

ADES welcomes the opportunity to offer comments to the Committee and apologise that we are unable to provide a representative to join the Committee in person. In relation to current provision of early learning and childcare, we would make the following brief comments:

Successes:

- The expansion of early learning and childcare from 600 to 1140 hours has been delivered successfully at a national level despite the pandemic and the delayed implementation date with 99% uptake nationally.
- Greater flexibility has been created across the system in most local authority areas recognising the needs of working families. Greater flexibility includes stretched day models operating all year round rather than school day over 40 weeks.
- Good initial progress is being made on growing a system of School Aged Childcare in the pilot authorities and sustaining the learning from the Access to Childcare projects.

Challenges:

- As with other policy areas, declining public finances.
- Recruitment and retention of the high-quality workforce required, which is a challenge for all but especially challenging for the Funded Provider sector.
- Although anecdotal, post-covid there appears to be an increased number of children presenting with additional support needs.

Risks:

- Sustainability of the Funded Provider Early Learning and Childcare sector which currently provides around a third of early learning and childcare and the potential loss of capacity if they close.
- Loss of flexibility for families where services have to reduce the offer due to either lack of staffing or pressure on places where other local services close.
- Pressure on the system (financial, workforce, physical space) through any rapid expansion of places for 1 and 2 year olds which is the most expensive form of childcare to provide due to staffing ratios.

ADES
23 May 2023