

Start Strong

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Early childhood care and education should be an essential part of our recovery.

Putting money into early care and education should be an essential part of Ireland's recovery and the sustainable economy of the future. International evidence shows that investment in early childhood intervention can have a return of over 16:1. Advocacy group Start Strong today said that Government must urgently develop an ambitious 10 year plan for early childhood as a recession priority.

Unlike most OECD countries, Ireland has no comprehensive national plan for early care and education. In a UNICEF League Table (2008), Ireland comes bottom of the list amongst 25 "economically advanced" countries, meeting just one of ten minimum standards. The existence of a national plan is one of the benchmarks used by UNICEF.

Speaking ahead of the launch of Start Strong's **Children 2020: Planning Now, for the Future**, director Ciairín de Buis said that Ireland is not prioritising its young children.

Research shows that early intervention and prevention, starting at the beginning of life and sustained through childhood and adolescence depending on need, enhances children's development, strengthens an economy and makes society fairer. "Early care and education is good for children, good for the economy and good for society," de Buis said. "There has been a lot of progress over the past decade which we can't afford to lose. We need to ensure advancements such as the free pre-school year are maintained, so that we can build on them in years to come. We need to plan for comprehensive investment in the next generation, now more than ever."

"A strong economy depends on people's skills, creativity, motivation and knowledge. Investment in young children has high economic and social returns because its impact on skills and dispositions lasts a lifetime," she continued.

Start Strong sets out 5 key principles for a 10 year plan and proposes both short-term recommendations that the Government could introduce now at little or no cost and more long-term ambitious recommendations. The recommendations range from ensuring that there are no further cuts to services and supports for young children and their families, to making a commitment to developing a long-term plan for children's early care and education, to publishing inspection reports on early care and education settings.