



MAYO
County Childcare Committee
Coiste Chúram Leanaí
Chontae Mhaigh Eo

Careers & our Children



Ciara Kane

*A Study of the Childcare Needs of
Working Parents in County Mayo*

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Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Section I: Introduction	4
Section II: Childcare Policy and Legislation	6
Section III: Current Provision of Childcare in Ireland	10
Section IV: Methodology	22
Section V: Findings and Discussions: Childcare Provision in County Mayo	24
Section VI: Findings and Discussions: Childcare Needs of Working Parents in County Mayo	29
Section VII: Recommendations and Conclusions	64
Bibliography	70
Appendix 1: Employers List	72
Appendix 2: Cover Letter	73
Appendix 3: Questionnaire	74

Section I:

Introduction

The Mayo County Childcare Committee identified the need for research to be conducted on the 'Childcare Needs of Working Parents' within the context of County Mayo. As a result, working parents were surveyed in order to ascertain their concerns and needs regarding childcare, which is discussed throughout this report. The discussions and recommendations are based on the opinions and experiences of the parents themselves and to a lesser degree on the professionals that work in the area of childcare.

The report reviews the current literature pertaining to this area. It covers the policies and recommendations available at the time of the research. The current provision of childcare in Ireland and how this relates to women and work; equal opportunities; and the rural/urban divide is also discussed. Moving on from this, literature regarding the actual childcare needs of parents is analysed and more specifically quality childcare as a need. Quality childcare is defined using a number of sources both academic and industry based as well as from the perspective of the parents surveyed. The economic and social benefits of a quality childcare framework are also discussed.

As a result of the literature review it was possible to pose a series of questions that would provide the information necessary to outline and analyse the childcare needs of working parents, from the perspective of the parents. By looking at type and status of employment in conjunction with why parents do and do not avail of different types of childcare and working arrangements a picture was generated. This picture portrays the average life of a working parent and more specifically a working mother. This picture looks grim.

Childcare is still viewed as a female responsibility. As a result women are still dominating the part-time work sector in order to achieve a work/life balance. This, as outlined in the report, is not a long-term solution to equal opportunities in the workplace and the current childcare crisis. More specific to childcare, the report establishes that the availability and affordability of childcare impacts upon parents' working arrangements and their careers.

Where there was access to adequate childcare facilities or family support parents stated that they did not need to avail of the different types of working arrangements or that childcare did not have an impact on their career. This brings access to quality affordable childcare into the employers' domain. It is therefore important that employers are made aware of the importance of a functioning childcare sector and that their involvement is essential in achieving this.

The Government has a key role in the provision of affordable quality childcare. Parents articulated the need for the reduction of cost and the improvement of access through:

- tax credits;
- extending paid maternity leave;
- providing pay for parental leave;
- sensible locating of facilities (especially in rural areas);
- support for stay at home parents;
- professionalisation of the childcare sector through regulation and quality childcare training;
- access to information on childcare services in Co. Mayo;
- ensuring family friendly working arrangements are the norm rather than the exception; and
- standardising the quality of childcare

It is not enough to merely advocate the provision of increased childcare places, as parents need and want their children to attend quality childcare facilities that are safe, regulated and allows their children to be cared for in the best way they deem appropriate.

Access to affordable quality childcare should not only be the right of the parent but the right of the child. Quality childcare has the ability to tackle the problems that children are facing in today's society from obesity to racism. All children must have the right to develop and learn through play, and this right should not be just available to the privileged few.

It is therefore necessary for Irish adults to make an important decision. Is childcare worth it? Are we willing to advocate for the redistribution of existing resources to meet the costs of a quality childcare system or are we willing to pay greater taxes? It would be naive to suggest that a quality childcare framework could be established without making these decisions.

The subsequent sections outline the difficulties that working parents face in Co. Mayo and offers suggestions and recommendations on how to alleviate these problems. It is hoped that this analysis will provide a basis for an accessible, affordable quality childcare framework that will, in the long-term, benefit Irish society as a whole.

Section II:

Childcare Policy and Legislation

Legislation and policies surrounding childcare are discussed in this section. This is undertaken in chronological order, outlining the developments that have occurred in this area throughout the last decade. For the purpose of this report, childcare refers to day-care facilities for pre-school children and school children outside of school hours. The services include care, education and socialisation opportunities for children that are of benefit to the children, their parents, employers and the wider community. Hence, schools and residential centres for children are not included but, within the context of Co. Mayo, pre-schools, naíonraí, day-care services, crèches, playgroups, childminding services and after-school groups are all included in this definition of childcare. The age group considered are children up to fourteen years of age.

2.2 Overview of Key Legislation and Policy

There have been significant developments in the legislation regarding early childhood care and education. Through the work of organisations, such as the Irish Pre-school and Playschool Association (IPPA) and the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA), childcare has become a major Government policy issue.

The main legislation surrounding the care and protection of children is the *Childcare Act, 1991*. This act puts statutory duty on The Health Service Executive to "promote the welfare of children in its area who are not receiving adequate care and protection." This act also strengthens the powers of the Health Service Executive (HSE) to provide childcare and family support services along with the ability for both the HSE and the Garda Síochána to intervene when children are in danger. Courts have the ability to place children who have been abused or who are at risk, in the care or under the supervision of the HSE. Also, the HSE has the responsibility to arrange the notification and inspection of pre-school services (French, 2003).

Ireland is a signatory of *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990* (ratified in 1992). This bill incorporates the full range of human rights, that is, civil and political rights as well as social, cultural and economic rights, for those under the age of 18 years. It relates to all aspects of a child's life evident through the four guiding principles of the Convention. These are non-discrimination (article 2); best interests of the child (article 3); survival and development (article 6); and participation (article 12). This policy places obligations on parents, the family, community and State. It also recognises the critical role of the family in the life of the child. Therefore, the family should be given the necessary protection and assistance so it can fulfill these roles within the community (UNICEF, (accessed on) 2005).

The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996 were developed as part VII of the Childcare Act, 1991. This introduced minimum standards for pre-school services and providers covered by the act are required to notify the Department of Health and Children of their service and be available for inspection. The regulations are divided into six sections, which deal with:

- commencement
- development of the child
- record keeping
- insurance
- required notices by pre-school service to HSE
- statutory obligations relating to the provision of information to the HSE
- fees
- premises and facilities
- adult/child ratios inspection
- first aid and medical assistance enforcement

(French, 2003)

The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme is managed by ADM (Area Development Management Ltd.) on behalf of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Under this programme, initial funding of €436.8 million was made available with the main aim of enabling parents to avail of training, education and employment by providing quality childcare supports. The grants that are directly available to providers include capital grants to support community/not-for-profit childcare groups along with private childcare providers to establish or upgrade childcare facilities/services. Staffing grants are also available to support community/not-for-profit organisations to contribute towards staffing costs in order to improve quality (French, 2003).

The report of *The Commission on the Family (1998)* concentrated on the welfare of children and vulnerable families. It was recommended that an approach to supporting families in carrying out their functions be developed. This approach should: prioritise investment in the care of young children; support parents choices in the care and education of their children; give practical support and recognition to those who undertake the main caring responsibilities for children; and facilitate families in balancing family and work life (French, 2003). The general direction of the Commission's recommendations focuses on the need for public policy to concentrate on "preventive and supportive measures to strengthen families in carrying out their functions and prevent difficulty" (The Commission on the Family, 1998). The core themes of this report are:

- "Building strengths in families"
- "Supporting families in carrying out their functions- the caring and nurturing of children"
- "Promoting continuity and stability in family life"
- "Protecting and enhancing the position of children and vulnerable dependent family members" (The Commission on the Family, 1998).

The *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (1999)* is a publication of the Department of Health and Children. Its main objectives are:

- to improve the identifying and reporting of child abuse;
- improve professional practice in both voluntary and statutory agencies that provide services for children and families;
- to emphasise the importance of family support services;
- maximise the capacity of staff and organisations to protect children; and finally;
- to secure inter-agency co-operation.

(Department of Health and Children, 1999)

The National Childcare Strategy (1999) established objectives in order to deal with the immediate crisis in the supply of childcare and to begin the implementation of the seven-year National Childcare Strategy. Part of the strategy included:

- The formation of City/County Childcare Committees which are made up of representatives from a cross-sector of stakeholders;
- The formation of a National Childcare Management Committee again with representatives from a cross sector of stakeholders;
- The allocation of money for the development of the strategy;
- To support grant schemes to small childcare groups;
- To develop after school care and childcare networks.

(Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999)

The National Childcare Infrastructure, (1999) was established with three separate but interlinking co-ordination roles. The first of these is the interdepartmental committee on childcare. This was established to examine all childcare initiatives being pursued by Departments; to ensure initiatives are co-ordinated between Departments; to develop co-operation between Departments; resolve any difficulties between Departments; and to advise the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee on developments in childcare policy (French, 2003).

The second of these roles concerns the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee, which was established to oversee the development of a childcare infrastructure throughout the country and to act as a link with the County Childcare Committees. The main role of this committee is to co-ordinate the delivery of childcare funding under the national development plan.

The third of these roles concerns the City/County Childcare Committees, which have been established based on local authority area with a remit to advance the provision of childcare facilities in the local area. The reasoning behind the establishment of these committees is recognition of the need to have an overall view on the provision of childcare throughout the country, which will be reinforced, by the needs of the local bodies (French, 2003).

Under the *National Children's Strategy, (2000)* the emphasis is on children having a voice, their lives to be better understood and to receive quality supports and services. There is a commitment to eliminating child poverty; addressing youth homelessness; meeting the educational needs of children; developing early childhood programmes; and a framework for the accreditation and certification of the childcare sector.

Another policy surrounding childcare is the document *Our Duty to Care: The principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People (2002)*, which is aimed at all community and voluntary organisations that provide services to children. It gives guidance on the promotion of child-welfare and the development of safe practices, along with necessary guidelines in the protection of children (French, 2003).

The purpose of *The Centre for Early Childhood and Education (2002)*, is to develop and co-ordinate early childhood education. This is to achieve the objectives of the White Paper *Ready to Learn* and to advise the Department of Education and Science on policy issues within this area (French, 2003).

The National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee found that childcare qualifications needed to be prioritised and, as a result, the document titled *Quality Childcare and Lifelong Learning: Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* was published. This document recognises the active changes that are happening in childcare, which will need constant flexibility, regular review, evaluation and revision of policy developments relating to qualifications (French, 2003).

All of these developments, whether they are policy, legislation or practice, are the first step forward to making positive impacts on children's lives and those of their family. Despite these advancements, there are many problems that exist regarding childcare in Ireland. These problems are evident through the current provision of childcare, discussed in the next section.

Section III:

Current Provision of Childcare in Ireland

The topics covered in this section include the current provision of childcare in Ireland; childcare as a gender and equal opportunities issue; childcare provision in urban and rural areas; the childcare needs of parents; and quality childcare as a need for parents. To begin, this section will look at the current childcare situation in an Irish context.

3.1 Introduction

The current situation in Ireland is that state expenditure is targeted mainly at children in need or in disadvantage. In reality, much of state expenditure on childcare occurs as a by-product of other activities rather than the improvement of childcare in its own right. As a result of this key players combined their efforts and lobbied the Government for childcare to be tackled in its own right. The 'Childcare 2000 Campaign' was launched and called for universal payments to parents for childcare. The Government's response to this is deemed, by the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA), to be misplaced as they decided to pay parents higher levels of children's allowance (National Budget December 2004) as a means of subsidising the cost of childcare. This measure has not proven to be satisfactory, and it is argued that there is not one measure that will help alleviate the burden of childcare for parents (Interview with Mary Lee Stapleton, Director of Services, NCNA, 8th December 2004).

The take up of paid childcare varies in accordance with the employment status of women – 16% of mothers who work full-time in the home avail of childcare while 58% of women who work outside the home full-time avail of these services. It is approximated that 146,000 (17%) of all children between the ages of 0-9 years avail of childcare (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. xxi).

In Ireland, childcare has been left to parents to arrange for themselves. This was appropriate when the country was in a recession and women were opting to stay at home and care for their own children. However, nationally, there is a distinct shortage of childcare places. This has occurred for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the social and economic conditions of women and their expectations have caused women to combine work and family life. This is occurring as childminding places are contracting. The childcare industry was traditionally being maintained by women who left the workforce to care for their own children. These women are now, however, opting to move into the formal job market where they can command higher rates of pay compared to that previously earned in the informal market of childminding. This has led to a substantial drop in childminders.

Secondly, the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations (1996), under the Child Care Act, 1991 have had a huge impact, as the HSE has been carrying out inspections of childcare centres. Many have not been meeting the minimum requirements so instead of investing, some providers are deciding to close. This is usually due to the fact that their profit margins are too small to hire the extra staff to meet staff ratios and to meet the physical requirements. These small-scale providers usually operate from their own home (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. xxi).

Thirdly, the larger childcare centres are experiencing difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff. Childcare workers are often paid poorly so in a more prosperous economy they are being drawn to other industries.

Fourthly, it is much more difficult for parents to access childcare when it is on a part-time basis or for babies. Regulations require higher staff ratios for babies costing the provider more. Similarly, part-time places cost the provider more when that place could have been filled by a full-time place.

Fifthly, there are issues around the quality of childcare as parents are forced to continue using lower quality services due to the lack of alternatives (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. xxi).

These issues have caused a virtual crisis in childcare. Combined with the improvements in the quality of childcare, the price is increasing for parents and as a result it is only women in the higher income groups who can afford childcare, thereby promoting an exclusionary system (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. xxi).

3.2 Women and Work

As previously mentioned, one of the major reasons for the increase in demand for childcare services is the increase in the participation of women in the workforce. Women's participation in the labour force has increased from 34.1% in 1992 to 39.2% in 1997 (Labour Force Survey, 1998). By the first quarter of 2004 the female participation rate was 49.5% (Quarterly National Household Survey, 2004).

An important aspect of the participation of women in the labour force is that of the increased participation of mothers, particularly evident in the last 10 years. Statistics from the 2004 Quarterly National Household Survey show that 48% of mothers with children under 15 years of age are in employment. This compares to 34% of mothers with children older than 15 years.

According to the National Childcare Strategy (2000), these figures are unexpected as the general belief, nationally, has been that mothers of very young children are more likely to stay out of the labour force. Also, the supposed trend of mothers leaving the labour force when their children are young and more likely to return to work when their children are of school-going age has been shown to be inaccurate.

A continuing trend in Ireland has been that of women availing of part-time work. As available data demonstrates, women are attempting to balance childcare and home duties with formal employment. It must be noted that part-time work is not an acceptable long-term solution, as it does not solve the problem of women trying to achieve formal work that is skilled, valued and suitably paid along with dealing with family responsibilities (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999).

3.2.1 Equal Opportunities

It is generally accepted that the major barriers to women's participation in the Irish work force is that of cost and accessibility to childcare and the difficulties balancing work with family. Despite how far women have come in the

previous decades, women still carry most of the responsibility of childcare. As a result of these responsibilities women can be forced to compromise on standards of care, split their working day and reduce the time spent with their children. The options available to women are to avail of traditional family support, if available, expensive or unsuitable formal childcare.

Even these types of childcare are not available to some women. With the number of women entering the labour force constantly increasing, the traditional support of the family is unable to meet demand. Level of income also plays a major role as women in higher income brackets can afford childcare and have a greater choice in the types of childcare available to them. There is a particular need for public policy to help parents reconcile work and caring roles so that quality of life for all concerned (children, parents and families) and equality of opportunities for women are ensured. Gender equality is one of the most pressing issues affecting the area of childcare at the moment (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. 4).

3.3 Childcare Provision in Urban and Rural Areas

According to the NAPS (National Anti-Poverty Strategy, 2002), childcare is one measure to help alleviate poverty and social exclusion. Childcare can do this in four ways:

1. By tackling educational disadvantage among children.
2. Facilitating women to access the labour market.
3. Aiding women to avail of educational, training and employment opportunities within the childcare sector.
4. By alleviating stress within the family as well as social isolation.

As defined by the Partnership 2000 Social Economy Working Group, the social economy is “that part of the economy between the private and public sectors, which engages in economic activity in order to meet social objectives”. It is, therefore, based on the principles of social solidarity and sustainability rather than profit. Childcare is an important tool in social and economic development as well as the regeneration of disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

3.3.1 The Urban Disadvantaged Context

In the urban context, community based provisions struggle for survival while private services are irregular and inconsistent in supply. Financial resources are not the only hindrance to childcare services but also the lack of infrastructure and support services to assure and maintain the development and supply of suitable childcare responses.

The barriers to childcare in urban disadvantaged areas are the unaffordable charges, the inability to hire trained staff, lack of information and limited opening hours (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. 36).

3.3.2 The Rural Context

The decline of agricultural output has forced women to look for employment outside of the farm. In addition to this,

modernisation of the agricultural process, as evident in mechanisation and chemical uses, has reduced the availability of safe play-areas. With migration to more urbanised areas continuing as a major trend, there is a low level of rural childcare provision and less choice available.

Obstacles and Barriers to Rural Childcare Provision

Obstacles and barriers include isolation, high staff costs and the non-existence of training programmes adapted to the needs of rural provision. There is also a lack of local network development and support mechanisms for childcare workers. In rural areas transport is a major constraint to accessing childcare services. Those without means of transport may not be able to access childcare at all. Also, flexibility of hours is another major hindrance for working parents.

EU resolution on women in rural areas

Ireland is not alone in the current dearth of childcare in rural areas. According to a European Parliament resolution on women in rural areas of the EU (2003), 37% of the agricultural workforce of the EU (excluding the new member states) consists of women. Women play a major role in overall production, as well as rural development, and form a significant link between production and consumption. The picture of women in rural Europe is disheartening. Some statistics to demonstrate this point are as follows:

- The female rural population is ageing;
- 50% of women farmers fall into the spouse or partner category, making terms and conditions of pay, social security, healthcare, pensions and so on undesirable;
- The number of women farmers is very low;
- The level of participation of women in farming co-operatives and agricultural organisations is dismal;
- Illiteracy and unemployment in rural areas affect women the most (in some areas twice as much as men).

The European Parliament made a list of recommendations, one of which encourages women to participate in work outside of the home and agricultural production in order to ensure participation is more balanced. They also recommended:

“...to implement policies to improve the general living conditions of women in rural areas and to set up an appropriate network of rural services (postal services, libraries) establishing or improving public transport facilities and schools as well as permanent and seasonal facilities for childcare...”. (Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, 2003).

There is a need for specific targeting strategies for disadvantaged areas. These strategies should facilitate the delivery of information. Also, there needs to be measures in place to assist in the access and support of training that specifically meet the needs of those in poverty and who are socially excluded. This demonstrates the need for childcare provision to be put in context. That is, every community in Ireland comprises of certain dynamic structures so it is important that these structures are investigated so that childcare provision can be geared to suit the requirements of that community.

3.4 The Childcare Needs of Parents

Childcare in Ireland transcends all sectors of society, as it is necessary for parents from urban/rural areas and disadvantaged/non-disadvantaged backgrounds. Parents use childcare for their own needs, their children's needs or both. The following are the circumstances in which parents use childcare services:

- As part of child rearing;
- So children can avail of socialisation and educational opportunities;
- To facilitate parent(s) working;
- To enable Parent(s) seeking work;
- Parents attending education or training programmes;
- Respite care (due to short-term family crisis, long-term stress, leisure or social activities); and
- Attending appointments (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. 36).

In a survey carried out by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions on identifying members' childcare needs (2002), almost two-thirds used some form of paid childcare. By and large, respondents organised their childcare to meet the needs of their employment and the labour market. Childminding responsibilities impact upon the type of working arrangements chosen such as part-time working, job-sharing etc, especially in the case of women. Also, childminding responsibilities impact upon women's capacity to develop their career to the extent that they do not avail of promotional opportunities or they avoid overtime.

According to the survey, policy-makers and interest groups concentrate on institutionally based childcare services even though they only provide a small proportion of childcare service use. Childminding in the home of a neighbour or childminder is the most commonly used childcare service (Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2002).

The general picture is that childcare services, subsidies, or other sources provided by employers are only accorded to the very few and mainly to those in the public sector.

For those on incomes less than €19,050 in the year 2002, on average, 31.2% of gross income went on childcare. This problem is not only confined to those on very low incomes since dual income families with a joint income of €50,790 are also paying 12.2% of combined gross income on childcare costs (Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2002). These constraints limit greatly parents' choices regarding childcare. The lack of availability and prohibitive costs has resulted in parents being forced into one of three situations.

Firstly, parents are forced to adapt their working life. This results in some parents giving up full-time positions for part-time ones or avoiding promotion and overtime opportunities in an attempt to limit childcare costs. Some parents also choose to work over-time, or anti-social shifts, resulting in longer working hours and little contact with their children in order to cover the cost of childcare. It can result in forcing one parent to leave the labour market altogether, as it is not practical to earn a wage to solely cover childcare costs.

Secondly, parents become dependent on informal childcare arrangements with friends, relatives or neighbours.

Thirdly, parents can be forced to pass up preferred childcare arrangements (for example, workplace or community-based crèche, professional childminder in one's home and so on) (Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2002, p. 30). The influencing factors regarding parents passing up their preferred childcare, is that of, affordability, availability and choice of childcare. This is the case for parents living in both rural and urban areas. For example, in a rural area, location can take away a parent's choice whereas cost can play a greater role for those parents in urban areas. This is discussed in greater detail in the Findings and Discussions section.

An Expert Working Group on Childcare was set up by Partnership 2000 in order to devise a national strategy on childcare (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. xxi). The group consulted the public in order to prioritise the elements in the development of the national strategy on childcare. The following are the key results from the survey:

- 34% stated that high quality training of childcare workers is essential
- 24% stated a need for State support for childcare provision
- 16% stated that quality childcare must be affordable to all wishing to avail of such services
- 16% called for equality of access and participation for all children
- 16% stated the need for registration of childcare workers and facilities
- 16% saw a need for the co-ordination of policy
- 10% want the recognition of accredited prior learning
- 7% called for the needs and rights of children to be at the forefront of all considerations
- 5% also called for the needs and rights of children to be recognised
- 5% want men to be involved in childcare services
- 5% also called for employers to have responsibilities in providing childcare

The Expert Working Group also saw the need to develop a national strategy that would meet European Guidelines and Structural Fund criteria. Member States must “*design, implement and promote family friendly policies, including affordable, accessible and high quality care services for children as well as parental and other leave schemes*” (1999 European Employment Guidelines, cited in Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. xxv).

The EU Guidelines on employment are based on four pillars:

- Improving employability;
- Developing entrepreneurship;
- Encouraging adaptability in businesses and their employees; and
- Strengthening policies for equal opportunities.

(The European Union, 1999)

Childcare contributes to the attainment of all four of these pillars. The national situation is that Ireland's childcare infrastructure is much weaker than the rest of the EU.

Research conducted by the Donegal County Childcare Committee formulated a list of barriers to satisfying childcare needs. These include:

- Children and parents who are isolated especially those in rural areas;
- Parents who do not own their own form of transportation can have difficulties accessing childcare;
- Prohibitive costs;
- Availability of spaces and/or no choice in the style of childcare being provided;
- Parents can find it difficult to source childcare due to the lack of available information (Gallo, 2004; p. 23).

Gallo (2004; p. 24) identified ways of meeting the specific needs of parents. These include:

- Childcare being located in local communities;
- Accessibility whether it is by transport or for all children regardless of background or special needs;
- Affordable childcare;
- Age appropriate childcare as required by the community;
- Trained and vetted childcare providers; safe and reliable (continuity of care, child proofing, etc.);
- The integration of the Irish language and culture into childcare provision;
- Opening times that are tailored to the needs of the area; and
- A positive experience for the child.

Once these needs are satisfied, parents were able to articulate a set of preferences for childcare. These included:

- flexible childcare;
- the covering of bridge-times;
- cover of school holidays;
- choice of type of childcare;
- one-stop shop for childcare;
- provision of Irish language to help children to learn to speak Irish;
- child development;
- A professional childcare service where there is tax relief for parents, standards, vetting and registration of childminders;
- An integrated approach to childcare regarding the start time of National Schools; local work schedules; people in the community who work with children (health nurses etc.) as an information source to parents; and
- An accessible list available in a central location (e.g. website) of childminders, Parent & Toddler groups, local provision summer camps (Gallo, 2004; p. 24-26).

If the needs and preferences for childcare were met parents would be able to:

- Work full-time, part-time, seasonally or advance career without childcare worries;
- Do day-to-day jobs such as shopping;
- Have some time for one-self on occasion;
- Attend events not suitable for children, such as funerals, with the provision of ad-hoc care;
- Relax more as there would be less stress rushing about and parents could have confidence in safety of provision;
- Achieve peace of mind as they can leave their children in a quality childcare facility. This reduces feelings of guilt that some parents feel when leaving their children in the care of someone else.

3.4.1 Quality Childcare as a Need

According to an ADM report on Progressing Equality through Childcare (2000), there is great variability in the quality of childcare. Services have developed in an ad hoc manner. This is due to a laissez-faire attitude from the State evident through the fact that much of the development, supporting and advising of childcare providers has been undertaken by the voluntary sector. They receive little funding and rely almost exclusively on parents' fees and fundraising attempts.

There have been a number of developments that have contributed to a greater level of co-ordination of State support for childcare. These include 'Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare', the 'National Forum for Early Childhood Care and Education, 1998' and the 'Commission on the Family, 1998'. It was these that played a pivotal role in the formation of a national policy articulated through the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

It is difficult to define 'quality'. Such a term is value based as each possible definition reflects what is wanted for children, parents, workers and communities. The definitions of quality depend on the perspective to be taken, that is, whether it is from the perspective of child development; government/regulatory bodies; social services; parents; the child; social policy funding; staff; or from a cultural stance. For the purpose of this report a definition of quality will be taken from two sources. Firstly, from academic and current working definitions of quality in childcare. Secondly, the definition will include the perspectives of working parents in the County Mayo region as major stakeholders in the childcare system.

Woodhead (1996) puts forward the idea of utilising any framework as long as it contains stakeholders, beneficiaries and indicators:

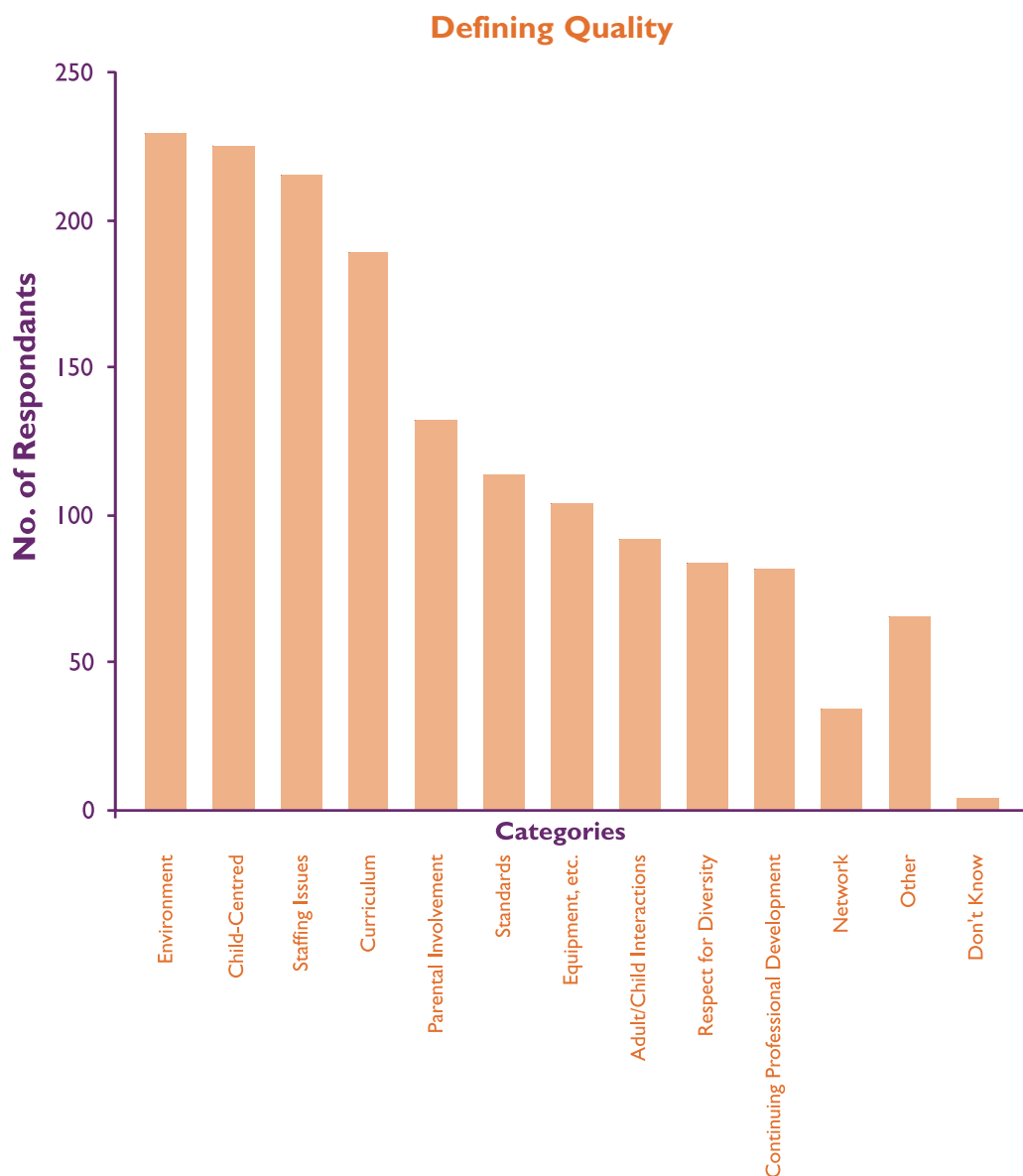
- Stakeholders may include children, parents, programme managers, childcare workers, employers, politicians, funding agencies, and community leaders.
- Beneficiaries may include society in general, local communities, parents, children, employers and providers.

It is necessary that a number of indicators be used to ensure that the values and perspectives of the stakeholders are being translated into practice. Quality indicators can be grouped under three main categories.

- **Input Indicators:** these refer to tangible aspects of a programme. They are the easiest to define and regulate, for example: buildings, materials, equipment and staffing.
- **Process Indicators:** these are the indicators of the day-to-day happenings. These would be more difficult to define and standardise as they include style of care, the experience of the children, relationships between parents, caregivers and others.
- **Outcome Indicators:** concern the impact of provision regarding its effectiveness seen through children’s health, abilities and family attitudes.

It is important that indicators are placed within the context of the specific community in order to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of parents and children in a particular community.

Duignan and Walsh’s (2004) report on quality in early childhood care and education consulted a range of sectors in order to define ‘quality’. Those consulted included practitioners/teachers, students, parents, adult educators, and policy developers with a urban/rural balance (56%/40%). The results are now presented.



The Environment category (66%) refers to the immediate environment that is both constant and active. Having a safe, clean and warm area for the child were stated along with an outdoor play area and a suitable atmosphere. Also, the environment should be aesthetically pleasing along with an adequate balance between safety and hygiene and sufficient room for the child to experience 'safe risk' in support of their development.

Child Centred (65%) relates to the recognition and valuing of each child and to work towards the needs of each child. Emphasis was placed on the physical, intellectual, emotional and social development of the child. In other areas of the research respondents expressed the need for children to be consulted and listened to, in order to develop policies and services that directly relates to them.

Staffing Issues (62%) revolves around concerns of staff training and qualifications. Of major importance to respondents were the characteristics of staff who care for children. In other parts of the consultation process it emerged that quality could only be achieved through adequate ratios of staff/children to facilitate both the development of the child and to aid in the record keeping, supervision of students and the engagement of parents. Also, there is a need for management to have appropriate levels of qualification and expertise. Time and resources must be allocated to teamwork building and networking with other relevant agencies.

Curriculum (55%) includes the daily routines, structure, and methodologies used within the setting, which need to be adaptable in accordance to the needs and capabilities of children.

Parental Involvement (38%): partnership between providers and parents was mentioned as necessary for accommodating the needs of families. Parents are the primary caregivers and educators of their child but it can be difficult to develop this aspect of quality so it is necessary for the correct support systems to be put in place to achieve this. Parental involvement is discussed in greater detail later in this section.

The areas of Standards and Best Practice (33%) refers to the development of policies, philosophies, procedures and record keeping in all areas of the childcare setting. This area should support the harmonisation of existing regulations, standards and guidelines. Standards need to be applicable and flexible to all childcare settings where children are aged 0-6 years.

Equipment, Materials and Resources (30%) appropriate to the needs of each child was also deemed as important by a proportion of respondents. This ranges from the structure and layout of the building to the resources available to the child which are necessary for its development.

Adult-Child Interactions (27%) was seen by certain respondents as central to quality as it refers to each child receiving individual attention for listening, supporting and interaction which can be led by either child or adult (Duignan and Walsh, 2004).

According to Fallon (2003), the most important aspect of childcare quality is the nature of the interaction between the child and the teacher and positive interaction requires small group sizes and better teacher training. It is, of course, important to invest in proper equipment and materials but more importantly, investment strategies lie with training and development of staff.

Respect for Diversity (24%) was put forward as a necessary all-inclusive practice to include ethnicity, language and religion along with diversity in family circumstances. However, in addition to this practice it is necessary that the individuality of the child be recognised so that difference is supported.

Continuing Professional Development (24%) refers to the necessity of staff working with children having access to courses, workshops and training in order to ensure quality on a continual basis.

Networks and Linkages (10%) were deemed to be important by a number of respondents in order to ensure the distribution of information at local, regional and national levels (Duignan and Walsh, 2004; p. 7-10).

3.4.2 Social Benefits of Quality Childcare

It is safe to say that pre-school education leads to immediate, obvious advantages in educational and social development. Research shows that high quality early learning results in early cognitive and social benefits in children, which stays with them through adolescence and into adulthood. The impact of early learning is evident in all social groups but is most striking with disadvantaged groups. Also, it benefits society in the long-term through economic savings.

Research has shown that poor quality childcare can have detrimental effects on child development. According to the EU Childcare network (1996, cited in Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. 52), high quality services that are accessible to all children can only be achieved through a national policy framework. This is exactly what is absent in Ireland as there is little State support or adequate co-ordination. This has led to a crisis in supply, inconsistent levels of quality and little structured development.

The most important features that ensure the effectiveness of early childhood programmes include good planning, play-based programmes, realistic resourcing, a positive informed attitude on the part of staff; continuous training for staff and committee members, and on-going research and development. Quality childcare also provides positive benefits to parents and the wider community.

3.4.3 Economic Benefits of Quality Childcare

The economic benefits of quality childcare include:

- The benefits for children will eventually lead to long-term benefits for the economy through the investment in human capital that is expected to be realised in approximately 2010.
- Quality childcare allows parents to return to training, to take up second chance education, to be placed in jobs or begin their own enterprises which will return benefits back to the economy.
- Skill and labour shortages can be curbed, as quality childcare will allow women to participate in the labour market. The economic return of this is immediate.
- The providers of childcare will also benefit as they all become regulated thereby improving capacity, profitability and sustainability.
- There are also benefits seen in job creation. The childcare sector will generate jobs in its own right especially in disadvantaged areas where the benefits of this would be visible immediately.

More specifically, Bright Horizons (2003), found that unscheduled absences due to childcare cost employers between €650 and €1,000 per employee per year. Employees with childcare difficulties miss more than twice as many workdays as those with no children. Also, offering childcare supported programmes is five times more effective in boosting employee productivity. These issues alone make childcare not just a social issue but a major economic issue also.

Demand for childcare is predicted to rise by 25%-50% up to the year 2011, mainly due to the increased participation of women in the labour force (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. 56)

With gender inequalities still widely evident in Ireland it is vital that the barriers are removed and the provision of affordable, quality childcare is an important step to redressing the inequalities that exist.

3.5 Conclusion

The needs and rights of children must be placed as the first and foremost concern regarding childcare. It needs to be child centred in all aspects from its ethos, policies, and curricula to premises and personnel attitudes. It must be accepted that care and education are inextricably connected in the holistic development of the child. It must also be recognised that play is one of the essential experiences of childhood so all services must provide both indoor and outdoor space to play.

Childcare must be accessible, affordable and of sound quality in order that equality of opportunity in education, training and employment can be achieved. Also the childcare sector needs to recognise and appreciate the value of diversity in society. It must offer services that enhance experiences for children as well as positive interactions between children and adults (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p. 50).

While there have been improvements in policy and legislation relating to childcare there are still major problems that exist. Childcare needs to be addressed in its own right at a national level. Those that are suffering most are the parents, children and to a lesser extent employers. Childcare needs to be targeted according to the needs of the community whether it is an issue of equal opportunities or the needs of a rural area. In essence the childcare needs of parents and more specifically working parents is to have access to affordable, quality childcare that would give parents the right to choose the type of childcare they deem most suitable for the needs of their child. The social and economic benefits of an adequate childcare infrastructure are immense and effect many sectors of the wider society.

Section IV:

Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the project methodology. Topics discussed include the sample selection; pilot study; measurement instrument and data collection, data analysis; and reliability and validity.

4.1 Sample Selection and Pilot Study

The research commenced on the 17th May 2004.

An extensive literature review was carried out on the childcare needs of working parents. The areas of focus in this section included the following:

- Legislation and policy surrounding the childcare sector
- Current provision of childcare in Ireland
- Women and work in conjunction with equal opportunities
- Childcare provision in urban and rural areas
- Obstacles and barriers to rural childcare provision
- Analysis of the childcare needs of working parents
- Quality childcare as a need
- Social benefits of quality childcare
- Economic benefits of quality childcare
- General childcare Provision in Co. Mayo

After this analysis a questionnaire was generated. It had been decided from the onset that the parents would be targeted through their place of employment in order to ensure all types of childcare arrangements would be considered. Using the list that was compiled from Mayo County Childcare Committee's Seminar for Employers, May 2004, employers across a wide spectrum were contacted (see appendix I). The size and type of business varied from manufacturing to the banking sector allowing for different types of working conditions to be assessed. In order to include the farming sector the IFA kindly agreed to distribute the questionnaires to their members. However, it emerged, during the coding stage, that only three farmers responded.

It was decided that the pilot study would be conducted with the Early Years Services of the Health Service Executive-Western Region and three departments in Mayo County Council. Staff of the Early Years Services were asked to fill out the questionnaire and were then interviewed in order to ascertain any difficulties that may have arisen. Questionnaires were delivered to County Council staff and the data was then examined to establish exactly how the results should be analysed and its suitability to both qualitative and quantitative analysis. As a result the appropriate changes were made for example syntax and format.

A total of 3,217 questionnaires were distributed across County Mayo. Each questionnaire had a stamped addressed envelope attached to it. Unfortunately a response rate could not be calculated prior to distribution due to the nature

of the target group. For example, 1,100 questionnaires were given to the Mayo Community Services section of the HSE. As only a certain percentage of the staff would be working parents with children under the age of 14 years and a smaller percentage again would respond to the questionnaires the response was obviously quite limited. A total of 222 questionnaires were analysed.

4.2 Measurement Instrument

As stated the instrument of measurement was a questionnaire. Each questionnaire had a cover letter attached to it outlining who is to answer the questionnaire; who is conducting the research; the returning of the questionnaire and background information to the research. By distributing the questionnaires through employers there were issues around duplication, that is, parents from the same family could return two questionnaires. Hence, parents were asked not to fill out the questionnaire if they were aware their spouse/partner had already done so (see appendix 2).

The questionnaire was divided into a number of sections. The first section concentrated on the respondents' profile. This established basic information such as where the parent worked; gender; age; number of children and so on. Section two and three concentrated on information on the occupation of respondents. This ranged from income to access to working arrangements. Also, two open-ended questions were presented to the parents. These were the effect of availability and/or affordability on their working arrangements and the impact of childcare opportunities on their career. Section four specifically concentrated on childcare, questions ranging from cost and type of childcare to the effect of availability and affordability on the type of childcare used. Parents were asked to give reasons why they choose the childcare they use and the positive and negative aspects of that childcare. Also included in this section were the opinions of parents on the employers' role and the government's role in childcare. In total ten pages and forty-eight questions were asked. It was accepted that the questionnaire was quite long, however it was decided that the information sought was too important to reduce the length (See appendix 3 for questionnaire).

4.3 Data analysis

An in-depth thematic analysis was carried out on the quantitative and qualitative data returned. A coding guide was generated. The quantifiable data was coded and then inputted into the statistical package SPSS (version 12.0) for statistical analysis. Qualitative data was placed into general themes and statistically analysed. Also, the qualitative data was organised thematically and coded in the qualitative research package N-Vivo (version N6). It was felt by using both methods for the qualitative data a general over view could be given along with an in-depth look at the reasons why parents have made the choices they have.

4.4 Reliability and Validity

As the questionnaires were long a student was hired to conduct the coding. This student was trained and the researcher re-coded the first twenty questionnaires. From this point every tenth questionnaire was re-coded. This ensured that there was consistency in the coding.

All variables have been tested in accordance with the appropriate levels of measurements. Significance, association and relationships were all analysed and there had to be a strong correlation before they were included in the report (unless stated otherwise).

Section V:

Findings and Discussions: Childcare Provision in County Mayo

5.1 In Context – County Mayo

In this section we examine the general childcare provision in Co. Mayo. In 1999 there were a total of 86 childcare services notified to the Western Health Board. The breakdown of which can be seen as follows:

Table 1: Childcare provision by type 1999

Playgroups	47 (42 offering sessional services, 5 offering full day-care)
Montessori	15 (11 offering sessional services, 4 offering full day-care)
Naíonraí	8
Crèche/Full Day-care	8
Workplace Nursery	1
Parent/Toddler Groups	7
Afterschool Provision	0
Total number of services	86

(Childcare Census, 2000)

By December 2004, there were 111 (an increase of almost 30% since 2000) services notified to the Health Service Executive. This increase reflects the effects of demand, supports and the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme. There has been more than a doubling of day-care, Naíonraí and parent and toddler groups.

As evident from the table below, most of the services are provided in sessional services, hence most children are cared for in a home situation either by parents or childminders. A calculation of the number of childminders is not possible but there are eleven who have notified the HSE-Western Region. According to the Mayo County Childcare Committee Strategic Plan 2002-2006 it is reasonable to assume that the numbers which individual childminders care for are less than four children.

Table 2: Notified Services by Type

PROVISION	COMMUNITY	PRIVATE
Sessional	38	26
Naíonraí	10	0
Full Day Care	6	18
Notified Childminders	0	11
Drop-in Centre	0	2
TOTAL	54	57

Location of Services

MCCC has adopted 7 electoral areas as a basis for the networking subdivisions of the county. These areas are roughly equal in terms of population but vary greatly in density, physical characteristics and provision of service. The seven areas are Ballina, Ballinrobe, Belmullet, Castlebar, Claremorris, Swinford, and Westport. Tables 3 to 9 provide an overview of childcare facilities available in these regions for December 2004.

Table 3: Ballina: Services in Ballina Electoral Area

PROVISION	COMMUNITY	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Sessional	7	4	11
Naíonraí	1	0	1
Full Day Care	1	4	5
Childminders	0	0	0
Drop-in Centre	0	0	0
TOTAL	9	8	17

Table 4: Ballinrobe: Services in Ballinrobe Electoral Area

PROVISION	COMMUNITY	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Sessional	4	1	5
Naíonraí	1	0	1
Full Day Care	1	1	2
Childminders	0	1	1
Drop-in Centre	0	0	0
TOTAL	6	3	9

Table 5: Belmullet: Services in Belmullet Electoral Area

PROVISION	COMMUNITY	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Sessional	2	1	3
Naíonraí	6	0	6
Full Day Care	1	1	2
Childminders	0	0	0
Drop-in Centre	0	0	0
TOTAL	9	2	11

Table 6: Castlebar: Services in Castlebar Electoral Area

PROVISION	COMMUNITY	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Sessional	6	7	13
Naíonraí	2	0	2
Full Day Care	0	6	6
Childminders	0	3	3
Drop-in Centre	0	1	1
TOTAL	8	17	25

Table 7: Claremorris: Services in Claremorris Electoral Area

PROVISION	COMMUNITY	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Sessional	8	7	15
Naíonraí	0	0	0
Full Day Care	2	1	3
Childminders	0	3	3
Drop-in Centre	0	0	0
TOTAL	10	11	21

Table 8: Swinford: Services in Swinford Electoral Area

PROVISION	COMMUNITY	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Sessional	5	2	7
Naíonraí	0	0	0
Full Day Care	0	2	2
Childminders	0	2	2
Drop-in Centre	0	0	0
TOTAL	5	6	11

Table 9: Westport: Services in Westport Electoral Area

PROVISION	COMMUNITY	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Sessional	6	4	10
Naíonraí	0	0	0
Full Day Care	1	3	4
Childminders	0	2	2
Drop-in Centre	0	1	1
TOTAL	7	10	17

The reality in Co. Mayo is that there is a negligible level of supply across the whole range of childcare provision. Also, geographical dispersal is unequal with facilities concentrated in one area (for example Castlebar) and other areas with little or no provision. The electoral areas of Ballinrobe and Swinford suffer a particular lack of services. The groups that are chiefly under serviced are rural families, babies under three years and children in the afterschool age groups.

The sessions that typically operate throughout the county have a tendency to last between 2½-3½ hours. For this time parents and carers have to travel considerable distances, more often than not on poor roads in order to avail of these services. This continues to be a major barrier to some families availing of services.

Overall, there is a major scarcity of information on childminding services and only eleven have notified the HSE-Western Region. This type of home based service may be the most suitable type of provision for rural areas (NICMA, 2004).

A study funded by the former Western Health Board (now titled HSE-Western region), Growing up in Castlebar, (2000), assessed childcare and family support needs in Castlebar after consulting with young people themselves and undertaking an audit of existing services in the town. The findings of this report are as follows:

- There are significant differences between the Castlebar Urban and Castlebar Rural DEDs in terms of provision.
- Trends show couples are locating in the more affluent rural DEDs while single parents and single males tend to live in the urban DEDs.
- There are a higher percentage of women working than the national average with women often working in the evenings.
- In two-thirds of the households sampled, mothers minded their children during the day.
- A number of childcare issues were identified, including costs, access, inflexible hours and lack of information.
- The majority of respondents preferred family to care for children rather than paid childcare arrangements.

(Castlebar Children's Service Planning Group, 2000)

The key conclusions of this report were that those planning services for the 0-6 year age group must address the needs of families in which both parents are working as well as families where one parent stays at home to raise the children. Families and young people themselves want to have access to facilities.

Recommendations include:

- Safe public playgrounds, in appropriate locations including on housing estates to ease access for families.
- A central support facility providing a range of services and training facilities
- An accessible and acceptable Parenting Support Service
- Parent and Toddler Groups
- Social and sports venues for young teenagers
- Parental involvement in planning of new services

Castlebar requires a response that recognises its urban problems and difficulties and provides relevant and accessible childcare services. It is envisaged that the proposal could be piloted as a model of good practice for other urban centres (Mayo County Childcare Committee Strategic Plan 2002-2006, p. 15).

The Erris Early Years Project – “Supporting Families in Erris” (1999) looked at the needs of families with children aged 0-6 years. It was commissioned by a multi-agency steering group and funded by the Western Health Board. The area of focus can be characterised as having high unemployment, low population density, and poor transport infrastructure. Much of this area is located within the Gaeltacht, therefore cultural preservation is important (Meitheal Mhaigh Eo Teo, 1999).

Recommendations include:

- It is necessary to work through existing infrastructure found in the public health services and primary schools.
- It is necessary to adapt an integrated cross-agency partnership approach.
- Two main identified needs have to be addressed – childcare for working parents and support for parents raising their children.
- Services need to be staffed by people known to families and that are locally based.

The Services identified as priorities are:

- Playgrounds where children can play safely, possibly within primary schools.
- Education and information for parents who use the medium of community radio.
- Home-based parent and toddler groups.
- A telephone help-line for parents.
- Enhanced facilities in health centres.

Erris Early Years Project states that this is a neglected area of extreme deprivation and deserves a comprehensive multi-agency strategy to test models for service delivery in remote rural areas (MCCC Strategic Plan 2002-2006, p. 16; Meitheal Mhaigh Eo Teo, 1999).

Section VI:

Findings and Discussions:

Childcare Needs of Working Parents in County Mayo

6.1 Respondents Profile and Employment Situation

Type of Employment

As mentioned previously, it was decided from the onset of this study to target parents through their place of employment. As a result, a variety of employers across Co. Mayo were contacted. These were divided into certain categories as follows:

Table 1: Respondents' Place Employment

EMPLOYMENT SECTOR	VALID PERCENT (%)
Public Sector	66.7%
Manufacturing Sector	16.2%
Financial Sector	7.1%
Retail Sector	6.2%
Other (e.g. services and newspapers)	2.4%
Farming Sector	1.4%
TOTAL	100.0%

Employment Type and Gender

Questionnaires were distributed to all parents (with children under the age of fourteen years) regardless of gender. However, despite this request the overwhelming majority of respondents were female (81% versus 19%). This occurrence could be used to confirm that childcare is still deemed to be a female responsibility. This was further strengthened by the fact that a small number of completed questionnaires were returned from places of employment that were not surveyed, for example the Gardaí and the VEC. All these respondents were female so the assumption could be made that their husbands/partners received the questionnaires and gave them to their wives/partners to fill out.

Table 2: Percentage within Type of employment according to gender

TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT	GENDER	
	FEMALE	MALE
Public Sector	87.9%	12.1%
Manufacturing	52.9%	47.1%
Financial Sector	92.9%	7.1%
Retail Sector	84.6%	15.4%
Self-employed	100.0%	.0%
Farming Sector	.0%	100.0%
Other (e.g. services and newspapers)	100.0%	.0%
% within type of Employment	81.3%	18.7%

As evident from the above table, the gender response rate varied according to the employment sector. Manufacturing sector returned the most gender balanced response (53% female versus 47% male). This type of response could have occurred due to manufacturing being traditionally a male dominated industry. With childcare viewed as a female responsibility, a greater gender balance was achieved as more women responded than men. A small number of farmers responded but, of those, all were male while the more administrative jobs returned an overwhelming majority of women. This research keeps in line with national trends of gender distribution amongst employment type.

Employment Type, Gender and Age

The age profile of this sample was as expected. Seventy-seven percent of the sample fell between the ages 30-44 years. The highest response rate came from the 35-39 age category, and within this group 30% were women and 45% were men. This occurred as respondents were only asked to respond if they had children under the age of 14 years.

Table 3: Age and gender of Sample

GENDER	Age							TOTAL
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	
Female	0.6%	9.0%	23.6%	29.8%	23.6%	11.8%	1.7%	100%
Male	0.0%	7.1%	21.4%	45.2%	9.5%	16.7%	0.0%	100%
Total	0.5%	8.6%	23.2%	32.7%	20.9%	12.7%	1.4%	100%

As stated, the majority of the sample is aged between 30-44 years. This holds true for the distribution of age among the different employment categories where there appears to be a moderate relationship between age and type of employment of parents. This relationship, however, is probably due more to the dominant age categories of the parents than age having an impact upon the sector in which they are employed.

Table 4: Age and Type of Employment of Sample

TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT	Age							TOTAL
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	
Public Sector	0.5%	4.3%	16.3%	18.7%	15.8%	10.5%	1.0%	67.0%
Financial Sector	0.0%	0.5%	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%	0.5%	0.5%	7.2%
Manufacturing	0.0%	2.4%	4.3%	6.2%	1.9%	1.0%	0.0%	15.8%
Self-employed	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Farming Sector	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%
Retail Sector	0.0%	0.5%	0.5%	4.8%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	6.2%
Other (services and newspapers)	0.0%	0.5%	1.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
Total	0.5%	8.1%	24.4%	33.0%	20.1%	12.4%	1.4%	100.0%

Family Composition

It was not surprising to find that 91.4% of the sample shared their child-caring responsibilities with their partner/spouse. 6.3% of the sample were single parents and of those single parents, 85.7% were female. The remainder (2.3%) shared their childcare responsibilities with either their non-cohabiting or ex-spouse/partner. Age also played a role in how childcare responsibilities were distributed. The age range of single parents was evenly distributed across the categories between the ages of 20-49 years. Those who were separated from their spouse/partner tended to be concentrated in the 35-49 age category.

The size of the family unit tended to be small but this was partially due to the fact that parents were only asked to include children under the age of 14 years. The majority of families had one to two children under the age of 14 years. It was only a very small minority who had four children in this age group, while none of the sample had five or more.

Table 5: Number of children per household

NUMBER OF CHILDREN	VALID PERCENT (%)
1	38.3%
2	44.1%
3	12.6%
4	5.0%
Total	100.0%

Average number of children per household: 1.8

However, as would be expected from the predominant age ranges of this sample, the majority of parents had relatively young children, with the average age of children being 5.7 years. It was also discovered that a small number of children required special needs care (3.6% or 8 children).

The educational status of the children is as follows:

Table 6: Educational Status of Children

EDUCATIONAL STATUS	VALID PERCENT
At home	27%
In pre-school	13%
In primary school	52%
In secondary school	7%
Special needs school	1%
Total	100%

This table represents all the children that were mentioned by their parents. Therefore, of all the children mentioned (408 in total), the majority are in primary school (52%) which coincides with the average age of the children (5.7 years).

Occupation of Parents

It was not expected to come across many who are at or below the poverty income line as all of the parents surveyed are working. However, 20.7% of the sample population earn less than €19,000 per annum, while a large minority (32.8%) earns more than €35,000 per annum. It would be safe to assume from this that the majority of parents are in the lower to middle income bracket.

Table 7: Individual Gross Income Range

GROSS INCOME RANGE	VALID PERCENT (%)	CUMULATIVE PERCENT (%)
Under €9,000	3.7	3.7
€9,000-€11,999	3.2	6.9
€12,000-€15,999	9.2	16.1
€16,000-€18,999	4.6	20.7
€19,000-€22,999	13.4	34.1
€23,000-€26,999	14.3	48.4
€27,000-€30,999	5.5	53.9
€31,000-€34,999	7.8	61.8
€35,000-€39,999	15.2	77.0
€40,000-€44,999	9.7	86.6
€45,000-€49,999	7.8	94.5
€50,000 or more	5.5	100.0
Total	100.0	

It was also important to assess the employment status of these parents' partners or spouses. The parents were asked whether their partner or spouse was in paid employment, the responses of which are outlined in the following table.

Table 8: Employment Status of Partner/Spouse

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF PARTNER	VALID PERCENT (%)
Partner in Paid employment	81.5%
Partner not in paid employment	15.3%
Not-applicable	3.2%
Total	100.0%

It was discovered that gender seemed to be significant in relation to the employment status of partner/spouse. Of all men that responded, 28.6% said that their wives or partners were not in paid employment compared to 12.3% of all women who stated that their partners or husbands were not in paid employment.

The combined gross income of both spouses/partners showed that families were in the middle to upper income range.

Table 9: Combined Gross Income of Parents

COMBINED GROSS INCOME RANGE	VALID PERCENT (%)	CUMULATIVE PERCENT (%)
Under €23,000	4.2%	4.2%
€23,000-€26,999	4.7%	9.0%
€27,000-€30,999	3.3%	12.3%
€31,000-€34,999	3.8%	16.0%
€35,000-€39,999	7.5%	23.6%
€40,000-€44,999	6.6%	30.2%
€45,000-€49,999	8.5%	38.7%
€50,000-€54,999	8.5%	47.2%
€55,000-€59,999	11.3%	58.5%
€60,000 or more	27.4%	85.8%
Not applicable	14.2%	100.0%
Total	100.0%	

The table highlights a sample population that could be deemed to be in the upper-income bracket. This demonstrates the impact of the male wage. As the majority of the sample population is female their income range remains in the lower-middle income bracket. However, when this wage is combined with their partners (the majority of which would be male) then the income of the family is pushed into the higher income bracket, demonstrating the current pay gap between men and women.

Linked to this previous point is the employment status of parents. The majority of parents (66.1%) are in full-time employment while 24% are in part-time permanent work. The remaining parents (8.2%) are part-time temporary or full-time temporary while a very small number (1.8%) are self-employed. Gender and employment status were looked at in order to see if gender had an impact upon the employment status of the parent.

Table 10: Employment Status of parents according to gender

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Gender	
	FEMALE	MALE
Full-time permanent	75.2%	24.8%
Part-time permanent	96.2%	3.8%
Full-time temporary/contract worker	77.8%	22.2%
Part-time temporary/contract worker	100.0%	.0%
Self-employed	50.0%	50.0%

The table highlights a number of issues. Men’s employment status is predominantly full-time work, however this is divided up between permanent and contract work (24.8% and 22.2% consecutively). Women’s employment status, however, is distributed differently. Of the 24% who are in part-time permanent employment almost all (96.2%) are women. This coincides with national trends of women dominating part-time working arrangements (Leonard and Byrne, 1997). Analysis suggests that out of the 19% of fathers who responded to this survey, 16.4% are full-time permanent. On the other hand, of the 81% of mothers who responded 50% are full-time permanent and 23% are part-time permanent.

As referred to in Section II, part-time work cannot be viewed as a long-term solution to equal opportunities in the work place. It does not solve the problem of women trying to achieve formal work that is skilled, valued, and suitably paid.

Most of the parents in this sample have been in their current place of employment for over five years (61%). A large minority (35%) have been in their current place of employment between one to five years while a very small number (3.6%) have been there for under 12 months.

Access to Working Arrangements

Table 11: Access to Working Arrangements

WORKING ARRANGEMENTS	ACCESS TO (%):	NO ACCESS TO (%):
Job/Work Sharing	50.7%	49.3%
Employment or career break	49.8%	50.2%
Part-time Work	43.0%	57.0%
Flexi-time	35.7%	64.3%
Shift Work	18.6%	81.4%
Term-time working	14.5%	85.5%
Annualised Hours	10.9%	89.1%
Tele/home working	2.3%	97.7%

The table above (Table 11) indicates that the most widely available working arrangement is Job/Work sharing. However, the type of working arrangements made available to employees depends on the type of business/work of the firm. For example, it would be impossible for some private businesses to provide access to shift work as they must be open for business at set times. However, it is clear at first glance that the public sector, namely the Western Health Board¹ and the Mayo County Council, had the highest response rate for giving access to the different working arrangements. It should be noted, however, that the public sector accounted for 67% of parents who responded to the survey.

¹ At the time of conducting the research the Health Service Executive-Western Region was known as the Western Health Board. For the purpose of this report the name Western Health Board will be used in this section in order to ensure consistency between quotes from parents and text.

Availing of Working Arrangements

Despite access to working arrangements there were a definitive number of reasons why parents availed or did not avail of these arrangements. A total of 77% of the sample population availed of one or more of the working arrangements listed in the table below (12). The most frequently availed of working arrangements were flexitime (19.5%) and parental leave (19%). Also, a significant number availed of Job-sharing (14.5%) and part-time work (13.1%). It is not surprising that such a large proportion of the sample avail of working arrangements considering that the majority of the sample population is female. As pointed out previously women tend to dominate part-time working arrangements.

Table 12: Percentages of those who availed of working arrangements

WORKING ARRANGEMENTS	PERCENTAGE OF THOSE WHO AVAILED OF:
Flexitime	19.5%
Parental Leave	19.0%
Job/Work Sharing	14.5%
Part-time Work	13.1%
Shift Work	10.4%
Annualised Hours	6.3%
Employment or career break	1.4%
Term-time working	1.4%
Tele/home working	1.4%

The reasons which parents gave for availing of these working arrangements were consistent throughout the sample and ranged from financial reasons to family commitments. These results can be seen as follows:

Table 13: Reasons Why Parents Avail of Working Arrangements

REASONS WHY PARENTS AVAIL:	Gender		VALID PERCENT (%)
	FEMALE	MALE	
Financial reasons	27.6%	5.3%	32.9%
Family Commitments	30.3%	1.3%	31.6%
Childcare arrangements suit work arrangements	18.4%	.0%	18.4%
No other arrangement available	13.2%	2.6%	17.1%
Total	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%

This table also highlights the differences found between men and women. None of the male respondents stated that they try to manage their work arrangements around their childcare needs. Also, a large minority of women (27.6%) stated that financial reasons are the main factor for availing of working arrangements. The parents themselves described these financial reasons in the following terms:

"Can't afford full-time babysitters fees". (Female-Other)

"Work 8am-2pm Monday-Friday. These working arrangements suit because our kids are in school as I am there to collect them when finished. Therefore need childcare only during holidays this saving money" (Female-Retail)

"Yes – only work part-time therefore only need childcare during holidays because we wouldn't be able to afford it all year" (Female-Retail)

"I take 2 parental leave days per week. Financially it would not pay me to work any more or to work any less." (Female-Public Sector)

"Removed children from childcare due to cost and took a career break." (Male-Public Sector)

"Part time work only option available – could not afford childcare if working full time." (Female-Other)

"I take parental leave so therefore only need three days max of child care per week." (Female-Public Sector)

"Couldn't really afford to financially." (Female-Public Sector)

As clear from the above quotes, mothers stated that they availed of working arrangements due to the cost of childcare. A number of parents did, however, offer a combination of factors that influenced their decision to avail of working arrangements:

"To spend more time at home and decrease time and money using childcare facilities". (Female-Public Sector)

"For child rearing I chose to work part time. 1. To be at home as much as possible with my children as my partner is a full time farmer and 2. I cannot afford childminding expenses." (Female-Public Sector)

Another major reason for availing of working arrangements was family commitments, with 32% of parents stating this reason. However, family commitments is a general term and from analysing the qualitative data three main themes emerged:

1. Wanting to spend more time with the family
2. Lack of childcare facilities/lack of available childcare
3. Time negotiation regarding work and childcare

These are now discussed in turn:

Wanting to spend more time with the family

Some parents expressed a desire to spend more time with their family and as a result availed of certain working arrangements.

“job sharing to spend more time with my kids” (Female-Public sector)

“Taking care of my children, especially child with special needs” (Female-Public sector)

“Primarily to avail of more time with my children. Also with my eldest at school, to have time to help her educationally. Personally to improve my quality of life – less stress” (Female –Financial Sector)

“to be home @ 3.00pm for my youngest child”. (Female-Public Sector)

“To be more available at home” (Female-Public Sector)

“Opted to work less hours in the week not particularly because of availability or affordability of childcare but to be more involved with home life”. (Female- Public Sector)

“Primary reason to avail of job sharing was to spend more time with children & to allow children to participate in extra curricular activities ie. sports”. (Female-Financial Sector)

“To have more time at home, to organise household, to have more time with the children, to have a bit of time for myself.” (Female-Public Sector)

“I avail of flexi hours in order to look after my children after school.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Flexibility for raising a family but at a lesser salary than usual.” (Female-Public Sector)

“To avail of parental leave in order to spend more time with children and still hold down full time employment.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Suits my personal life.” (Female-Public Sector)

“I am currently work sharing in order to spend more time with younger children.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Reduced working hours in order to care for children at home, rather than sending them to childcare full time.” (Female-Public Sector)

“To be with my children and to assist child minding.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Currently job sharing and am happy with this situation. Husband and I work part time and look after the children without needing a childminder.” (Female-Public Sector)

As evident from the above comments, certain parents wish to be at home in order to spend more time with their children. This has increased the need for parents to have access to family friendly working arrangements. It should be noted however, that of all the parents who stated the wish to spend more time at home, all were female.

Lack of childcare facilities/lack of available childcare

Parents were asked what their main reasons were for availing of different working arrangements. As the following quotes highlight, parents avail of working arrangements due to childcare difficulties. It is worth noting at this point that it was only women who stated that they avail of working arrangements in order to alleviate childcare difficulties, firmly placing childcare responsibilities in the female realm.

“(i) I finished maternity leave + due to lack of childcare facilities in my work/living area I had to take parental leave for summer months...” (Female-Public Sector)

“Childcare” (Female-Public Sector)

“Childcare” (Female-Public Sector)

“Baby sitter problems.” (Female-Retail Sector)

“Childcare” (Female-Public Sector)

Time negotiation regarding work and childcare

Some parents prove to be innovative in negotiating the time necessary to care for their children. It was discovered that certain parents went to extraordinary lengths to compensate for the cost and/or lack of available childcare services. Such measures included parents working alternative times in order to reduce anytime that would require childcare. However, there is a clear sacrifice on the parents' part, as they try and reconcile their child caring responsibilities and their work life.

“My husband works shifts opposite to myself so childcare is not really an issue.” (Female-Public Sector)

“I have a babysitter plus I work only 3 long days in a week. At weekends my husband takes the baby.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Minding the baby between us.” (Female-Public Sector)

While these arrangements have alleviated the problems of affordability and availability of childcare, they infringe on home relationships, leisure time and quite often, sleep. These non-standard work-times can disrupt family routines and relationships and are associated with marital conflict, stress and reduced parent well-being (Starzdins et al, 2004).

Not availing of Working Arrangements

Parents stated throughout the sample a number of reasons why they did not avail of working arrangements. These can be seen in the following table.

Table 13: Why parents did not avail of working arrangements, according to gender

REASON	Gender		TOTAL (%)
	FEMALE (%)	MALE (%)	
No-one else to do the work/ Work commitments don't allow it	30.6%	16.7%	47.2%
Good family/childcare support	6.9%	5.6%	12.5%
Financial Reasons	34.7%	5.6%	40.3%
Total	72.2%	27.8%	100.0%

Of those parents that commented on why they do not avail of working arrangements, the majority stated that there was no one else to cover their work or that work commitments did not permit (47.2%); or financial commitments were problematic (40.3%). Ironically, financial reasons are stated as a major reason for **not** availing of working arrangements, which is also proffered frequently by parents as a reason **for** availing of working arrangements. In this instance, parents feel that they cannot afford to avail of working arrangements because they could not afford to cover the cost of living, including childcare. Hence, financial reasons are the reasons why parents **do** and **do not** avail of working arrangements. Some quotes on this point include the following:

“Unable to access these arrangement due to the following priorities:

- *Impact on income-main breadwinner*
- *Crèche facilities does not recognise less than fulltime attendance so no benefit in part time or job sharing*
- *Administrative [Company X] post is mon-fri 9-5 so is not flexible” (Female-Public Sector)*

“Feel it would be better to wait until children start school, as when paying for crèche, this doesn't make much difference to the fee.” (Female-Public Sector)

“cannot afford parental leave” (Female-Public Sector)

“ Owing to work responsibilities not a ready option. Also I earn the income for the household and I can't financially afford to reduce hours or take a break.” (Female- Public Sector)

“Cannot afford to drop in salary” (Female-Public Sector)

“Some not available, also financial reasons for not availing of term-time, parental leave.” (Male-Public Sector)

“Need to work full-time for income” (Female-Manufacturing)

With regard to those whose work commitments do not allow parents to avail of any of the working arrangements, the following are just some of the statements made by parents:

“Doesn't suit my job – eg. Parental leave can be availed of but no cover given-therefore I would end up carrying full workload on reduced hours.” (Female-Public Sector)

"Not available, not suitable to work type." (Female-Retail)

"Due to business needs of employer and my role in management team" (Female-Financial Sector)

"Lack of clarity about exactly what is available what is acceptable to management, and what absence will mean to production processes. Also macho work culture doesn't help." (Male-Manufacturing)

"Responsible position in company of less than 15 people so not possible" (Female-Manufacturing)

"My job requires me to travel a lot so it would not be practical to do." (Male-Manufacturing)

Parents also explained that working arrangements were not made available to them so they do not have the option.

"term-time not available in whb at present; home working not available to my grade of staff; cannot afford to take unpaid leave for long periods; parental leave all used up for all children" (Female-Public Sector)

"Employers decision" (Female-Public Sector)

"I have applied for part-time but as of yet I haven't received it. [Company X] have not been very helpful in this matter. I have looked for parttime for the last two years." (Female-Manufacturing)

"My job does not permit shorter hours" (Female-Retail)

"Not available in company." (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

"Not in permanent position" (Female-Public Sector)

"Not available in part to temporary permanent employees." (Female-Public Sector)

"Employer not open to it." (Female-Public Sector)

A small minority (12.5%) stated that they did not need to avail of working arrangements due to adequate childcare and good family support. This highlights the fact that if parents have access to adequate childcare, they are less likely to avail of working arrangements. This point makes access to quality childcare an issue for employers also.

"Have good holidays as a teacher. Have a good childminder for the children" (Female-Public Sector)

"Having good childcare" (Female-Public Sector)

There was a weak relationship found between household income (combined income) and parents' decisions on working arrangements. However, a stronger relationship was found between the individual income of the parent and their availing of a working arrangement. To a lesser extent there was a relationship between how much they earned and not availing of a working arrangement. Despite these relationships, the parent who chose to avail of a working arrangement could fall into one of a number of income brackets.

Those who stated 'financial reasons' as a reason for availing of working arrangements fell into three income bracket ranges: €19,000-€22,999 (16.7%); €31,000-€34,999 (16.7%); €35,000-€39,999 (20.8%).

Those who stated that the working arrangements they availed of suit the type of childcare they use were mostly in the higher income brackets of €31,000-€34,000 (30.8%) and €35,000-€39,000 (23.1%). However, there was a significant minority (15.4%) in the €19,000-€22,999 income range.

Those who stated 'family commitments' as a reason for availing of working arrangements were distributed evenly across the different income brackets (€12,000-€49,999). The majority (20.8%) however fell into the €23,000-€26,000 income bracket.

The parents who stated that there was nothing else available to them were not confined to any income group.

Hence, from these comparisons on income and why parents avail of working arrangements it can be ascertained that issues around childcare transcends all income brackets from the most financially vulnerable to the more well-off.

Employment Patterns of Spouses/Partners

Parents were also asked if their spouse/partner were availing of any working arrangements and 27% of the sample population stated that they did. The breakdown of this is interesting. Of all the female parents that answered, 77% stated that their (male) partner did not avail of working arrangements. When they did avail of a working arrangement, most availed of shift-work (9.5%). On the other side, of all the male parents that responded, 45% of their (female) partners availed of a working arrangement, the majority (12%) availing of part-time work. This again demonstrates how women dominate part-time positions in the work place due to their private commitments (namely child-rearing responsibilities).

Gender also has a direct impact on the paid hours that parents work in a week. This is not surprising considering the gender make-up of working arrangements, where women work fewer hours than men overall.

Childcare responsibilities impact upon the type of working arrangement chosen, especially in the case of women. These findings are supported by research conducted by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (2002).

Impact of the Affordability and/or availability of childcare upon parents' working arrangements.

Parents were asked directly whether or not the availability and/or affordability of childcare had a direct impact upon their working arrangements. As a result, a large majority (64%) stated that childcare did directly impact upon their arrangements. This was an open-ended question so parents were free to answer in any way. The results are as follows:

Table 14: Impact of childcare on working arrangements

IMPACT	VALID PERCENT (%)
No impact	36%
Availed of working arrangements to alleviate childcare issues	36%
Use work holidays to cover childcare	21%
Couples do alternative shifts/hours in order to alleviate childcare issues	5%
Cannot avail of working arrangement due to availability of childcare	2%
Total	100%

On further analysis of the data it was found that within the male sample, 50% of men stated that childcare had no impact upon their working arrangements, compared to 33% of women. The same proportion of men and women (21% in both cases) used work holidays in order to cover childcare. There was, however, a difference between the percentage of men (24%) and women (38%) who stated that they avail of working arrangements in order to alleviate problems experienced with childcare.

This demonstrates that while childcare appears to affect women in more ways compared to men, childcare has a strong impact upon the working life of both men and women.

Impact of childcare opportunities on Parents' Careers

A large minority (43%) stated that childcare has directly affected their career negatively. Out of those who stated childcare has adversely affected their careers, 49% said that they have lost out on promotion and career progression because they are unable to work the hours required by their employers as a result of poor access to quality childcare facilities. The remaining parents stated that taking time off when children were younger (22.5%) or not being able to access further training (12.5%) has hindered their career. The remainder of parents (16%) simply stated that childcare affected their career but did not give a further explanation.

However, it should be noted that only eight men (3.7% of the whole sample) stated that childcare affected their career, highlighting that the above issues are predominantly women's issues. Some comments to illustrate this point are as follows:

"Yes. I have changed jobs to gain a more flexible position with less prospects. I have taken a lower salary to accommodate family. Further education to improve promotion prospects is not an option". (Female-Public Sector)

"Flexibility to do further education & unable to work longer hours if job demanded the same." (Female-Public Sector)

"Difficult to do extra courses. I would have to pay extra for childcare if I wanted to do a course and it would be too expensive". (Female-Public Sector)

"My spouse has left work due to ill health and should have re-trained but due to cost of childcare that was not an option for us." (Female-Public Sector)

In essence, the availability and affordability of childcare limit parents' choices regarding employment. It has resulted in parents being forced into a number of situations.

- Parents are forced to adapt to their working life. This results in parents giving up full-time positions; avoiding promotion and over-time opportunities in an attempt to limit childcare costs. Parents also choose to work over-time or anti-social hours in order to cover or alleviate the cost of childcare. Parents are perhaps forced into leaving the labour market altogether.
- Parents become dependent on informal childcare arrangements.
- Parents pass-up on their preferred childcare.

The Employer's Contribution to Childcare

It was not surprising to find that not one parent surveyed has access to work-based childcare facilities. In addition to this no parent surveyed has access to subsidised childcare or receives any contribution towards their childcare costs.

It has been well documented that the childcare crisis in Ireland has gone so far that it has caused parents to give up work altogether in order to meet the childcare needs of their family. Nearly a fifth of all the women surveyed stated that their partner/spouse gave up work to take care of childcare needs, while the vast majority of women (75.4%) stated that their partner/spouse has not left work. On the other hand, of all the men surveyed, 38% stated that their partner/spouse has left work while 52.4% stated that their spouse/partner has not. As is evident here there is again a strong relationship between gender and those that actually carry the responsibility of childcare.

In the following section, issues specific to the childcare situation in Co. Mayo are presented. These issues centre on cost, availability, access, choice and quality.

6.2 The Present Childcare Situation in Co. Mayo

Cost of Childcare

The average cost of childcare for parents in Co. Mayo during the school year is between €71-€80 per week. The average cost during the school holidays is between €81-€90 per week. It should be noted that price varies for parents in accordance to the number of children they have in childcare facilities; the type of service they avail of; and the frequency of use of the facility.

Firstly, there appears to be a minor difference between the cost of childcare during the Summer Holidays and during the school year. This phenomenon holds true for 72% of the sample population. A marked difference is that 27.4% stated that their childcare costs them nothing during the school year while 29.4% stated that childcare costs nothing during the school holidays. This difference can be accounted for respondents' partners² being in certain professions (e.g. teaching); therefore the partner/spouse can care for the children during the summer months.

² The reason why it is the partners of respondents and not the respondents themselves is because professions such as teaching were not surveyed. Also, a number of respondents made reference to the fact that their partner/spouses were free in the summer months to care for children, as they were teachers.

In terms of the amount of childcare hours that parents avail of in a week (for all of their children), the average that parents utilise is between 21-30 hours. However, the largest minority of parents (21%) use childcare for between 31-40 hours.

Type of Childcare Arrangements used by Parents

Parents were given a list of all possible childcare arrangements available to them (see table below) and were asked to indicate all the facilities they used.

Table 15: Type of childcare arrangements used by working parents

TYPE OF CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENT	VALID PERCENT (%)
Unpaid family member–partner	26%
Unpaid family member–older child	7%
Unpaid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in your home	7%
Unpaid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in their home	9.5%
Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in your home	7%
Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in their home	19%
Formally paid childminder in your own home	4%
Informally paid childminder in your own home	4.5%
Formally paid childminder in their home	27.5%
Informally paid childminder in their home	9%
Au Pair	1%
Private crèche/nursery	10%
Workplace crèche	0%
Community based crèche/nursery	.5%
Kindergarten/Montessori	1%
Playgroup	7%
School based after school care	1%
Afterschool private childcare facility	3%
Special needs childminder in your home	0%
Special needs childminder in their home	0%
Special needs service	1%
Other	1%

It is worth noting that childminding in this case has been divided into a number of specific types based on who is providing the service and the location of that service. As evident from the table, of all the childminding alternatives, 27.5% of parents choose a formally paid childminder located in the minder's home. This type of facility is also the most popular of all the types of childcare arrangements. However, childminding comes in different forms, hence 71% of this sample avail of a fee-paying childminding service. Another significant percentage is the number of parents (23.5%) who

avail of childminding services that do not cost the parents any money (this figure includes an older child or an unpaid relative, neighbour or friend in either their home or the parents' home). The ethical implications of this type of childcare will not be discussed in this report. However, it is important to note that not only are the non-fee charging childminders disappearing but so too are the fee-charging childminders (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999). As more and more women enter the formal labour market (as promoted by the government) and with the increased mobility of families, parents do not have access to the same kind of childcare support that existed in the past.

Average costs of the specific types of childcare

Parents were given a list of childcare arrangements and asked to insert the weekly cost of all their childcare arrangements (for each individual child), the results of which can be seen in table 16. The most expensive of all childcare arrangements is the special needs service, costing €250 per week. This, compared to all the other services, demonstrates the huge inequalities that exist between those with special needs and those without. Also evident from the table is the increase in cost that parents must pay during the school holidays.

It was not surprising to find that the cheapest form of childcare arrangement is an informally paid relative, friend or neighbour, caring for the child in the parent's home.

Table 16: The average cost per child per week according to the type of childcare used

TYPE OF CHILDCARE	COST-DURING SCHOOL	
	YEAR	HOLIDAYS
Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in your home	€50.00	€59.60
Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in their home	€55.10	€65.90
Formally paid childminder in your home	€80.10	€75.80
Informally paid childminder in your home	€80.10	€89.10
Formally paid childminder in their home	€70.85	€78.10
Informally paid childminder in their home	€68.50	€74.00
Au Pair	€90.00	€90.00
Private Crèche/Nursery	€86.90	€90.00
Workplace Crèche	N/A	N/A
Community based crèche/nursery (Sessional only)	€30	€30
Kindergarten/Montessori	€49.50	€87.50
Playgroup	€32.10	€33.20
School Based after school care	N/A	N/A
Afterschool private Childcare facility	€47.50	€50.00
Summer Camps (price according to course)	N/A	€74.30
Special Needs childminder in your home	N/A	N/A
Special Needs childminder in their home	N/A	N/A
Special Needs service	N/A	€250

With the exception of the special needs service, the next most expensive childcare arrangements are 'au pairs' and 'private nurseries' or 'crèches'. This results in cost influencing the type of childcare a parent uses.

Location of Childcare Arrangements

Parents tended to locate their childcare arrangements in rural areas (47.3%) rather than urban areas (33.6%). There were also a small number of parents who availed of more than one service, locating their childcare arrangements in both rural and urban areas (6%). These findings are significant, as the provision of childcare in both urban and rural areas are weak. However, rural areas in Co. Mayo are more disadvantaged due to the level of choice, access and availability.

Impact of availability of childcare on type of childcare used

When parents were asked whether the availability of childcare impacted on their choice of childcare, 49% of parents confirmed that the availability of childcare does have an impact. Parents were asked to elaborate and the following are some of their statements:

"would prefer crèche/reg. childcare – unable to find one to take children on part-time 'irreg' hours" (Female-Public Sector)

"I would prefer to use a registered Childminder/Nursery/Crèche but the lack of facilities of where I live, I have to use informally paid childminder system." (Female-Public Sector)

"Not much choice in a rural area. Accessibility to play areas limited. Can't do much about it if you're not happy with a number of things." (Female-Public Sector)

"Not enough after school childcare facilities, mostly younger children catered for". (Male-Manufacturing. Children aged 12 & 7)

"My childminder cannot take baby anymore so I have to find another place. Not enough crèches available under W.H.B. approval." (Female-Public Sector)

"Availability of professionally trained child carers is limited and those available are too expensive". (Female-Manufacturing)

"Husband had to give up work". (Female-Public Sector)

"Had no choice but to get informal childminder due to no crèche facilities near by. This person received cash, has no education in childcare." (Female-Public Sector)

"I would like to be able to avail of a childminder but there's none about. I have to use my current crèche as there doesn't seem to be any vacancy in any other – therefore I'm paying a higher price. I would like to be able to call to my current crèche but I'm not allowed therefore I will try to move her somewhere else". (Female-Public Sector)

"Private crèche are too expensive. Have to use unregistered due to prices" (Female-Other)

"Extremely hard to find reliable childcare. My oldest child who will be 8 in August - has had eight different childminders since she was born. There is only one crèche facility in my locality and their rates are not affordable to me." (Female-Manufacturing)

"I would rather an afterschool facility in winter but I cannot lose the fulltime summer care provided by the childminder. If I don't use her in winter-I lose the places" (Female-Public Sector)

In conjunction with this, of the 49% that stated availability had an impact, 55.2% of those located their childcare in a rural location, while 34% were based in an urban location. This demonstrates that both urban and rural locations are affected by the availability of childcare, with parents in rural areas being somewhat more vulnerable. Some quotes to highlight this point are as follows:

"No childcare facilities available except family members where we live in rural area" (Female-Public Sector)

"Crèches etc all located in towns-children attending local rural schools..." (Female-Public Sector)

"Living in rural area. Very difficult to get suitable childcare. Currently sharing childcare responsibility". (Male-Manufacturing)

"I couldn't find anyone locally to mind my baby, so I have to drive 12 miles to nearest town". (Female-Public Sector)

"I live in a rural area there is no facility nearby." (Female-Public Sector)

"Rural areas desperately need childcare facilities suitable to life and work in rural area. Any development no matter how small is an improvement on what is available at present." (Female-Unknown)

"Childcare has been a nightmare. Living in rural area trying to keep children in school and local Pre School. I have only survived because of flexible working arrangements." (Female-Unknown)

To conclude, 61% of parents stated that their ideal childcare was not available to them; 28% of parents stated that there was not any suitable childcare available in their location while the remainder of parents had access to family support so availability was not an issue for them (11%). The women that are satisfied with their childcare service did not opt for any working arrangements, which have direct consequences for their careers and financial prospects. The findings suggest that access to adequate childcare, which parents (and more specifically mothers) have confidence in, would contribute greatly to gender parity in the workplace.

Impact of childcare costs on type of childcare used

Parents were asked if cost impacted upon their choice of childcare and 37% of the sample stated that to be the case. This highlights the fact that while the cost of childcare is a major factor for a large minority of parents, availability of childcare appears to affect more parents (37% compared to 49%). When parents were asked to comment on the impact of cost, they said the following:

"Some crèches want 150 a week and more. It's not worth me going to work". (Female-Public Sector)

"Too expensive for 3 children". (Male-Public Sector)

"Crèche too expensive". (Female Public Sector)

"We have moved our kids from place to place because the cost is increasing all the time". (Male-Public Sector)

"We preferred the crèche but the cost was too much for us". (Male-Public Sector)

"Private childminders are too expensive & we have no relatives in this area so we ration childcare". (Male-Unknown)

"Financial considerations (low income when first availing of childcare). Also lack of formal after school service has meant that extended family member now provides this service but she is not always available so this means taking time off work." (Female-Public Sector)

"did have our children in full time crèche but costs increased so much I cut back my working hours and took care of childcare myself. Work night shift to do this." (Female Public Sector)

"Removed children from childcare due to cost and took a career break." (Male Public Sector)

In relation to additional costs, 21% of the sample stated that their childcare provider lowers their rates for subsequent children, while 27% stated the opposite. Also, 11% of parents mentioned that their childcare provider charges extra when parents are late and this was usually by the hour.

6.3 Childcare Preferences

With the exception of cost and availability, parents were asked about the factors that influenced their choice of childcare. From the pilot study, six options were generated and in the larger survey the parents were asked to choose the ones that they felt influenced their choice.

Table 17: Factors Influencing Choice of Childcare

FACTORS	VALID PERCENT
Work and home location/location of childcare facility	59.5%
Reputation of Provider	56%
Type of Childcare Preferred	47%
Facilities offered by Provider	44%
Notified Service (to the Western Health Board	20.5%
Other	15.5%

It is not surprising that there was a relatively small amount of parents who regarded notification to the Western Health Board as influencing their decision, considering that the majority of parents (71%) use some form of childminding, which tends to be non-regulated and an informal arrangement. Therefore, the majority of who use formal childcare arrangements, such as a crèche or playschool, stated that notification to the Western Health Board was an influencing factor.

Parents were asked to comment on their reasons for choosing their childcare service, which can be seen below:

Facilities offered by the childcare provider

"Other children for comfort + stimulation" (Female Public Sector)

"...house with yard and plenty of toys" (Female Public Sector)

"Car-collecting from school". (Female Public Sector)

"newly developed crèche. Modern, wide variety of hourly patterns available. Different rooms for different ages." (Female-Manufacturing)

"Good range of services from pre-school to after-school" (Male-Public Sector)

"Crèche offers flexibility to provide 2 mornings per week rather than full-time place." (Female Public Sector)

"willing to mind baby up to 8.30pm." (Female-Public Sector)

"Homely set up and atmosphere – often children of same age – flexibility of childminder eg. Can collect child from playschool" (Male-Public Sector)

"I wanted proper designated area i.e. play & hygienic cheerful area". (Female-Public Sector)

"Hygiene and educational through fun learning practices." (Female Public Sector)

When all statements were analysed it was possible to formulate a list of the facilities parents look for when choosing their childcare facility. These are as follows:

1. Socialising opportunities (with other children)
2. Adequate play space including outside area
3. Transportation of child (from school etc) and the provision of meals
4. Modern facilities (including security, hygiene standards etc)
5. Catering to all ages (childcare facility can cater to babies up to after-school care)
6. Flexibility of placement (parent has the option to place the child part-time, fulltime etc.)
7. Homely Environment (applies to childminders as they can replicate a home environment)

8. Guaranteed Service (applies to childcare facilities such as playschool and crèches as they have the capacity to open when a provider is ill for example)
9. Learning of life skills and access to play (a formal service where children are taught life skills through play)
10. Personality and attitude of the provider

In relation to the last point, parents took this opportunity to state that the provider must have certain personal attributes in order to provide an adequate service. The parents describe these attributes in the following terms:

“Being raised as a member of the family by my childminder – not just a pay cheque at the end of the week!” (Female–Financial Sector)

“My mother will take the best care of my son I will know he will be safe fed and cared for so well” (Female-Manufacturing)

“Honest reliable trustworthy” (Female-Public Sector)

“Personality and experience of childcare provider plus home safety environment and space and stimulation” (Female-Public Sector)

“She gives my child total care”. (Female-Financial Sector)

“Very important that my children are in a caring and loving environment”. (Female-Manufacturing)

“Reliable lady, looking after children for years in her own home.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Reliable. Attentive to needs of child, experienced mother.” (Female Public Sector)

“Companionship, discipline, fairness, patience, knew childminder.” (Female Public Sector)

“Personality of childcarer and knowledge and experience with her own children.” (Female-Manufacturing Sector)
“Caring, understanding, good with children.” (Female Public Sector)

The findings echo those of Duignan and Walsh (2004) who found in their study that the characteristics of staff who care for children are of great importance (see page 19).

Reputation of Provider

As mentioned, 56% of the entire sample stated that the reputation of the childcare provider influenced their choice of childcare. The parents made it clear that it was vitally important to them that they can trust the people caring for their children.

“Most important [reputation of provider], person known to the family and is good at the job.” (Female-Public Sector)

“recommended to me by several friends” (Female – Financial Sector)

“Well established in area”. (Female-Manufacturing)

“Checked with other users of service” (Male-Public Sector)

[Reputation of provider] *“very important and influential”. (Male-Public Sector)*

“To know other parents who had children in there were happy - good reports”. (Female-Financial Sector)

[Reputation of Provider] *This was a major influencing factor in my choice – and helped with the decision of employing my childminder.” (Female-Public Sector)*

“Would not let children out to anyone without checking references first.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Childminder has a reputation for looking after children well with not too many.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Family member – element of trust very important.” (Female-Public Sector)

Type of Childcare Preferred

Parents mentioned three different types of childcare that they preferred. These were: family member; formal childcare facility such as a crèche; and childminder. These are discussed now in turn.

Family Member Preferred

Despite a family member being the preferred type of childcare by some parents, this type of support is contracting, emphasising the need for the expansion of alternative services.

“One parent at home full-time regarded by us as the best form of childcare, regardless of cost.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Family member offered to do childcare and this was preferred rather than placing child in crèche/professional childminding services” (Female-Financial Sector)

Formal Childcare Facility Preferred

It is important to note that while some parents may prefer a formal childcare facility such as a crèche, they were unable to access this type of childcare due to affordability and availability of the service. This helps to account, in part, for the overwhelming majority of parents that use informal childminding as an option.

“Crèche too expensive” (Female-Public Sector)

“After-school club [preferred]”. (Female-Public Sector)

"Prefer crèche for socialising with other children. We are using it mainly for this reason as spouse is at home full-time". (Female-Public Sector)

"We preferred the crèche but the cost was too much for us". (Male-Public Sector)

"Felt that a childminder may just put my child in front of a television rather than interact with it." (Female-Public Sector)

"I like to combine childminder and crèche to give range of experience". (Female-Public Sector)

"I choose crèche because I was not sufficiently satisfied that a childminder in her home would be safe enough for a child. I concluded that the female childminder herself may be very moral but how could I vet her husband, persons, her extended family, neighbours that may call to childminder's home and have informal access to the baby?" (Female-Public Sector)

"1. security – physically + medically private crèche the workers are all watching the practices of each other so increase accountability increase safety for individual child. 2. Guaranteed crèche will open so if minder is sick I can still go to work." (Female-Public Sector)

"Made decision to go with private crèche for reliability of service and quality of care." (Female-Manufacturing)

"No availability of crèches." (Female-Public Sector)

"Would prefer a proper childcare facility". (Female-Unknown)

"Cost of crèche and after school service was prohibitive. Childminder in our home would have been a good option but were afraid of consequences of getting the wrong person inappropriate person." (Male-Public Sector)

"Crèches have strict guidelines e.g. 3 babies to one adult. Childminders seem to have numerous children with just one carer." (Female-Public Sector)

"No crèche available that I could afford." (Female-Retail Sector)

Childminding Preferred

Parents often chose childminding because of its informal nature and they felt that the child receives more one-to-one attention, where the home environment can be reproduced.

"Wouldn't have been happy with a crèche – too impersonal". (Female – Financial Sector)

"I would prefer a childminder as I feel they get more attention" (Female-Public Sector)

"Prefer the home like situation" (Female-Public Sector)

"Would not like a crèche for under 3 yrs." (Female-Public Sector)

"Childminder is my preference because its not as institutionalised as a crèche. However, crèches offer a more consistent service, but tend to be very expensive and unaffordable." (Female-Manufacturing)

"I prefer my children to go to a smaller group rather than to a large crèche". (Female-Public Sector)

"Smaller numbers with a childminder". (Female-Retail)

"Preferred personal touch of childminder as opposed to crèche. Childminder more flexible in relation to working hours/overtime". (Female-Financial Sector)

According to Canning (1998), having good childcare and being happy with it is essential to the transition back to work. It is also important for the productivity of the parent in the work place (Bright Horizon, 2003). The type of childcare a parent prefers is both a practical and emotional decision. As no one arrangement is better than another, it is vital the parent feels confident in their choices.

Location of Facility

Almost 60% of parents mentioned location as an influencing factor in choosing their childcare arrangements. Some comments include:

"Near to school and home". (Female Public Sector)

"had to use because close to work and oldest child's school" (Female – Financial Sector)

"I travel 30 miles to work. Children are cared for close to home". (Female Public Sector)

"In town where we work – near, handy for collection in evenings –or if there were any problems". (Female-Financial Sector)

"This is big priority when choosing childcare. Often parents have no choice in this matter – they have to take what they get." (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

Notification of Service to the Western Health Board

The reason why parents view notification as an influencing factor is because it gives them confidence in the service they have chosen. This is evident in the following comments:

"Would be extremely important for safety and health reasons". (Female-Public Sector)

"You know these are checked regularly" (Female-Financial Sector)

"Gives reassurance" (Female-Public Sector)

"Yes, fact that crèche is regulated, inspected + system is transparent was very important". (Female-Public Sector)

"Helped me with my decision as someone else is also regulating the facility." (Female-Public Sector)

The quality indicators laid out by Woodhead (1996) can be used to categorise these influencing factors:

- Input Indicators: facilities available to children, location of childcare arrangement
- Process Indicators: type of childcare, characteristics of childcare provider
- Output Indicators: parents contentment with the childcare service, development of the child

6.4 Positive and Negative Aspects of Childcare Arrangements

Parents were asked to list both the positive and the negative aspects of the type of childcare arrangement they were using at the time of the research. Tables 18 and 19 outline these aspects.

Table 18: Positive Aspects of Childcare Arrangements

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENT	VALID PERCENT
Reliable/trustworthy provider	23.6%
Close to home/work/school	21.4%
Flexibility and Availability	19.5%
Home Environment	17.3%
Opportunities for child to socialise	16.4%
Cost	13.3%
Children like the facility	12.7%
Activities and learning facilities	12.3%
Parent approves of the overall environment	11.4%
Qualified Staff/Highly trained staff	9.5%
Informal/one-one setting	8.6%
Health Board Inspected	2.3%

It should be noted that these points are not necessarily what parents look for in a childcare arrangement but it is what they like about their current arrangement.

Trust and reliability has proven to be one of the major traits that parents like about their childcare provider.

"know child is well cared for". (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

"we know the baby will be well cared for and safe". (Female-Financial Sector)

"Evidence of professional standards not just aspirations; transparent system to encourage trust; security of building + reg. staff; guaranteed crèche will open if staff sick" (Female-Public Sector)

Location was again seen as an important aspect of the childcare arrangement with 21.4% of parents mentioning this as a positive aspect of their childcare arrangement.

"Near to work + home". (Female-Public Sector)

"Near the primary school" (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

"Proximity to home/work" (Male-Public Sector)

Flexibility and availability are also very important to parents. This refers to being flexible around times and lateness etc. and having to cancel all childcare services when the provider is sick or has an appointment.

"Very flexible with hours." (Female-Public Sector)

"available from 8am in morning" (Female-Manufacturing)

"...can take child if unwell or at short notice, if running late not a problem." (Female-Public Sector)

"Always open". (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

Negative Aspects of Childcare Arrangements

Parents were also asked to list negative aspects of their childcare arrangement, and as result, a list of nine points was generated.

Table 19: Negative aspects of childcare arrangements

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENT	VALID PERCENT
High Cost	11.4%
Not flexible/reliable enough	8.2%
Not enough learning/stimulation	3.6%
No socialising with other children	3.6%
Location does not suit	3.2%
Lack of training of Provider	2.7%
Poor adult child ratios	2.7%
Informal/unprofessional	2.3%
High turn over of staff	1.8%

In relation to the negative aspects of the parents' childcare arrangements, there tended to be considerable diversity, thereby making a lot of statements statistically irrelevant. It is evident though that cost plays a significant role for the largest minority of parents (11.4%), reaffirming that the cost of childcare appears to affect a lot of parents. Also, 'not being flexible and reliable' was a significant negative aspect for a number of parents (8.2%).

As discussed in Section II, it is important to define quality according to the views of the key stakeholders. In this case, the positive and negative aspects of the parents' childcare arrangements (in conjunction with the factors that influenced parents' choice of childcare) could be used as quality indicators by the relevant parties (for example, the providers themselves, Western Health Board, parents etc.).

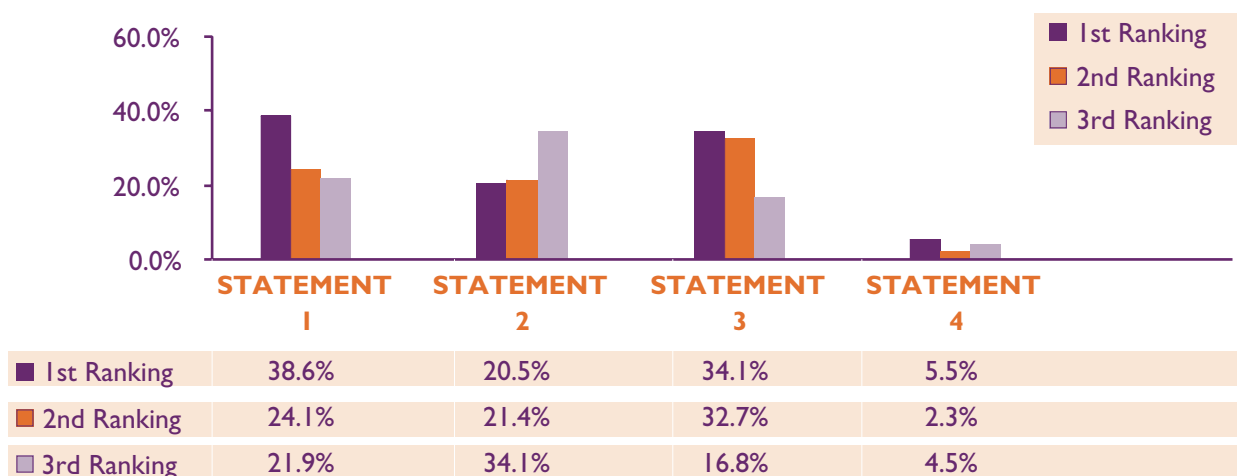
In the next section, findings are reported on a number of points relating to employers and the Government. Parents were consulted on the level of responsibility employees and the Government should take regarding the childcare situation. This resulted in parents calling for family friendly working arrangements being made available to all and for the government to reduce the cost of childcare and improve the availability of services.

6.5 What employers should prioritise according to working parents

Parents were given four statements and were asked to rank them in order of importance, '1' being the most important and '4' the least important. The four statements were as follows:

1. Increase the level of family friendly practices available to employees
2. Provide childcare facilities in the workplace
3. Subsidise the cost of employee's childcare
4. Other, please describe

What employers should prioritise



Hence, as evident from the chart the majority of parents ranked 'increase the level of family friendly practices available to employees' as the most important priority of employers. Subsidising the cost of employees' childcare was deemed to be the second most important statement that employers should prioritise. Those parents that elaborated on the fourth statement ('Other') tended to re-emphasise the previous statements (namely family friendly practices) as highlighted in the following quotations:

"Introduce Home Working as much as possible where most work involves telephone + email." (Female-Public Sector)

"Company should be made to give family friendly/jobsharing equally and fairly to all employees, not just when it suits them to do so." (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

"Provide practices that allow parents time with their children in the first five years i.e. sick leave if child is sick." (Female-Public Sector)

"If company could have list of carers for children and subsidise same." (Male-Manufacturing Sector)

"All flexible working hours to fit in with school hours and holidays" (Female-Public Sector)

"More leave for parents with young children (under 14) as the current parental leave is not sufficient" (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

"Culture change is required. Policy documents cross my desk often but the company culture means they only get taken out under threat of court or union action. Childcare policies would be paper policies only." (Female-Financial Sector)

"To make parental leave more accessible, i.e. to avail of it in small amounts e.g. 2 hours a day for school collection etc." (Female-Public Sector)

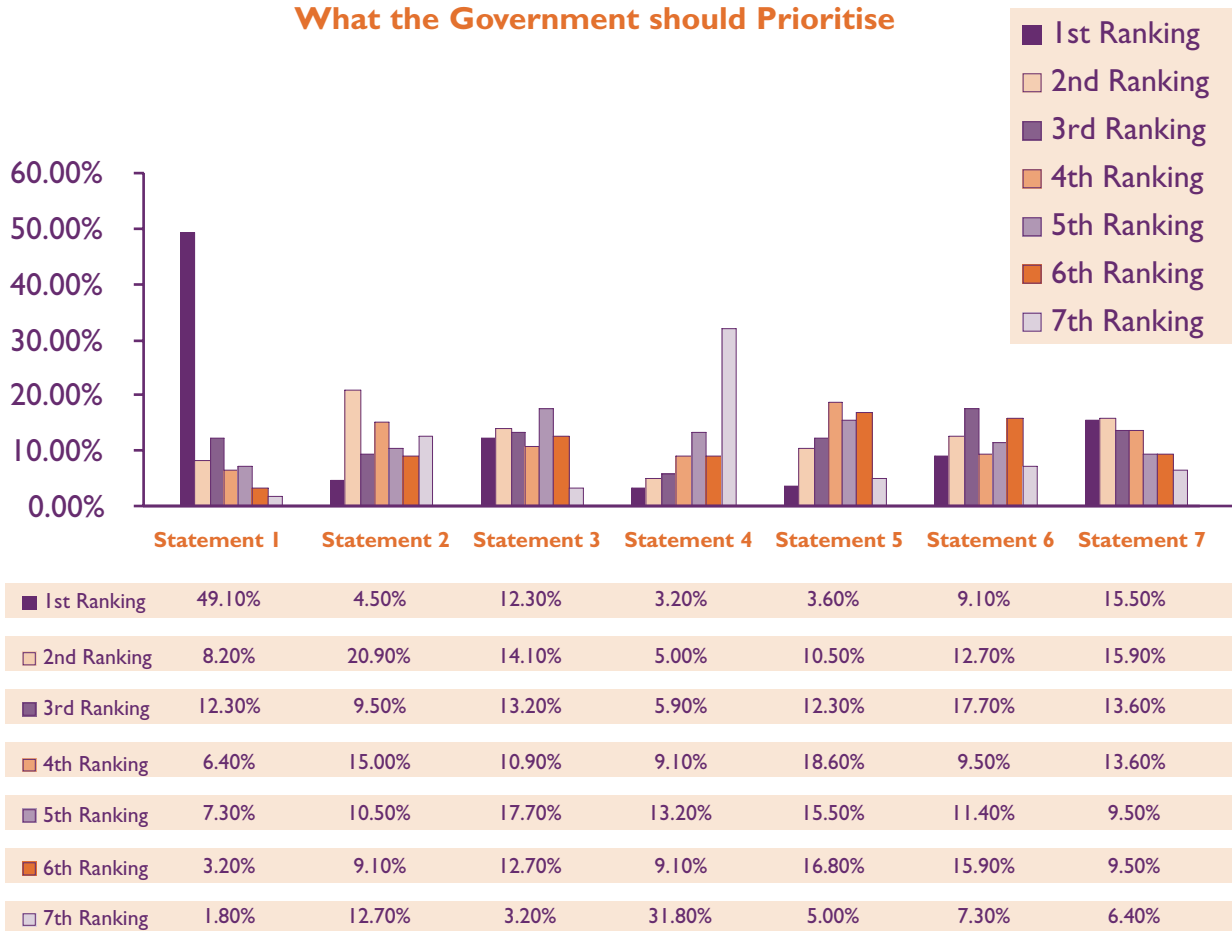
6.6 What the Government should prioritise according to parents

In this instance parents were given eight statements and were again asked to rank them in order of importance, one being the most important and eight being the least important. The statements given were as follows:

1. Provide tax relief on employees' childcare expenditure
2. Provide tax relief on employers' expenditure on childcare
3. Provide greater support for constructing/developing company crèches
4. Provide an expert advice service
5. Provide staffing grants for all company crèches
6. Provide greater support for private childcare services
7. Provide greater support for community childcare services
8. Other

The results are as follows:

What the Government should Prioritise



The chart highlights the fact that parents regard tax relief on childcare expenditure as a priority for the government. A large minority of parents (40.5%) also saw intervention in the provision of childcare facilities (community, private and company childcare facilities) as responsibilities of the government. Parents ranked these in according to their needs, so it is evident from this that parents want greater intervention from the government as the statements that involve less government intervention such as an expert advice service (3.2%) were given lesser importance.

Those parents that elaborated on the eighth statement ('Other') again tended to re-emphasise the previous statements, namely:

Support for community/private childcare facilities

"I feel a community childcare service would be ideal as they can continue to go there when they reach school age." (Female-Public Sector)

"In general provide more funding to all childcare including sessional services." (Female-Public Sector)

"with some regulation of crèche[s] to ensure cost doesn't go up when tax relief is introduced. As crèches will just increase the fee in response [to an increase in] demand." (Female-Public Sector)

"French system: Childcare is provided in schools after school hours e.g. from approx. 3pm – 6pm i.e. saves an awful lot of dropping off/picking up in the situation where both parents work." (Male-Public Sector)

“Community childcare is better because it’s not tied to your job, what if your job involves travel? Or your boss uses crèche facilities as an extra lever.” (Male-Unknown)

Tax relief/financial aid towards the cost of childcare

“Child benefit should increase by 50% per week”. (Female–Manufacturing)

“Tax relief scheme to be introduced” (Female-Public Sector)

“There should be more tax reliefs, for e.g. we are expecting a second child in August the childcare cost would be €200 per week therefore financially it would not be worth it for my wife to work”. (Male-Financial Sector)

Legislate for employers to implement more family friendly policies

“Legislate to make the working environment more family driven with flexible working hours/parental-leave opportunities/company crèches the norm rather than the exception” (Female-Other)

“Provide legislation so that work practices are family friendly. If it is optional employers won’t do it.” (Female-Public Sector)

There was also a call for greater support for those parents that wish to stay in the home to care for their children themselves:

Support for ‘stay at home parents’

“Government should be more helpful to parents in raising their children...Government should also look into ways of keeping parents at home, maybe provide some kind of payment scheme for parents to leave work and stay in the home.” (Female-Manufacturing)

“provide recognition (wage?) for parents who choose to remain at home to care for children” (Male-Public Sector)

“Remove tax individualisation penalty.” (Male-Public Sector)

“Encourage a parent to stay at home by removing penalty on single income families.” (Male-Manufacturing Sector)

“Would like to see parenting to be seen as a job in itself. If a parent was paid to stay home if they wanted to and raise their own children it would be great.” (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

“Provide tax relief for parents who stay at home in order to look after their children themselves, who choose to not work in order to look after their children.” (Female-Public Sector)

6.7 Suggestions for Developments

Parents were asked if they had any suggestions for developments in their own childcare service. They instead took this opportunity to make suggestions for childcare in general rather than specific to their own service. Their remarks took nine general themes and often re-confirmed suggestions that were made in previous sections. Their remarks can be seen as follows:

Additional funding for childcare

Parents highlighted the need for additional funding to be allocated to childcare provision and services. Some of the parents' suggestions are as follows:

"More funding for childcare". (Male-Public Sector)

"More community based crèches would be very welcome. A good example of affordable care would be Mayo Abbey Crèche." (Female-Public Sector)

"Encourage more people to become childminders in their own homes with grants and tax relief this will encourage more professional experienced people to work". (Female-Manufacturing)

"Govt subsidy; to be registered with Western Health Board". (Male- Public Sector)

"Childminder is offering a service government should subsidise childminder as payment is small" (Female-Financial Sector)

"Community group organised of childcare providers from their own homes. With support for each other and the parents of the children in their care." (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

"As it is a private business one cannot influence change on an individual basis. The government could link possible tax relief, grants to conditions to provide more choice." (Female-Public Sector)

"State-funded community based childcare arrangements are the best way to go. Pay through tax + PRSI system. Know the carers, and other kids in crèche. Proper regulation." (Male-Unknown)

"Tax incentives, government development of places in community crèches and supervision." (Female-Public Sector)

"Grants, supports for after school service providers. State run after school services." (Female-Public Sector)

Work-based childcare facilities

Some parents also articulated the need for work-based childcare facilities to be made available by their employers. However, it should be noted that these parents were mostly based in larger places of employment such as the statutory bodies.

“some crèches/facilities in work”. (Female-Public Sector)

“All large employers should have childcare facilities”. (Male-Public Sector)

“More crèches needed at work areas. With tax relief for employees”. (Female-Public Sector)

“I would like to see facilities at work.” (Female-Unknown)

“I would like to see a childcare facility where I work.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Employ childcare workers so I can always be near my child if needed. There would then be a lot less sick leave and other leaves”. (Female-Public Sector)

After-school Services

Those parents with children in school identified a major lack of after-school childcare facilities across County Mayo. This is evident in the following remarks made by a number of parents.

“services when child gets older 10+. Need for additional facilities/activities” (Male-Public Sector)

“after and before school service in bigger schools” (Female-Other)

“After school kids segregated from babies”. (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

“I would like to have more choice in after school childcare services.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Grants, supports for after school service providers. State run after school services.” (Female-Public Sector)

“would like to see an after school service developed. Currently relying on my mother to collect 2 school going children from school and mind them until I get home from work. Would prefer not to have to ask relatives.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Not enough after school childcare facilities, mostly younger children catered for”. (Male-Manufacturing Sector)

“French system: Childcare is provided in schools after school hours e.g. from approx. 3pm – 6pm i.e. saves an awful lot of dropping off/picking up in the situation where both parents work.” (Male-Public Sector)

“There are no after school clubs. My wife has to stop work when the school bells goes.” (Male-Unknown)

Less Cost/Tax Relief

The issue of cost and the suggestion of tax relief for childcare expenditure was articulated throughout the study by the parents. This is seen as a major priority for parents.

"Make childcare costs a tax deductible expense". (Male-self-employed)

"This should not be placed fully on the shoulders of employers. Tax relief or other government aids need to be more available". (Female-Selc Ireland)

"Keep updating legislation and tax reform – stop penalising working mothers". (Female-Public Sector)

"More crèches needed at work areas. With tax relief for employees". (Female-Public Sector)

"If the government provide tax relief – all would have to register" (Female-Other)

"Tax relief would be good" (Female-Manufacturing)

"Tax relief on childminder fees" (Female-Public Sector)

"State-funded community based childcare arrangements are the best way to go. Pay through tax + PRSI system. Know the carers, and other kids in crèche. Proper regulation." (Male-Unknown)

"I think its time the government started giving tax credits for childcare like the UK does. If I was there I would get £150 per week towards childcare for two kids." (Female-Public Sector)

"Tax incentive, cost etc. is dictating when I plan next child because of cost." (Female-Public Sector)

"Tax relief on earnings to help towards the high cost of childcare." (Female-Public Sector)

Family Friendly Work Policies

The issue of family friendly working environments was earmarked by parents as a measure employers can take to help alleviate the burden of childcare.

"More part-time and flexible hrs needed." (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

"Cannot avail of tax breaks for the service, working parents need more time off, have to use my own annual holidays to cover for babysitter/minder." (Female-Manufacturing Sector)

"Maternity leave at 18 weeks is too short particularly if you are breastfeeding. Health board recommend to feed your baby for up to a year or as long as possible. Forced to give up because of work and distance to travel." (Female-Public Sector)

"Breastfeeding facilities or additional maternity leave (after all you are investing in your child's health by breastfeeding)." (Female-Public Sector)

Access to Information

A small number of parents noted that access to a formal list of childcare services would be of great benefit, especially for those parents that do not originate from the locality. Parents would also be assured that the services on the list are notified to the Western Health Board guaranteeing a level of quality.

“More registering of childminders. More available information on childminding.” (Female-Public Sector)

“when looking for childcare it would be great to be able to ring + look for a list of available registered/notified minders.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Should childcare be vetted e.g. Garda clearance. A list of registered childcare providers crèches should be more available e.g. noticeboards, libraries etc.” (Female-Public Sector)

“Healthier menu offered – more vegetables. More information available to parents about quality of food offered e.g. chicken nuggets what’s in them, what type etc.” (Female-Public Sector)

Formalise/Professionalise Sector

Formalising the childcare sector again reassures parents that there is a minimum level of quality through minimum training requirements and inspections carried out by the Western Health Board.

“Too many children in one household could lead to accidents” (Female – Financial Sector)

“...Also ability for private childminders to register legally” (Female-Public Sector)

“Training course on first aid, discipline, child development”. (Female-Public Sector)

“More structured time with children e.g. games, songs, music etc.” (Female-Public Sector)

“More trained personnel, better paid personnel.” (Female-Public Sector)

In essence, one parent summed up the childcare needs of working parents in Co. Mayo:

“Bigger, better, brighter, cheaper, later, more”.

Section VII:

Recommendations and Conclusions

In this section of the report, it is intended to formulate a number of practical recommendations based on the findings of the research. These recommendations are limited within the context of the childcare needs of working parents. Hence, they are not all encompassing of the whole issue of childcare in Ireland but rather relate specifically to the needs of working parents.

It is therefore recommended that other groups with specific needs, such as the unemployed, those with disabilities, parents in education, lone parents, etc., have their needs assessed separately. There would be a required focus on social inclusion; life-long learning; the regeneration of disadvantaged communities; and economic renewal and sustainability when addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups. While there may be overlapping of needs regarding all the aforementioned groups the emphasis is different depending on what group is being targeted.

7.1 Childcare Responsibilities

It has been highlighted in previous sections that childcare is still viewed as a female responsibility. This point became evident during the early stages of the research from the simple fact that 81% of the respondents were female. This study also found that 18.4% of women try to manage their work arrangements around their childcare needs while none of the male respondents stated the same. These findings along with others (discussed in the previous section) clearly demonstrate that childcare is still firmly in the female domain. The Mayo County Childcare Committee would place great importance on the male role in childcare. This comes in two forms. Firstly, to encourage men to take more responsibility for childcare and childrearing roles. Secondly and more specifically, to encourage men to participate in the childcare sector. This would result in the normalisation of men in child caring roles and eventually help to erode the perception that childcare and childrearing are female responsibilities.

7.2 Gender and Employment Status

The study highlights the fact that women are still dominating the part-time work sector in order to achieve a work/life balance. Given the problems associated with part-time work, it cannot be deemed a long-term solution to equal opportunities in the work place and the current childcare crisis. It has also been established that the affordability and/or availability of childcare impacts upon parents' working arrangements and their careers. As stated by the parents themselves the lack of access to adequate childcare has forced many parents into seeking working arrangements namely flexi-time and part-time work. In conjunction with this, parents (mostly mothers) have lost out on promotional opportunities and career progression. With the provision of quality childcare, women would have a greater opportunity to advance their careers if they so choose.

During the course of the study it was discovered that a small minority of parents did not need to avail of working arrangements because they had access to family support or adequate childcare. This highlights the fact that if parents are happy with their childcare arrangements they are less likely to seek working arrangements, making access to quality

childcare an issue for not just parents but employers also. It is therefore important that employers are made aware of the importance of a functioning childcare sector that supports parents in the work place. This does not suggest that work place childcare facilities are necessarily what is required or what parents actually want, it does however increase the need for employer involvement in attaining a quality childcare framework.

7.3 The Employers Contribution to Childcare

Employers have the capacity to contribute to childcare in a number of ways. They can:

- Provide access to work-based childcare facilities
- Subsidise the cost of childcare
- Contribute to childcare costs
- Establish and support a family friendly work environment
- Lobby the government to support quality childcare programmes
- Engage with local and national childcare agencies to support quality childcare programme

Bright Horizons (2003), found that unscheduled absences due to childcare cost employers between €650 and €1,000 per employee per year. Employees with childcare difficulties miss more than twice as many workdays as those with no children. Also, offering childcare supported programmes is five times more effective in boosting employee productivity. This again highlights the need for employers to recognise the importance of childcare for their employees and their business performance. Essentially it is important for parents to have confidence in their choice of childcare in order to make the transition back to work a less stressful one and to allow for a productive and less distracting working day.

As discussed in the previous section, the largest minority of parents believed that the employers should prioritise increasing the level of family friendly practices in the workplace. A strong minority also stated that employers could subsidise the cost of childcare. The least amount of parents wanted work-based childcare facilities, and those that elaborated mentioned that this would be inappropriate for their place of employment.

7.4 Government's Contribution

7.4.1 Greater Investment

Parents emphasised the need for greater investment in community, private and work-based childcare facilities. These, as the parents saw it, are the responsibilities of the government and it is no longer acceptable or feasible to allow parents to fend for themselves regarding access to quality childcare.

7.4.2 Cost of Childcare

Throughout the study parents emphasised the need for government intervention regarding childcare. Almost 50% of parents stated that the government needs to provide tax credits on childcare expenditure.

Other recommendations to help alleviate the financial burden of childcare costs include extending paid maternity leave to one year and to provide pay for the fourteen weeks of parental leave (these suggestions have also been made by the NCNA, 2004).

The NCNA (2004) also recommend a sliding fee system with the state paying the balance at an agreed annual rate irrespective of whether the service is private, community or workplace based. This in principle is an excellent way to improve access to childcare for those who are disadvantaged. In line with this suggestion ADM Ltd. (Area Development Management) has instructed childcare providers to implement a sliding fee system in their facilities and have provided guidelines on how to develop this system.

It is important that the major stakeholders (especially the Government) recognise that childcare is not simply another business or company providing a service. Childcare is part of the social economy sector, where both community and private childcare services are meeting a social need. As a result, childcare providers are not exposed to the same profit margins or pay scales that other businesses and employees enjoy. Therefore, childcare facilities should not be subject to the same conditions as main stream businesses. An example of this is where legislation has allowed local authorities to impose rate charges on childcare facilities. These rates can make up one third of the weekly childcare costs of the parent. A contradiction arises here specific to community childcare facilities as the government is giving the community facilities funding with one hand and taking it away with another by charging rates. It would benefit parents, children, and childcare providers if these rates were abolished, hence, reducing operational costs for childcare providers, and in turn, the cost of childcare for parents.

In reality, childcare providers are also suffering financially. The NCNA, in their pre-budget submission, point to the value of providing additional revenue to the capital strand of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme to allow for the further development of childcare facilities, especially areas that have a low level of provision. They also convey the need to introduce a capitation grant of €2,500 per annum and childcare providers' should have approximately €6,000 tax exemption (NCNA, Pre-budget Submission, 2004).

7.4.3 Family Friendly Working Arrangements

Working parents also highlighted the need for the government to legislate for family friendly working arrangements so access to these arrangements are the norm rather than the exception. This study discovered that access to family friendly working arrangements is essential to achieving a work/life balance.

7.4.4 Location of Childcare Facilities

The study found that working parents in Co. Mayo tended to locate their childcare arrangements in rural areas rather than urban areas. While the quantity of childcare provision in both urban and rural areas is weak in Co. Mayo, rural areas tend to be more disadvantaged due to the level of choice, access and availability. Parents that stated availability

of childcare impacted directly on their choice of childcare, more than half of those parents located their childcare in a rural location, while 34% were based in an urban area. Location is also an influencing factor when parents choose their childcare facility.

This makes the locating of childcare facilities an important aspect of childcare provision. Parents need to be able to have access to childcare facilities close to their home, work or the child's school. However, it is difficult to provide an adequate childcare infrastructure in a rural location, as there are issues around sustainability, isolation, and so on.

Childminding has been suggested in certain literature, as a means of facilitating childcare needs in rural areas. The development of notified home-based childminding services within local communities could have a number of benefits. This strategy provides employment opportunities enabling local individuals (namely women) to develop their own small-scale childcare business. Also, due to small populations dispersed over large areas, childminding can offer a more economically sustainable childcare service compared to other childcare arrangements, the latter requiring major capital investment.

The provision of community based childminding services builds social capital and guarantees that earnings are kept within the community. According to the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA, 2004) the above policy would have a number of benefits such as facilitating more women into the labour market; providing disadvantaged children with a better academic start; providing training and employment opportunities; and building social capital.

7.4.5 Support for Stay at Home Parents

Support is also deemed necessary for stay at home parents. Some parents articulated the wish and the practical reasoning for a parent to remain in the household to care for their children. However, parents stated that due to financial constraints it would not be possible to do this. They also felt that perhaps greater acknowledgement of the importance of the role of the stay at home parent would help to facilitate this option. Hence, if the government were to invest in the availability, affordability and accessibility of childcare, an argument could also be made for the support of parents who make the choice to stay at home to rear their children.

7.4.6 Professionalisation of the Childcare Sector

Another area, which requires government intervention, is the professionalisation of the childcare sector. A minority of parents felt that childcare providers and childminders should be notified with the HSE before they can go into operation. This would instil confidence in the parents by ensuring physical requirements are met; that background checks have been carried out; and that there are appropriate child/staff ratios (to name but a few). Included in this concept is also the area of childcare training. A minority of parents highlighted the fact that some services lack structure and a set curriculum. Regarding this point it would be possible to establish minimum training requirements before a childcare provider could operate.

Discussed in the previous section was the matter of notification/registration with the HSE. The majority of parents did not see notification as an influencing factor when choosing their childcare. This, however, is not an acceptable trend. It raises the issue of the level of work required to inform parents as to the importance of leaving their children in a

regulated, monitored and checked environment that increases the levels of quality and safety of childcare experienced by their child. Parents who mentioned that they prefer the informal atmosphere of the childminders home also expressed that by regulating the sector this 'home from home' situation would be negatively affected. However, it is important to inform parents that regulating the sector would ensure quality and safety of the preferred childcare service but would not affect or change the type of childcare provided whether it be the informal setting of a childminders home or the formal setting of a large crèche.

7.4.7 Access to Information

Parents also highlighted the need for accessible information of childcare facilities in their area. The Mayo County Childcare Committee identified this as a need of parents and is currently compiling a list of childcare facilities in County Mayo and will be making it available through their website. It should be noted that the providers listed on the site are only the ones that responded to the Committee's questionnaire posted to all facilities across the County. Due to the method of gathering the information, non-notified childcare providers are not on the list.

7.5 Quality Childcare

While the wider problems experienced by working parents are important the study also discovered issues relating more specifically to the provision of childcare. These issues allow for a practical formula to be generated that would contribute to the overall aim of an accessible, affordable, quality childcare infrastructure that all sectors of society can benefit from.

Based on the research, it was possible determine what it is parents want for their children and to define quality childcare from the perspective of the working parent. The choice of childcare really depends on the priorities of the parents. Not one type of childcare arrangement is better than another so decisions around a homely environment versus a more structured environment is essentially an emotional and personal choice for each parent. However, it is not acceptable that childcare providers vary in their level of quality standards and training while parents have little means of ascertaining what facility provides the best quality. By regulating the whole childcare sector and implementing a quality childcare training infrastructure it would be possible to not only satisfy the needs of working parents but to ensure the provision of quality childcare. If there is a set standard across all types of childcare from the large crèche to the childminder then the parent's choice is based on what type of childcare is best suited to the child's needs rather than issues around adequate facilities and safety.

7.6 Conclusion

There is not one measure that alleviates the burden of childcare for working parents. In order to sustain a healthy work/life balance, to avail of career and training opportunities, and to provide a basic household income, a quality childcare sector must be established. It is not satisfactory to only advocate the provision of increased places as parents need and want their children to attend quality childcare facilities that are safe, regulated and allows their children to be cared for in the best way they deem appropriate. Working parents, both men and women, need access to affordable,

reliable, high quality childcare that will allow their children to develop through play. This can be achieved in two ways as discussed above. Firstly by regulating the sector to ensure high quality standards while not impacting on the type of childcare provided and secondly establish a quality-training infrastructure. The latter will not only improve the quality of childcare but will also professionalise the sector raising the social status of providers.

In order to increase access the Government and employers have vital roles to play. The government needs to prioritise funding and target childcare directly. Tax credits for working parents is essential to alleviating the financial burden of childcare costs. Employers also need to recognise the importance of childcare not only for their employees but also their business. A quality childcare framework would increase productivity and reduce absenteeism. It is therefore in the best interests of the employer and their business to facilitate a childcare framework that benefits all.

Irish society must make a conscious decision that childcare is worth it. Do we as a nation want to redistribute existing resources to meet the costs of an excellent childcare system or are we willing to pay greater taxes. This is our decision. Bel Kaufman (cited in Bright horizons, 2003) expressed what our decision should be based on:

“Children are the true connoisseurs. What is precious to them has no price – only value”

To conclude, the provision of quality childcare would benefit many citizens of the Irish State. Children, as citizens, are therefore entitled to attend quality childcare facilities that will allow them to learn and develop through play. By investing in our future society major problems such as obesity, racism and pollution can be tackled in the early years of childhood through the provision of quality childcare. A happy childhood is essential for children to grow and develop into happy adults and quality childcare can contribute to the well being of the child and give them the better start in life they deserve.

“Our greatest natural resource is the minds of our children” (Walt Disney)

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Appendix 1

Employers List

COMPANY NAME	LOCATION
Bioshell	Ballina
Eagle Isle Sea Foods	Ballina
Porturlin Shellfish	Ballina
Kertoy Ltd	Ballina
Western People	Ballina
T.J. Lennon Quarries	Ballina
Caffertys Gift Centre & Jewellers	Ballina
Dekko Heating Technologies Ltd	Ballina
Coleman Electronics	Ballina
Caffolla's	Ballina
Tuffy's Cash & Carry	Ballina
Schutz Ireland Ltd	Ballina
Pure Fresh Dairies	Ballina
Joseph Murphy (Ballina) Ltd	Ballina
Moy Ridge Nursing Home	Ballina
Greg Jackson Ltd	Ballina
Molloy Concrete	Ballina
Melvin, Life & Pensions	Ballina
M.C.M. Insurance Brokers Ltd	Ballina
Lundy Foods Ltd	Ballina
Archers Thomas (Ballina) Ltd	Ballina
Ballina Credit Union Ltd	Ballina
Casey Ballina Ltd (Ford & Volvo)	Ballina
ICT Eurotel	Belmullet
Cuffe's, Centra Foodstore	Belmullet
Comhair Iorrais Teo (co-op)	Belmullet
An Ceibh	Belmullet
Selc Ireland	Belmullet
A.J. Reilly's Furniture	Belmullet
Frank Brogan's Euro SPAR	Belmullet

COMPANY NAME	LOCATION
Judge Bros Ltd	Bonniconln
Mayo General Hospital	Castlebar
AIB plc	Castlebar
Fort Wayne Metals	Castlebar
Mayo General Hospital	Castlebar
APC	Castlebar
Johnson Manufacturing	Castlebar
Quilte	Castlebar
Connaught Telegraph	Castlebar
Mayo County Council	Castlebar
Western Health Board	Castlebar
Tesco	Castlebar
Killala Precision Components	Killala
Crann Iorrais Teo	Knock
Corcoran Concrete	Westport
Country Fresh	Westport
Flynn Furniture	Westport
Isotron	Westport
Nomadic Structures Ltd	Westport
Portwest Ltd.	Westport
Tim Hastings Ltd	Westport
Ulster bank	Westport
Westport Credit Union Ltd.	Westport
Mayo News	Westport
AIB plc	Westport
Allergan Pharmaceuticals	Westport
Beirne Express Freight Ltd.	Westport
Carraig Donn Sales Ltd.,	Westport
IFA	Westport

Appendix 2

Cover Letter

Mayo County Childcare Committee,
Mill Lane,
Bridge St.,
Castlebar,
Co. Mayo
06 July 2004

Dear Sir or Madam:

You will find attached to this letter a questionnaire on the childcare needs of working parents. This questionnaire should be filled out by those with children under the age of 14 years. If you are aware that your partner/spouse has already completed this questionnaire there is no need for you to do so. It is important to note that it is not your employers that are conducting this research but the Mayo County Childcare Committee. All information will be treated as confidential and anonymity is guaranteed. We realise that questionnaires are time consuming but this research cannot be completed without your support. Your help is very much appreciated.

When you have completed this questionnaire please return it to the person that distributed it or if individual stamped addressed envelopes have been provided please post as soon as possible.

Background Information

I have been contracted out from NUI Galway to carry out research on the childcare needs of working parents. This contract is provided by Mayo County Childcare Committee (MCCC), who are aligned with Mayo County Council, by becoming a sub-committee of the County Development Board.

The childcare needs of working parents was identified in the MCCC Strategic Plan as an area that needs to be investigated as there is a lack of research on both a regional and national level. As Mayo has a distinctive geographical and demographic profile (for example a large rural population) it is distinct from the rest of the country. It is therefore the intent of this project to place the childcare needs of parents within the context of Co. Mayo. This social policy report will be a publication of the MCCC and will be used by the latter to identify needs and to formulate responses to those needs.

I would like to thank you again for your co-operation and please feel free to contact me for any further details.

Yours truly,

Ciara Kane
Researcher
Mayo County Childcare Committee
(094) 9034778

Appendix 3

Questionnaire

Childcare Needs of Working Parents

Please note that all information will be treated as confidential and anonymity is guaranteed.

This questionnaire should be completed by people who have caring responsibilities for children under the age of 14 years.

Section I: Your Profile

1. What is the name of company you currently work in?

(For example AIB or Baxter. If self employed please state profession e.g. farmer)

2. Are you: 1. Female 2. Male (Please tick the appropriate)

3. What age group do you fall into? (Tick the appropriate box)

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| 1. 15 or under | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. 40-44 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. 16-19 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. 45-49 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. 20-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. 50-54 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. 25-29 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. 55-59 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. 30-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 11. 60-64 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. 35-39 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 12. 65or over | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. Do you have child caring responsibilities? (Tick the appropriate box)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Yes, on my own | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Yes, with my cohabiting spouse/partner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Yes, with my non-cohabiting spouse/partner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Yes, with my ex-spouse/partner | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Does any of your children require special needs care? 1. No 2. Yes

6. Please give details of your children's ages, gender and educational status for under 14s only

(Please tick the appropriate box for each child):

	Age	GENDER		At home full-time ✓	In pre-school ✓	In Primary school ✓	In 2nd level School ✓	SPECIAL NEEDS	
		✓ F	✓ M					At Home ✓	Special Needs School ✓
Child 1									
Child 2									
Child 3									
Child 4									
Child 5									

(add accordingly)

Section 2: Occupation Information

7. What gross income range do you fall into? (Tick the box that applies to you)

- | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Under €9,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. €27,000-€30,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. €9,000-€11,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. €31,000-€34,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. €12,000-€15,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. €35,000-€39,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. €16,000-€18,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. €40,000-€44,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. €19,000-€22,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 11. €45,000-€49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. €23,000-€26,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 12. €50,000 or more | <input type="checkbox"/> |

8. If you are currently sharing your childcare responsibilities (e.g. with your partner/spouse), is the other person in paid employment? (Tick the appropriate box)

1. Yes 2. No 3. Not applicable

(If answered **No** to question 8 please go to Q. 10)

9. What is the combined income of those sharing childcare responsibilities for children under 14 years? (for example you and your partner) (Tick the box that applies to you)

- | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Under €9,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. €31,000-€34,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. €9,000-€11,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. €35,000-€39,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. €12,000-€15,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. €40,000-€44,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. €16,000-€18,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 11. €45,000-€49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. €19,000-€22,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 12. €50,000-€54,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. €23,000-€26,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 13. €55,000-€59,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. €27,000-€30,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 14. €60,000 or more | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Section 3: Working Hours

10. What is your employment status? (Tick the box that applies to you)

- 1. Full-time permanent
- 2. Part-time permanent
- 3. Full-time permanent/contract worker
- 4. Part-time temporary/contract worker
- 5. Self-employed

11. How long have you worked in your present job? (Tick the relevant box)

1. Under 12 months 2. 1-5years 3. Over 5 years

12. Do you have **access to** any of the following working arrangements if you wanted it? (Tick all the relevant boxes)

- | | Yes | No |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Shift work | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) Annualised hours | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) Flexitime | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) Job Sharing/Work Sharing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (e) Part-time work | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (f) Term-time working | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (g) Tele-working/Home-working | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (h) Employment or career break | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13. Are you **currently availing** of any of these arrangements? (Tick all the relevant boxes)

- | | Yes | No |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Shift work | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (b) Annualised hours | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (c) Flexitime | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (d) Job Sharing/Work Sharing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (e) Part-time work | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (f) Term-time working | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (g) Tele-working/Home-working | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (h) Employment or career break | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (i) Parental Leave | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (j) Carer's Leave | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

14. What are your main reasons for (not) availing of these working arrangements?

15. Is your partner/spouse currently availing of any of these arrangements through their place of work? (Tick all the relevant boxes)

	Yes	No
(a) Shift work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Annualised hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Flexitime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Job Sharing/Work Sharing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Part-time work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) Term-time working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g) Tele-working/Home-working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(h) Employment or career break	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(i) Parental Leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(j) Carer's Leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(k) Not Applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. How many paid hours do you normally work in a week? (Tick the appropriate box)

1. 0-4	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. 20-24	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. 40-44	<input type="checkbox"/>	13. 60 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. 5-9	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. 25-29	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. 45-49	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3. 10-14	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. 30-34	<input type="checkbox"/>	11. 50-54	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4. 15-19	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. 35-39	<input type="checkbox"/>	12. 55-59	<input type="checkbox"/>		

17. How many paid hours does your partner/spouse normally work in a week? (Tick the appropriate box)

1. 0-4	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. 20-24	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. 40-44	<input type="checkbox"/>	13. 60 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. 5-9	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. 25-29	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. 45-49	<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Not Applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. 10-14	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. 30-34	<input type="checkbox"/>	11. 50-54	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4. 15-19	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. 35-39	<input type="checkbox"/>	12. 55-59	<input type="checkbox"/>		

18. What is the average time spent commuting to and from work each day? (Tick the appropriate box)

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Work from home | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. 91-120 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Under 30 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. 121-150 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. 31-60 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Over 150 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. 61-90 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

19. Has the availability and/or affordability of childcare impacted upon your working arrangements in any way? (For example, have you availed of any of the working arrangements mentioned in Q. 13; use work holidays to cover childcare; cut back on hours worked or availed of overtime due to childcare arrangements etc.)

20. Has childcare opportunities affected your career? (For example seeking promotion, etc.)

Section 4: Childcare

21. Who is responsible for childcare decisions and arrangements?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. You solely | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. By yourself and your partner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. By your partner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Other (Please specify) | _____ |

22. Does your employer provide for childcare facilities? (Tick the appropriate box)

- | | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. No | <input type="checkbox"/> | (If no please go to Q. 26) |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|----------------------------|

(If self-employed please go to Q. 28)

23. Are they available to you? (Tick the appropriate box)

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| 1. Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|

24. Do you avail of these childcare facilities? (Tick the appropriate box)

1. Yes

2. No

25. Please explain why you do or do not avail of these services:

26. Does your employer subsidise the childcare facility used by you? (Please tick)

1. Yes

2. No

3. Do't Know

4. Not applicable

If yes, how much: € _____

27. Are you in receipt of any direct contribution for childcare from your employer? (Tick the appropriate box)

1. Yes

2. No

3. Not applicable

If yes, how much: € _____

28. Has your partner/spouse left work in order to meet childcare needs? (Tick the appropriate box)

1. Yes

2. No

3. Not applicable

4. Other _____

29. How much do your childminding arrangements cost you each week for **all** your children? (Tick the appropriate boxes)

	During School Year	During School Holidays		During School Year	During School Holidays
1. No cost	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12. €121-€140	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. €2-€25	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13. €141-€160	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. €26-€40	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14. €161-€180	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. €41-€50	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14. €181-€210	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. €51-€60	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	16. €211-€240	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. €61-€70	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	17. €241-€270	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. €71-€80	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	18. €271-€300	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. €81-€90	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	19. €301-€330	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. €91-€100	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20. €331-€360	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. €101-€110	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	21. €361-€400	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. €111-€120	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	22. Over €400	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 4: Childcare Details

30. In the table below please indicate the age of each child and how many hours in a week you would normally avail of childcare provision for each child.

	AGE	HOURS IN A WEEK
Child 1		
Child 2		
Child 3		
Child 4		
Child 5		

31. Please indicate in the table below the types of childminding services you avail of for each of your children: (Tick the appropriate boxes)

Type of Childcare Arrangement	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5
(a) Unpaid family member–partner					
(b) Unpaid family member–older child					
(c) Unpaid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in your home					
(d) Unpaid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in their home					
(e) Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in your home					
(f) Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in their home					
(g) Formally paid childminder in your own home					
(h) Informally paid childminder in your own home					
(i) Formally paid childminder in their home					
(j) Informally paid childminder in their home					
(k) Au Pair					
(l) Private crèche/nursery					
(m) Workplace crèche					
(n) Community based crèche/nursery					
(o) Kindergarten/Montessori					
(p) Playgroup					
(q) School based after school care					
(r) Afterschool private childcare facility					
(s) Special needs childminder in your home					
(t) Special needs childminder in their home					
(u) Special needs service					
(v) Other, please indicate _____					

32. Please indicate weekly childcare costs for each type of childcare used during the school year

Type of Childcare Arrangement	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5
(a) Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in your home	€	€	€	€	€
(b) Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in their home	€	€	€	€	€
(c) Formally paid childminder in your own home	€	€	€	€	€
(d) Informally paid childminder in your own home	€	€	€	€	€
(e) Formally paid childminder in their home	€	€	€	€	€
(f) Informally paid childminder in their home	€	€	€	€	€
(g) Au Pair	€	€	€	€	€
(h) Private crèche/nursery	€	€	€	€	€
(i) Workplace crèche	€	€	€	€	€
(j) Community based crèche/nursery	€	€	€	€	€
(k) Kindergarten/Montessori	€	€	€	€	€
(l) Playgroup	€	€	€	€	€
(m) School based after school care	€	€	€	€	€
(n) Afterschool private childcare facility	€	€	€	€	€
(o) Special needs childminder in your home	€	€	€	€	€
(p) Special needs childminder in their home	€	€	€	€	€
(q) Special needs service	€	€	€	€	€
(r) Other, please indicate _____	€	€	€	€	€

33. Please indicate weekly childcare costs for each type of childcare used during the school holidays.

Type of Childcare Arrangement	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5
(a) Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in your home	€	€	€	€	€
(b) Informally paid relative/friend or neighbour minding child in their home	€	€	€	€	€
(c) Formally paid childminder in your own home	€	€	€	€	€
(d) Informally paid childminder in your own home	€	€	€	€	€
(e) Formally paid childminder in their home	€	€	€	€	€
(f) Informally paid childminder in their home	€	€	€	€	€
(g) Au Pair	€	€	€	€	€
(h) Private crèche/nursery	€	€	€	€	€
(i) Workplace crèche	€	€	€	€	€
(j) Community based crèche/nursery	€	€	€	€	€
(k) Kindergarten/Montessori	€	€	€	€	€
(l) Playgroup	€	€	€	€	€
(m) Summer Camp(s)	€	€	€	€	€
(n) Afterschool private childcare facility	€	€	€	€	€
(o) Special needs childminder in your home	€	€	€	€	€
(p) Special needs childminder in their home	€	€	€	€	€
(q) Special needs service	€	€	€	€	€
(r) Other, please indicate _____	€	€	€	€	€

34. What is the location of your childcare arrangement? (Tick the appropriate boxes)

Location of Childcare Arrangement	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5
(a) A rural area (including village)					
(b) An urban area (town)					

35. Has the **availability** of childcare impacted upon the type of childcare you use? (Please Tick)

1. Yes 2. No

36. Please elaborate:

37. Has the **cost** of childcare impacted upon your choice of childcare? (Tick the appropriate box)

1. Yes 2. No

38. Please elaborate:

39. Does your childcare provider charge a lower rate for each subsequent child? (Tick the appropriate box)

1. Yes 2. No 3. Not applicable

40. Does your childcare provider charge you for collecting your child late? (Tick the appropriate box)

1. Yes 2. No

41. If yes, in what way and how much? _____

42. In your opinion, which of the following statements on the current childcare needs of employees should employers prioritise? Please **rank** the following four statements from **1-4**, where **1** is most important and **4** least important.

1. Increase the level of family friendly practices available to employees
2. Provide childcare facilities in the workplace
3. Subsidise the cost of employee's childcare
4. Other, please describe _____

43. In your opinion, which of the following statements on the current childcare needs of employees should the Government prioritise? Please rank the following eight statements from 1-8, where 1 is most important and 6 least important.

- 1. Provide tax relief on employees' childcare expenditure
- 2. Provide tax relief on employers' expenditure on childcare
- 3. Provide greater support for constructing/developing company crèches
- 4. Provide an expert advice service
- 5. Provide staffing grants for all company crèches
- 6. Provide greater support for private childcare services
- 7. Provide greater support for community childcare services
- 8. Other , please describe _____

44. When choosing the type of childcare you are currently availing of, what were the factors that influenced your decision? (Tick all the boxes that are relevant to you. Comment on each chosen factor)

- 1. Facilities offered by childcare provider

- 2. Reputation of provider

- 3. The type of childcare preferred (for example, using a childminder instead of a crèche etc.)

- 4. Work and home location/location of childcare facility

- 5. Whether the service is notified (to the Western Health Board)

- 6. Other(s), please explain _____

(If your partner/spouse is caring for your children full-time at home, there is no need to answer the rest of the questionnaire. Thank you for participating)

45. Please list the positive aspects of the childcare service you are currently availing of?

1. _____	2. _____
3. _____	4. _____
5. _____	6. _____

46. Please list the negative aspects of the childcare you are currently availing of?

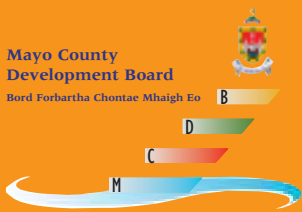
1. _____	2. _____
3. _____	4. _____
5. _____	6. _____

47. Are there any developments/enhancements you would like to see in the childcare service you are currently availing of?

48. Have you any suggestions for bringing about these developments/enhancements

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION

Your Plan - Your Future



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M.C.C.C., 2nd Floor, Mill Lane, Bridge Street, Castlebar, Co Mayo.

Tel: 094 9034778, 094 9034779 Fax: 094 9034815

E-mail: maryconway@mayococo.ie Website: www.mayocdb.ie