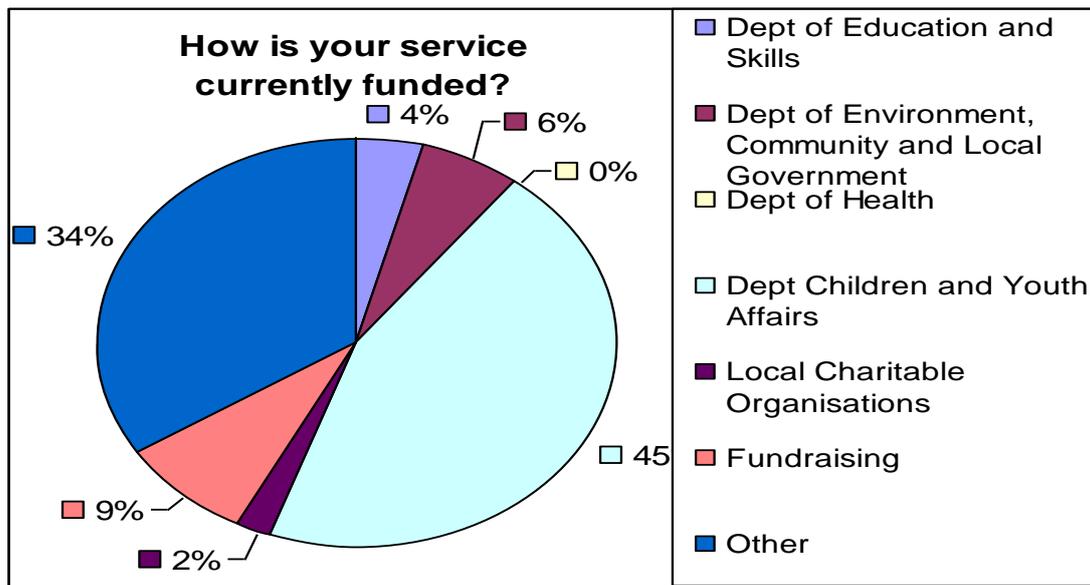


**Is there a designated and deputy designated person for Child Protection in place?**



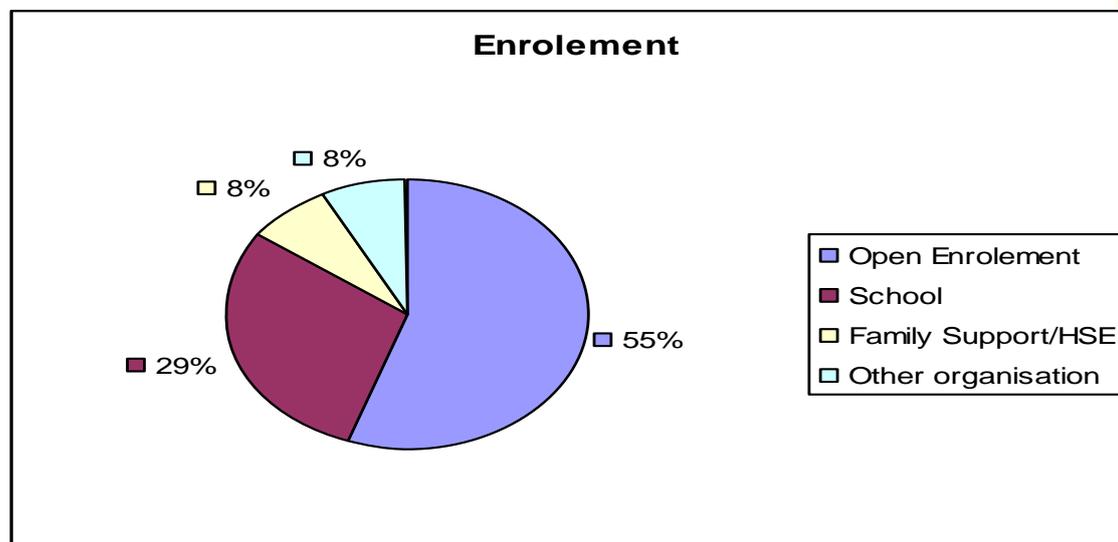
- The survey indicates that 100% of services have child protection policies in places with between 95% and 98% have Garda vetting and a designated person for child protection in place.

**How services are funded**



- The survey clearly indicates the variety of funding streams for services. 45% are funding through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 34% have identified other sources of funding, 9% are funding through fund raising.

**Enrolment of Children**



- 55% of services have an open enrolment with 29% being enrolled through schools and 8% through Family Support Services/ HSE.

## Summary of Findings and Discussion

The findings from the survey illustrate there are a significant number of School Age Childcare services available in Galway City and County which cater for a large number of children. The findings also show there are inconsistencies in relation to the type of activities offered and the time periods they are opened. The report indicates that child protection standards are being adhered to within the sample group; further discussion of the finding will be developed under the following headings:

- Curriculum, Regulation and Resourcing,
- Qualification and Child Protection,
- Access to After School Provision.

### Curriculum and Regulation and Resourcing

The findings have highlighted the fact that the vast majority of services provide a combination of play based and homework supports (90%). Therefore, suggesting that this model of delivery is the most relevant to children accessing the services in Galway City and County. Furthermore, it highlights the potential variations in curriculum provision within services. Guidelines such as Siolta and Aistear provide a framework for service delivery but specific curriculum requirements for afterschool provisions are not currently addressed in policy. Consequently, there is a need for a standardised curriculum for afterschool services. However, in advance of a curriculum being developed a clear functionality of these services needed to be developed: are these services activity based? Are they a homework completion based? Or does the service complete both function. This needs to be debated both locally and nationally in order to develop an appropriate and effective service. Furthermore, this debate should explore where School Age Childcare should be located i.e. schools, communities or both.

Regardless of the result of the above debates there will be a need for increased training and up skilling for individuals involved in delivery School Age Childcare. Furthermore, there will be requirements for increased resourcing and monitoring within services. There is a significant issue with increased resourcing and regulation due to the fact that services, as supported by this research, are currently funded by different departments and organisations. This highlights the need for one Department

or Agency to be solely responsible for the development, funding and regulation of after school services. This research has identified that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs are currently the largest funder of after school provision in Galway City and County. It would therefore seem appropriate that this same Department be given the sole responsible for after school provision in Ireland.

#### Qualifications and Child Protection

Over 70% of services involved in this survey are staffed through paid employment. The level of qualification among those staffing these services is extremely high with the vast majority having a minimum of a Level 5 FETAC qualification. This would suggest the services are well placed to implement a consistent curriculum and develop a more prescribed services to children within after school provision settings. However, currently there are no specific qualification requirements for staff working of School Age Childcare which could result in a lack of consistency of approach and implementation within the sector.

However, this research indicates there is a high level of professionalism in relation to child protection with 100% of services having child protection policies in place with between 95% and 98% having Garda vetting and a designated person for child protection in place. This is particularly important in the light of the development of the Tulsa – Child and Family Agency and the imminent implementation of the Child Protection Legislation. Ireland has never been better positioned to take on regulation and prescribed curriculum but it requires clear and consistent policy. It will also require supports and resourcing through such organisations as the Childcare Committees (support and training) and Tulsa (Monitoring and regulation).

#### Access to After School Provision

A clear finding from the survey is inconsistencies within the sample group as to when the service is available and to whom. The numbers of hours and periods services are opened varies significantly. In order to provide a consistent and quality service, after schools services need to be available to provide supports to children and parents throughout the year for the required time on a weekly basis. There are also inconsistencies in relation to what ages of children can access after schools services; regulation in relation to this is also required. Currently the majority of services are

located in Schools (39%) and Community Centres (25%) but services must be located in venues that suit parents and children. Finally, 55% of services have an open enrolment with 29% being enrolled through schools and 8% through Family Support Services/ HSE.

## **Recommendations**

- It is recommended that one single Government Department is given sole responsible for the development, funding, resourcing, training and regulation of the School Age Childcare in Ireland. Based on the stated functions of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, it would appear that this Department should be given this responsibility.
- All current statutory funding streams for School Age Childcare should be maintained, if not increased, and incorporated under the umbrella of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
- A specific School Age Childcare funding stream should be developed within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs which provides for equality of access for, and meet the needs of, all school aged children in Ireland.
- A standardised curriculum for School Age Childcare should be developed. This development of such a curriculum should be in line with requirements of Siolta, Aistear, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessments, best international evidence based practice and all relevant Irish legislation.
- Standardised qualifications are developed for workers involved in the delivering School Age Childcare which meets the requirement of a newly developed curriculum.

## Appendix One

### Survey no.1

- 1) Name of Service.....
- 2) Location based.....
- 3) What type of premises is your service operating in? (Please tick)
  - a) School
  - b) Other (Please specify).....
- 4) Which best describes your activities? (Please tick one)
  - a) Homework
  - b) Play based
  - c) Homework & Play based
  - d) Other (please specify).....
- 5) Who manages the service?
  - a) Organisation
  - b) School
  - c) Other (please describe).....
- 6) How many hours does your service operate each session?.....
- 7) How many days per week does your service operate?.....
- 8) Does your service operate in school holidays?.....
- 9) What age group does your service work with? (Please tick any that apply)
  - a) 5 – 7 years
  - 8 – 10 years
  - 11 – 12 years
- 10) How many children attend per session on average?.....
- 11) How is your service staffed? (Please tick any that apply)
  - a) Paid staff
  - b) Volunteers
  - c) People on schemes (interns, TUS, CE)If paid staff, who employs the staff? .....
- 12) How many staff are working in the service per session?.....
- 13) What qualifications do paid staff have, if any?.....
- 14) Do ALL staff have valid Garda Vetting? Yes  No
- 15) Do you have a Child Protection Policy in place? Yes  No 
  - a) Have staff completed Child Protection Training? Yes  No
  - b) Is there a designated and deputy designated person for Child Protection in place? Yes  No
- 16) How is your service currently funded? (Please tick all that apply)
  - a) Dept of Education & Skills
  - b) Dept of Environment, Community & Local Government
  - c) Dept of Health

d) Dept Children & Youth Affairs

e) Local Charitable Organisations

f) Fundraising

g) Other

17) What is the cost per child per session if valid?.....

18) How do they enrol in your service? (Please tick all that apply)

a) Open Enrolment

b) Referral from School

c) Referral from Family Support Services/HSE

d) Referral from other organisation



## Appendix Two

06 February 2014

A Chara

On behalf of Galway City & County Childcare Committee, Galway City Partnership, Galway Rural Development and Forum Partnership Companies, we are carrying out a survey of all afterschool/homework clubs in Galway City & County.

This is in light of the changes in agencies dealing with children and young people such as the new Child and Family Support Agency (Túsla), and also the setting up of the Galway City and County Children's Services Committee.

We are exploring the provision of services with a view to establishing a document to identify supports and possible funding providers for afterschool/homework services.

We would encourage you to complete the form fully and openly as all information will be completely confidential and for our own research. Please return to us here no later than Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February in the enclosed SAE.

If you have any questions in relation to the survey, or require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Seamus Morrissey, Galway City Partnership (091 773466), Andrea Leufer or myself, Lorriane Carroll 091 752039.

Thank you for taking the time to look at this survey.

Yours sincerely

Lorriane Carroll  
Clerical Worker