

## Draft Childminding Action Plan – Overview and Call for Submissions

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs launched the Draft Childminding Action Plan on 29<sup>th</sup> August, for public consultation. The call for submissions and online survey are open until 10<sup>th</sup> October. The consultation will also include focus groups of childminders and an Open Policy Debate.

The overall objective of the Draft Action Plan is to improve access to high quality and affordable early learning and care and school-age childcare through childminding. It aims to fulfil commitments in *First 5* – the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families.

Childminding offers many benefits to children and parents, but currently receives little formal recognition by the State. Despite its many advantages and its continued popularity among parents, it has remained largely unfunded, unsupported and unregulated.

It is not known how many childminders there are. The number is in the thousands and could be as high as 19,000. Whilst only a portion of these are eligible to register with Tusla, only 81 childminders are currently registered.

### **Objectives of the Draft Action Plan**

The proposals set out in the Draft Action Plan aim to:

- **Give recognition to childminders** for the valuable work they do, by making a wide range of supports available to childminders, including training opportunities, participation in local support networks, and access to public funding schemes.
- **Support parental choice and children’s preferences**, by giving parents who use childminders access to subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme.
- **Safeguard children** by extending regulation (which may include requirements for Garda vetting, child protection training, first aid, and qualifications/training) to childminders.
- **Respect what’s different about childminding** by developing new regulations and a new inspection model that are proportionate and appropriate to the home setting in which childminders work, and by ensuring that training and other supports are designed for childminders’ needs and working hours.

### **Specific proposals**

The Draft Action Plan proposes four areas of action:

- **Regulatory change**
  - Introduce new regulations and an inspection model that are specific to childminders and that are proportionate and appropriate to the home setting.
  - Require all paid, non-relative childminders who work in their own homes to register with Tusla. (Exemptions will remain for relatives.)
- **Qualifications and training**
  - Make initial training available for childminders in the short-term, including first aid training, child protection training, and training on quality childminding.
  - Phase in childminder-specific qualification requirements during a transition period lasting several years.
- **Quality supports**
  - Open up quality support services to childminders, including a wide range of mentoring and continuing professional development programmes.

- Pilot and introduce staffed Local Childminding Networks to provide leadership and support to childminders, staffed by qualified and experienced personnel.
- **Funding and financial supports**
  - As soon as childminder-specific Regulations are in place, open up the National Childcare Scheme to all childminders who meet transitional requirements.
  - Review and enhance other financial supports for childminders, including the Childminder Learner Fund and Childminding Development Grant.

### **Phased approach**

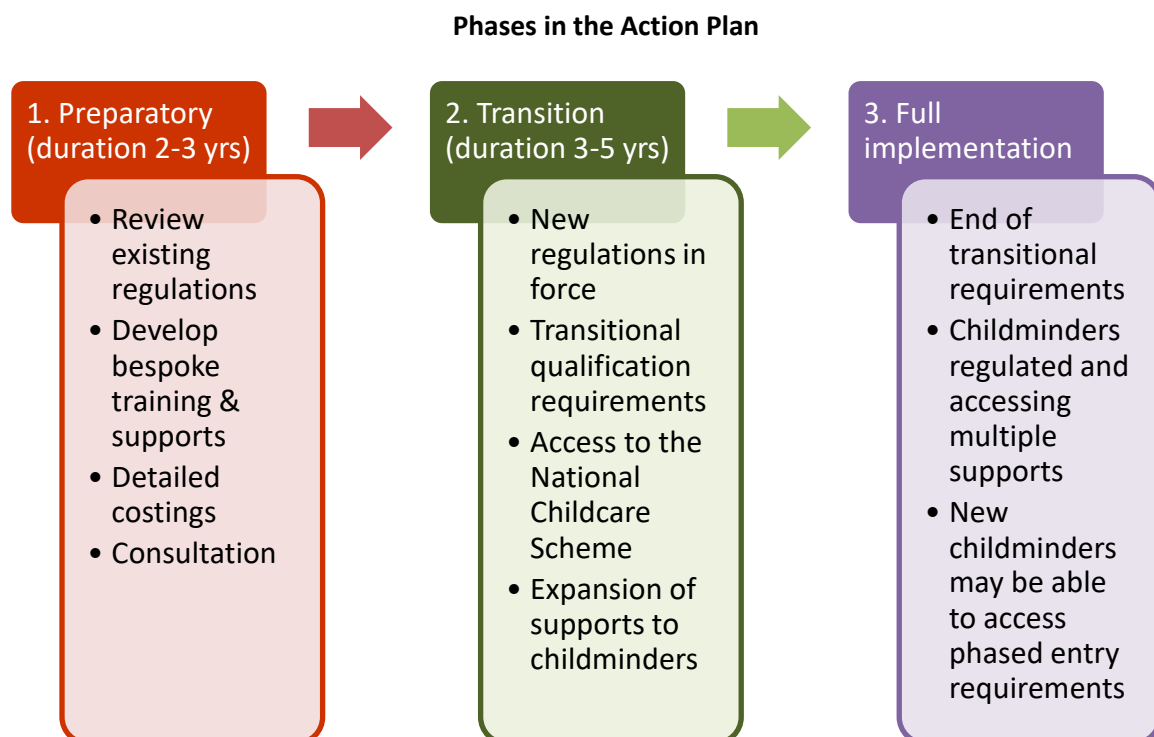
The Draft Action Plan proposes a phased approach, seeking to balance the objective of making the National Childcare Scheme accessible to childminders at the earliest opportunity with the need to build appropriate quality supports, with a significant lead-in time for legal requirements being introduced.

**Phase 1 (initial 2-3 years)** will be a **preparatory** phase, involving amendment of legislation, development of childminder-specific regulations, development of training programmes, and further research and planning.

**Phase 2 (the 3-5 years after phase 1)** will be a **transition** phase. At the **start** of this phase, new regulations will come into force, legal exemptions from regulation will end, and more childminders will be able to (a) register with Tusla provided they have completed initial training requirements, and (b) take part in the National Childcare Scheme.

**Phase 3** will see full implementation of the Plan. By the **start** of this phase, existing childminders will need to have achieved the full childminding qualification requirement (to be determined by end 2019, following public consultation).

*(The duration of these phases will depend on the speed of progress, funding available through the annual Estimates process and other factors.)*



## **Case studies**

*Note: These case studies are possible scenarios for illustrative purposes only, and are consistent with the proposals in the Draft Action Plan. However, many details – e.g. legal requirements, specific training and the timeframe for transition to Phases 2 and 3 – will be determined during Phase 1. Hence these case studies should be used as an aid to assist in understanding possible implications of the Draft Action Plan only.*

### **Mary**

Mary has been a childminder for 10 years, since her own children went to school. She currently minds 4 children: a baby and a 3 year-old all day; and two school-age children after school and in holidays. She is Garda vetted and has insurance, but she has no relevant qualification. Currently she is not allowed to register with Tusla and is not able to take part in the National Childcare Scheme.

*During Phase 1* of the Childminding Action Plan, Mary is offered subsidised training – including first aid, child protection, and an initial qualification in quality childminding – available in evenings and at weekends. She also successfully applies for a grant that provides her up to €1,000 to buy new toys and equipment. She attends a support session run by her local County Childcare Committee with the support of a Childminding Development Officer, at which she gets advice on policies she needs to have in place (e.g. on managing children’s behaviour, and on healthy eating) and guidance on registering with Tusla.

*After Phase 2 begins* (about two years from now), as she has completed initial training requirements Mary can register with Tusla, who visit her at home to check that her home is safe and that she has met all legal requirements. Once she has registered with Tusla, and commits to continue her training, she can apply to take part in the National Childcare Scheme, and the parents of the children she minds then benefit from subsidies.

*During Phase 2* (over the next four years or so), Mary completes further training designed for childminders. By the time Phase 2 ends she has reached the qualification level necessary to remain a registered childminder.

*In Phase 3*, Mary joins a Local Childminding Network that was recently established. Every month she meets other childminders in the area for peer support, advice, and on-going training opportunities.

### **Bridget**

Bridget has been a childminder for 20 years. She currently minds 5 children: four of pre-school age and one after-school. She is Garda-vetted and has completed several modules of a Level 5 qualification in early childhood care and education. She is required to register with Tusla but she has not done so, because she is anxious about being inspected, has not completed the Level 5 qualification, and feels there is no incentive to register.

*During Phase 1* of the Childminding Action Plan, Bridget hears from her local County Childcare Committee about the Childminder Learner Fund and the National Childcare Scheme. Over the next year she completes her Level 5 qualification, knowing she will get a €750 bursary at the end, and she then registers with Tusla, enabling her to take part in the National Childcare Scheme. She is inspected by Tusla, which offers reassurance to the children’s parents. While the inspection is based on current regulations, she knows that new regulations are on the way.

Over the next five years (*during Phases 1 and 2*), encouraged by her success at Level 5, Bridget studies part-time for a Level 7 degree, while continuing to work as a registered childminder, and she receives financial support for her studies from a Learner Fund bursary.

*In Phase 3*, after completing her degree, Bridget takes part in a fully funded new training programme to qualify as a Childminding Network Leader, and successfully applies for a paid role as leader of a Local Childminding Network.

## Consultation questions

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) invites submissions from individuals or organisations in relation to the Draft Childminding Action Plan (available on the DCYA website). DCYA is particularly interested in hearing your views on the following questions. You are not required to answer all questions. Please feel free to answer as many or as few of the questions as you wish. DCYA also welcomes your views on any other aspect of the Draft Childminding Action Plan.

You may also complete the online survey, available on the DCYA website. The online survey is structured around the same questions.

### General

- Do you agree with the overall approach set out in the Draft Childminding Action Plan?
- Do you agree with the phased approach, with a preparatory phase followed by an extended transition phase, to allow childminders a lead-in time for any requirements?

### Regulatory change

- Do you agree with the proposal to introduce new Regulations and a new inspection model that are specific to childminders and that are proportionate and appropriate to the home setting? Do you have any specific suggestions for what these should be like?
- Do you agree with the proposal to require all paid, non-relative childminders who work in their own home to register with Tusla and be subject to regulation and inspection?

### Qualifications and training

- What do you think the **initial** training / qualification requirements should be that childminders have to meet before initial registration with Tusla (allowing their participation in the National Childcare Scheme) **at the beginning of the transition phase**? [Please be as specific as possible, e.g. by referring to the National Framework of Qualifications (e.g. whether Level 4, 5 or 6; whether minor or major awards, etc.)]
- What do you think the **full** training / qualification requirements should be that childminders have to meet in order to remain registered with Tusla **at the end of the transition phase**? [Please be as specific as possible, e.g. by referring to the National Framework of Qualifications (e.g. whether Level 4, 5 or 6; and whether minor or major awards).]
- Do you agree with the suggestion that, even in full implementation (i.e. after the end of the transition phase), new childminders should always have a **phased qualification requirement** (with initial training required before Tusla-registration and then a period of time to achieve the full qualification requirement), to facilitate new entrants and to support childminders out of the informal economy on a progressive pathway to professional development?
- If you agree with this suggestion, **how long** do you think new childminders should be given between initial Tusla-registration and the time at which the full qualification requirement applies to them (once we are in the full implementation phase of the Plan)?

### Funding and financial supports

- Do you agree with the proposal to open up the National Childcare Scheme to all childminders who meet transitional requirements, as soon as childminder-specific Regulations are in place?

- Do you agree with the proposal to review and reform other financial supports for childminders, including the Childminder Learner Fund and Childminding Development Grant? Do you have any specific changes you would like to see made to any of the financial supports available to childminders?

#### Quality supports

- Do you agree with the proposal to open up to childminders the full range of quality supports that are available for early learning and care and school-age childcare?
- Are there quality supports for childminding that are not referenced in the Draft Action Plan that you think would be valuable to childminders and to children?
- Do you agree with the proposal to develop local childminding networks that are led by qualified childminding network leaders?
- What qualifications / experience should be required to be a childminding network leader?
- Do you think that centre-based services should / could play any role in supporting childminders or local childminding networks? If so, what role?
- Do you agree with the proposal to develop a range of resources on the use of nannies (e.g. childminders working in the child's home) and au pairs, including information for parents? What resources do you think would be most useful?

#### **Sending in your submission**

To make a submission please complete the submission and enclose any relevant materials by Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October at 17:00 by email to [ELCQuality@dcya.gov.ie](mailto:ELCQuality@dcya.gov.ie) or by hard copy to:

Early Learning and Care Quality Unit  
Department of Children and Youth Affairs  
Block 1 - Floor 2  
Miesian Plaza  
50-58 Baggot Street Lower  
Dublin 2  
D02 XW14

On your submission please include your name, organisation (if any), address, phone number and email address.

Please keep your submission to a maximum of 1,000 words.

Late submissions will not be considered.

Submissions are subject to Freedom of Information legislation, and may be released in response to Freedom of Information requests.

DCYA may seek to engage with people or organisations on the basis of their submission for further discussion.

By making a submission you agree to DCYA reserving the right to publish your submission in part or in full.