

Quality Childcare in the Workplace

a step-by-step guide for employers

Angela Canavan


Barnardos
Children, their rights
and their needs

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Quality Childcare in the Workplace

Quality Childcare in the Workplace - A Step-by-Step Guide for Employers

Researched and written by Angela Canavan

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Ireland has experienced fundamental economic and social changes over the past few years. One of the most significant developments has been the shift away from relatively high unemployment to that of almost full employment, with consequent labour shortages evident in some sectors.

Irish employers have begun to face the new challenges of a booming economy. Attracting and maintaining staff has become a major focus for most Human Resources Managers. The exploration of new sources of recruitment is discussed not just within the business community but increasingly in the general public.

International comparisons suggest that Irish women are participating in the labour force to a greater extent than heretofore. However, one of the barriers facing female participation in the labour force is lack of good quality, affordable childcare.

IBEC has been aware of increasing numbers of employers considering measures to assist families – and women in particular – with their childcare needs as a means of facilitating employment opportunities. However, for many employers the area of childcare represents uncharted waters with some being discouraged by the lack of support available to them. The provision of childcare is not just about providing places but also about high standards and quality in service delivery.

For this reason, IBEC welcomes the publication of *Quality Childcare in the Workplace – A Step by Step Guide for Employers* by Barnardos and is pleased to contribute these introductory words.

We hope that many of our members will find this guide very useful. The hands-on style and practical advice will be particularly relevant, as are the encouraging examples of successful initiatives and projects to date.

On behalf of IBEC, I would like to wish Barnardos success with this much-needed publication.

Aileen O'Donoghue, Assistant Director of Social Policy, IBEC

Introduction

In Ireland the world of work is changing fast: unemployment is at an all-time low; labour turnover is escalating; and there is a skills shortage in some sectors of the economy. We are all too familiar with the widespread difficulties faced by employers in attracting and retaining staff. Recognising that the labour market growth has primarily been driven by women's participation in the workforce, employers are increasingly looking to women as potential employees. However, in spite of recent trends, Ireland still has one of the lowest labour market female participation in Europe (8% lower than the EU average). Less than 30% of the 400,000 women with children under 15 are in full-time employment.

Women continuously cite the lack of good quality, affordable childcare as a primary obstacle to participation in the world of work. In this country at present, there is a virtual crisis in the supply of childcare. Every day we hear about women who could not return to work after their maternity leave because they could not find suitable childcare arrangements. Others have been forced to give up work when childminding arrangements break down or because they cannot afford the costs. It is not surprising then that more and more employing organisations are focusing their attention on child-friendly measures that will help them compete more favourably for suitable staff.

If 20% of those mothers who are not currently active in the labour force were encouraged back into employment, this would create a pool of **50,000 potential employees**.

IBEC, 1999

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you, the employer, with information that will assist you in introducing practical child-friendly measures to support parents in reconciling work and family life. It also aims to highlight the importance of introducing quality measures where the needs and safety of children are central.

Your response to the childcare needs of your employees depends on your organisation size, industry, location, economic situation and employee profile. You can select the most suitable options based on the advantages of each, the capacity to address employee needs and the ability to respond to your goals and resources. A number of options are presented. Some require substantial investment. Others require a little thought and creativity with minimal financial input.

The ultimate aim of this publication is to help you find ways to increase your chances of maintaining a workforce that is happy, loyal, committed and effective.

Child-friendly Practices: The Benefits

There is a strong business case for investing in appropriate childcare measures. This has been documented in a range of research studies over the past number of years.

For employers the benefits can include:

- The retention of experienced and skilled staff
- Better recruitment opportunities
- Reduced absenteeism
- An improved public image
- Higher employee morale and commitment
- Tax advantages

For employees the benefits can include:

- Less stress
- An opportunity to balance work and family life
- Greater equality of opportunity between males and females
- A fairer sharing of responsibility between men and women

What the employees say

"The benefits of having such a facility are two-fold...

Firstly for the children... It encourages them from an early age to learn to cope with meeting other people and sharing with other kids. There is no doubt that our eldest's speech and all round development has been greatly enhanced by the care and attention he receives in the Bank of Ireland crèche.

Secondly for the parents there are a number of benefits...

- ability to continue employment whilst knowing that the children are receiving expert care and attention
- having the crèche nearby is a great comfort, in case anything happens to the kids
- being part of a work crèche gives the added comfort, in that I know we will not be subjected to any unreasonable actions (e.g. unwarranted price increases) by the crèche management
- fosters a sense of 'community' among parents and can share experiences with other parents
- knowledge that the crèche will facilitate part/time sharing, if the need arises (unlike other crèches)"

Brendan Kelly, Bank of Ireland (Little Steps Limited)

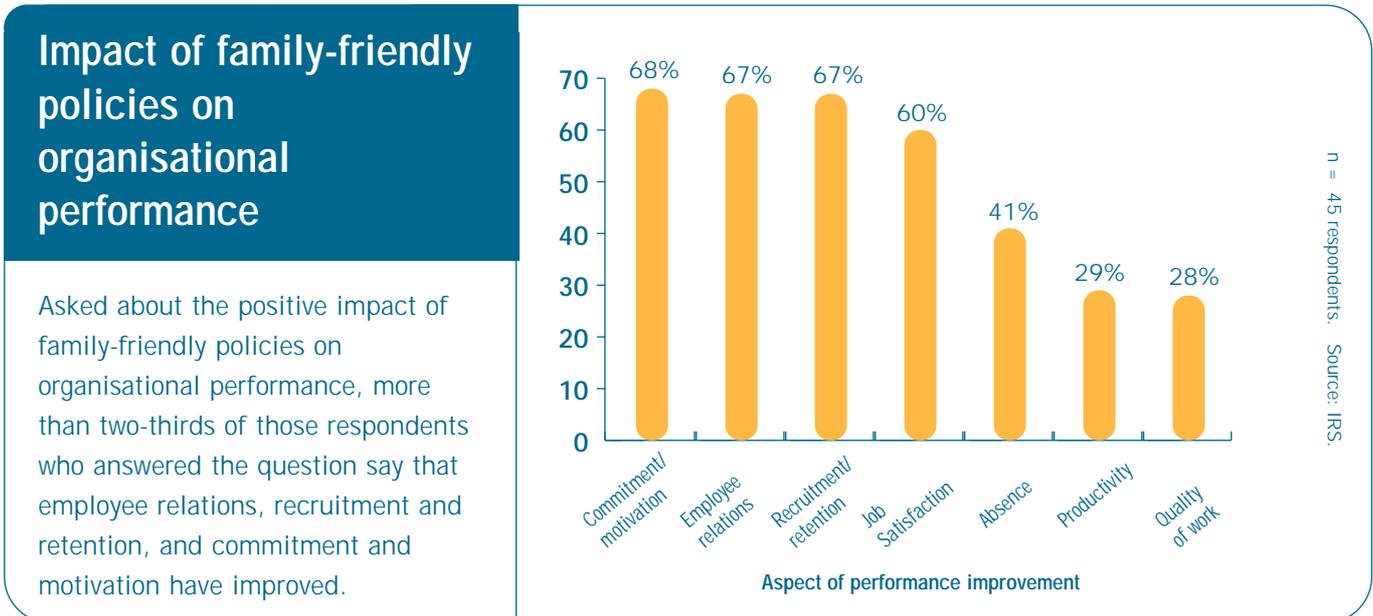
"There are clearly tremendous benefits to be derived by employers providing much needed childcare facilities for their employees, in terms of employee loyalty, employee well-being and a positive attitude to work."

Fionnuala Sheehan, University of Limerick (Silver Apples)

"The opening hours are most convenient and suitable for my working day and it certainly takes a lot of the pressure and stress out of working."

U. Shanley, INTEL (Trinity Tots)

A recent IRS survey in the UK details the family-friendly practices of 83 private and public sector employers. The survey examines a wide range of strategies from flexible working arrangements to subsidised childcare provision. A quick glance at the chart below clearly demonstrates that family-friendly practices have very positive benefits in the key areas of performance.



SOURCE: IRS Employment Review, Feb 2000

In Ireland many Irish businesses are also beginning to realise that a more enlightened approach to childcare needs can bring impressive business benefits. The Employer Demonstration Initiative was introduced by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in conjunction with the employers organisation IBEC to stimulate employer interest in supporting equal opportunities childcare facilities. This pilot initiative was one strand in the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme and is supported by EU and exchequer monies. A total of eight employers are participating in the project.

While these employers vary in the nature of their business, the number of staff they employ and the stage of development of their childcare initiative, they are unanimous about the benefits or expected benefits of adopting childcare measures.

Childcare Options

Childcare provision in Ireland can vary greatly. Parents, in the main, are left to their own devices when it comes to arranging care for their children.

Childcare services take a variety of forms:

Full Daycare

Often referred to as nurseries and crèches these centres offer a full care programme. They generally cater for children from 3 months old. They are run privately, by community groups or by an employer in the workplace. They open early morning until late evening to facilitate working parents. Most workplace nurseries operate in the Dublin area. They include Aer Rianta, ESB, RTÉ, Mater Hospital, Dublin Corporation and Bank of Ireland. ELAN Corporation in Athlone also provides such a service to their employees.

Childminders (family based childcare)

Childminders provide full daycare for pre-school children in the childminder's home or the child's home. They also provide care to school-going children before and after school and during school holidays.

Sessional Service

Sessional services are provided by playgroups, Naíonraí (Irish language playgroups), Montessori Schools and Steiner Kindergartens. They generally cater for children between 3 to 6 years. They offer care and education for periods of 3 - 4 hours.

Drop-in Centres

Drop-in centres are provided in shopping centres, training centres and leisure centres. The service is provided on a customer/client basis. Children are dropped into the service while the parent attends an event or avails of a service.

After School Care

Full daycare services and childminders (see above) provide afterschool care. This usually involves children being dropped and collected from school. However, there is a growth in the establishment of after-school services and homework clubs run by community groups and schools.

It is not surprising that the most commonly used forms of childcare amongst working parents are **childminding** and **full daycare**. These services provide the greatest flexibility in terms of opening hours and an all-year-around service. However, part-time employees often use sessional services.

For the first time in Ireland, regulatory provisions for pre-school services (children under 6) became law on 1st January 1997.

These regulations, "**Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations 1996**" introduced under the Child Care Act 1991, lay down minimum standards which must be adhered to by nurseries, crèches, drop-in centres, playgroups and some childminders. The health boards have responsibility for enforcing these regulations. Inspections are carried out by pre-school officers. They assess the facilities for suitability and safety of premises, equipment, staffing levels and the care programme offered.

It is worth noting that most childminders are exempt from the regulations. The law only covers childminders caring for more than 3 pre-school children (apart from their own) who are not from the same family. Therefore childminding, in the main, is still operating outside statutory controls. It is estimated that over 30,000 childminders are operating in this way.

Child-friendly Measures in the Workplace

A decision about whether to implement a child-friendly measure should take into account the following factors:

- A careful assessment of employees' needs and preferences
- Employers' goals and resources
- The supply and demand for childcare services which already exist in the community
- The importance of providing a quality solution

Assessment of need

A good needs assessment will find out:

- What childcare needs employees have
- Which groups of employees have most needs
- What impact these needs have on work
- What childcare arrangements are currently in place
- Which types of childcare would address needs most effectively

The most popular method of collecting data is the employee survey. A survey will give the most accurate and complete information from which to make a decision. Consultation groups are an alternative method of surveying staff. Small companies often find this method more cost effective. Whatever method is chosen, many employers find that the use of a childcare advisor or consultant at the needs assessment stage increases the chances of obtaining an accurate picture of need.

Employers' goals and resources

An organisation's goals may be a strong basis for introducing a child-friendly measure. Is the company seeking to increase productivity? Has absenteeism and staff turnover been a problem? Is staff morale low? Is the company trying to encourage women to return to work? One possible solution to such problems may be to address childcare needs.

In addition, the type of measure introduced will depend on what resources are available to the employer. An employer's decision to introduce subsidised childcare, establish a workplace facility or contract a service from the community will depend on the resources of the company.

Supply and demand

The availability and affordability of childcare in the community will also influence what assistance is needed from the employer. By making existing services more accessible to employees, an employer can indirectly address the needs of employees. If there were an adequate supply of care in the community, it would be duplicative and not cost effective to create more supply.

Quality

Another very important factor that should be considered when investigating childcare solutions is the quality of childcare provision. Any solution that is introduced should be fully compliant with the regulations and should ensure that the welfare and safety of the child is paramount. Pre-school services have a central role to play in the development and early education of children.

What follows is a description of child-friendly measures. Space in this booklet does not allow a detailed description of each one. A number of examples are included to highlight good practice.

If you require further information on any of the areas detailed in this publication contact Barnardos' National Children's Resource Centre. The Resource Centre holds an extensive collection of resources that may help.

Measure 1: Full Daycare Services

Employers have a number of options with regard to supporting full daycare services for their employees.

1. Workplace Crèches

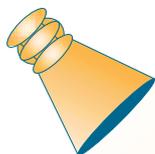
Under this system the employer sets up and operates a crèche in or in close proximity to the workplace. Workplace crèches are a visible sign of a family-friendly employer and can contribute significantly to an enhanced corporate image. The establishment of such a service requires considerable capital investment by the employer. The employer either passes the running costs to employees by charging appropriate fees or shares the cost by subsidisation. Some companies provide the premises and finance the start-up costs and contract the day-to-day operation to an independent operator. A workplace crèche has many advantages for employees: only one journey is required en route to work; time is saved in travelling; parents can be close to their children; and facilities may be provided for nursing mothers. However, a workplace crèche may not be accessible to employees working in a multi-site company and some employees may prefer to use a facility closer to home.

2. Consortium Crèches

This is where a number of employers from the same geographic area share the costs and benefits of establishing and operating a childcare facility. This option is more suitable for the small employer. Each participating employer is allocated a number of places. This system may involve complicated negotiations among employers. The establishment of clear management structures and areas of responsibility is essential for the smooth running of such a service.

3. Private Services

Under this system a company block books places in a private service for their employees. Fees may or may not be subsidised, depending on the policies and resources of the employer. The main advantage of this system is that the employer avoids the capital and running costs associated with a workplace crèche. Some employers, in return for this facility, support the private provider by way of sponsorship or donation.



SPOTLIGHT ON TRINITY TOTS AND INTEL

A partnership committee was established with representatives from INTEL and Trinity Tots to explore the childcare needs of staff. Following a survey of staff, it was decided that Trinity Tots would establish a stand-alone independent facility close to INTEL. Trinity Tots, Leixlip was established in 1998. INTEL employees use 40% of childcare places. The crèche is purpose built and is situated less than a kilometre from INTEL. It offers opening hours to suit the employees who work various shift patterns. It is open from 7am - 7pm, Monday to Friday. It caters for sixty children and the service includes afterschool care. The crèche is managed and operated solely by Trinity Tots. Whilst INTEL are not directly involved in its management, on-going consultation takes place with regard to the childcare needs of their staff. The facility is self-financing and childcare places are not subsidised.

Step-by-Step

- A childcare committee is established with representatives from the employer, employees and a childcare advisor.
- A needs assessment is conducted.
- Based on the results of the needs assessment, a financial feasibility study is carried out. In addition to capital and running costs, consideration is given to what employees are willing to pay, as determined from the needs assessment.
- The childcare committee undertakes the task of site/building identification. Consideration is given to planning permission requirements.
- A brief is prepared for the architect. Particular attention is given to the requirements under the pre-school regulations. A childcare advisor and/or the Health Board Pre-school Officer is heavily involved in this process.
- The architect, in consultation with the committee, prepares design and building plans.
- The childcare committee invites tenders and a building contractor is selected.
- Building/renovation work takes place.
- The childcare committee works on operational details and devises policies and procedures for the service. Areas such as allocation of places, numbers and age range of children, child/staff ratios, insurance, health and safety policies and procedures, and record keeping are addressed.
- The childcare committee manages the recruitment of qualified and experienced staff. The manager/operator is recruited in advance of other staff and is invaluable in choosing remaining staff and fitting-out the facility.
- Building/renovation is completed.
- Premises is decorated, equipped and furnished.
- Remaining staff are recruited.
- The health board is notified and the premises is inspected by the Pre-school Officer and the facility is approved.
- Enrolment takes place.
- The facility is open for business.

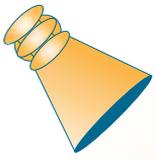
Measure 2: Childminders Networks

This measure involves establishing and supporting a network of individual childminders who, in return, provide a family daycare service to employees. The network provides training, equipment lending and general support to the childminders through an investment from the employer. This option can be very attractive to employers, as networks are less expensive to start up than on-site childcare facilities. Also, childminding is one of the most common forms of childcare used by working parents.

Step-by-Step

- Following a needs assessment a steering committee consisting of representations from employees and management is established to implement this measure.
- An appropriate advisor is appointed to provide professional advice. Childminding Ireland represents and trains those involved in family daycare.
- Contact is made with the Health Board Pre-school Officer for assistance.
- After extensive consultation, decisions are made with regard to the co-ordination and on-going operation of the network.
- Decisions are made about numbers of childminders involved and employee eligibility criteria for the scheme. Specific groups may be targeted.
- A full cost analysis is completed. Costs may include staff time, training, professional consultation and equipment.
- Childminders are recruited and trained.
- The employer, through the network, provides on-going support and continuously monitors the scheme.

Employers should note that under the new pre-school regulations, a large number of childminders are not required to notify the health board. Therefore extra attention should be given to quality and the need for professional advice when selecting childminders for the network.



SPOTLIGHT ON ELIDA FABERGÉ LIMITED - "LINKED" CHILDMINDING SCHEME

Elida Fabergé (formerly Elida Gibbs) is a large manufacturer of personal products in the UK and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Unilever. As a major employer, Elida Fabergé has a long history of responsible and progressive policies. In 1989, as a Total Quality Initiative, an attitude survey was issued to all employees. 95% of respondents identified childcare as being vital. In mid-1989 a feasibility study for childcare options was undertaken. A number of options were discounted as being impractical. In April 1990 a "Linked" Childminding Scheme was introduced with Leeds City Council. The aims of the projects are:

- To improve the supply of quality childminders
- To offer guaranteed, high quality childcare places to employers
- To develop further services and resources for "childminders" linked to the company

The scheme recruits, trains and supports childminders. At present there are 31 childminders "linked " to the scheme. The scheme is now an integral part of the employee package. A high number of employees have used the service for emergency cover or holiday relief with existing childcare.

Measure 3: Childcare Vouchers

Under the childcare voucher system an allowance is paid by the employer to help employees with the cost of childcare. Childcare vouchers are a flexible and cost-effective way for employers to contribute towards their employees' childcare costs. They are given by employers to their employees and are then used as part or full payment for childcare. Childcare vouchers allow the parents to choose the most appropriate care for their children's needs. The employer is free to determine exactly who will receive childcare vouchers at what value. Therefore the cost of the scheme can be planned and controlled from the outset. Up to now childcare vouchers have not been used to any extent in Ireland but are the most popular form of childcare assistance provided by UK employers, helping to motivate staff and acting as an aid to recruit and retain staff in an increasingly competitive employment environment.

Step-by-Step

- Employer decides eligibility criteria for the allowance. Specific groups may be targeted.
- Employer sets the level of the allowance.
- The full cost of the scheme to the employer is determined.
- The employer produces vouchers personalised with company logos, etc.
- The employer produces an information pack for the employees and childcare providers. The pack explains how the scheme works, the benefits, and information about choosing quality childcare. A childcare specialist may be contracted to assist with this task.
- Vouchers are issued to employees.
- Employees provide chosen provider with documentation (from information pack) which includes an application to participate in scheme.
- Agreement is reached between the employer and provider.
- Vouchers are presented by employees to provider.
- Provider presents vouchers to employer at agreed intervals.
- Employer reimburses the provider.

There are many advantages to childcare vouchers. They are totally flexible – the employer can choose who is eligible, the value of the voucher and the cost of the scheme. Vouchers can only be spent on their intended purpose, unlike cash, which can be abused. It is worth noting that the Benefit In Kind exemption only applies to childcare provided by the employer. (See Money Matters, page 17)

Holiday Playschemes/Summer Camps

Parents often face a childcare crisis during the summer holidays. It is not uncommon to hear of parents who, having made a decision to return to work, are forced to give up during the holiday period, to care for their children. Employers too experience the impact of this situation. Many complain of higher absenteeism and lower production levels during these times.

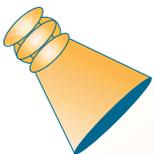
In this country a wide range of "Summer Camps" are organised by sports and leisure clubs, church groups, youth organisations and schools. These are generally designed to provide leisure and cultural opportunities for young people. However, in most cases they are not designed to meet the needs of working parents with a late start time and an early finish time. The establishment of a holiday playscheme may be an attractive option for employers.

Step-by-Step

- Employer establishes a committee consisting of employer and employee representation.
- A needs assessment is carried out.
- A fact finding exercise is completed to establish what is happening in the area with regard to holiday playschemes.
- Employer decides whether to contract a local community group to provide the scheme or to set up the scheme independently.
- A financial projection is carried out. Costs will include rental, staff, training, equipment, materials, professional advice and insurance.
- Committee seeks suitable premises. Space, accessibility, health and safety and availability of facilities are considered.
- Decisions are made regarding the operation of the service - number of children, age groups, fees payable, opening hours, staffing, size of groups and duration of sessions.
- To ensure the safety and well-being of the children, a child protection policy and code of practice is developed. A childcare advisor is consulted to ensure that a quality service is provided.
- Staff is recruited. Youth organisations with experience are sought to assist with the recruitment process.
- An induction and short training programme is developed for staff. Again professional assistance is sought.
- A programme of activity is devised.
- Enrolment takes place and the playscheme is launched.

After School Care

After school care is often provided by a full daycare service. This involves the added consideration of school collection and transport. The employer should also take into consideration that the development of programmes for older children can be challenging, and expert advice should be sought. If an employer wishes to establish an independent service for employees, the steps outlined for holiday playschemes should be followed. After school care is generally provided Monday - Friday afternoons. However, if weekend work is a feature of your organisation this measure could be extended to weekends.



SPOTLIGHT ON SATURDAY WORK-CARE SCHEME, PORTSMOUTH

Portsmouth City Council operates holiday playschemes for children aged 5 to 12 years old during the Easter and Summer holidays. The playschemes offer children a chance to have fun through a broad range of activities in a safe, secure environment. In 1998 the Council introduced a new and innovative playscheme - the SATURDAY WORK-CARE SCHEME. The scheme is available only to parents who work on Saturday, and takes place in central Portsmouth at a local school. It runs from 8.30am to 5.30pm every Saturday. Parents provide a packed lunch and snacks. Activities include games, sports, outings and arts and crafts.

The introduction of a playscheme or an after school service has many advantages for employers, particularly if the workforce is drawn from the local community. They can be very cost effective for the employer if they work through a local community agency and charge appropriate fees. The introduction of such a measure improves morale, reduces stress and contributes to lower absenteeism and higher productivity.

Measure 5: Information and Referral

Information and Referral is a service provided by the employer, whether contracted or on-site that offers information, advice and referral to parents regarding childcare needs. This may simply include the provision of information on providers in their area or it may include a broad range of information on childcare and parenting. Some employers extend the service to include parenting workshops and telephone advice lines.

It is worth noting that under the Child Care Act 1991, health boards are obliged to make available information on pre-school services in its area. However, because implementation of the pre-school regulations is a relatively recent development, information provision remains ad hoc and underdeveloped. However in the UK, where county councils are charged with a similar responsibility, a network of childcare information centres has been established. These are either provided directly by the county councils or alternatively they are contracted to independent information providers. Many employers in the UK have developed very positive relationships with these services in order to support their employees.

The provision of information and referral services is an attractive option for employers who are not in a position to provide a more direct childcare service but want to support their employees. Many companies include this service within their human resources department. Some larger companies employ a childcare co-ordinator to co-ordinate this function.



SPOTLIGHT ON BP AMOCO

In April 1999 BP Amoco, one of the world's top oil companies, won the Opportunity 2000 "communicating ownership" award for its parental, advisory and networking service (PANS). Maternity and childcare information, support and advice is given to staff via:

Publications (including factsheets)

Information on all types of care from 0-14 years. Parents are helped to plan and select childcare and are given information on existing facilities in their area of choice.

Keeping-in-touch-scheme

For all BP Amoco employees on maternity leave or career break who wish to receive publications, newsletters or other in-house literature and information.

Maternity Co-ordinator

Advice and support on all aspects of maternity rights.

Newsletter

Published three times a year, it covers new developments, with topical articles on childcare.

Parenting courses

Available in-house for parents of children 3-12 years.

Parents' network meetings

Regular in-house working lunches at various BP Amoco sites, where parents meet and share information and listen to guest speakers on a wide range of topics.

Workshops

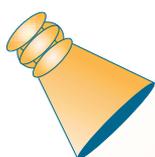
One-day workshops on issues such as maternity leave, returning to work, balancing work and family life. These are held on an "as needed" basis.

Helpline

Provides information and advice on all aspects of childcare.

Step-by-Step

- A steering group is set up to co-ordinate the service consisting of representatives from management (perhaps human resources) and employees.
- Decisions are made regarding the level and nature of service to be provided.
- Costing implications are examined and budgets allocated - costing may include staff time, storage space, shelving, printing, telephone costs and computer equipment, depending on the level of service offered.
- Roles and responsibilities are defined in relation to the management and operation of the service.
- Information is gathered and collated from a range of resources:
 - **The Health Board**, through the pre-school officer, provides information regarding the services that have notified them.
 - **The National Children's Nurseries Association** represents and supports those who run nurseries and crèches. It provides listings of services in local areas.
 - **IPPA - The Early Childhood Organisation** represents and supports those who run playgroups, parent and toddler groups and out-of-school care. Through their branch network it provides information and support.
 - **Comhchoiste Reamhscolaíochta Teo** represents those who provide pre-schooling through the medium of Irish. It provides information on Naíonraí (Irish language playgroups).
 - **The Association of Montessori Teachers of Ireland** provides information on schools registered with their Association.
 - **St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland** also provides information and guidance on Montessori services in the community.
 - **Childminding Ireland** represents those engaged in family daycare. The Organisation provides information and advice on childminding services.
 - **Barnardos' National Children's Resource Centre** provides a specialist information resource on all aspects of childcare. It provides guidelines on choosing quality care and will point employers to the many voluntary childcare and parenting groups operating in local communities.
- Accommodation is allocated to store the information. This can be as simple as a few drawers in a filing cabinet to a designated room, depending on resources and the level of service provided.
- Decisions are made regarding the delivery of the service - when and by whom?
- Training of the information providers takes place. To ensure quality, it is wise to involve professionals in such training.



SPOTLIGHT ON LEEDS CITY COUNCIL CHILDCARE SCHEME

The scheme was launched in September 1995 to "provide a responsive service to meet the needs of Leeds City Council Employees in their search for appropriate, affordable, accessible childcare." The Childcare Team are available every weekday in the Under Eight's Service to discuss with parents their childcare needs. They help parents to find childcare, visit departments on a one-to-one basis and organise group discussions. They also visit childcarers with parents and give advice on selection.

The services offered include:

- ✓ Information and Advice
- ✓ Information Packs and Factsheets
- ✓ Departmental Roadshows
- ✓ Maternity/Paternity Packs
- ✓ Newsletters
- ✓ Holiday Playschemes

Many employers find the introduction of an Information and Referral service an attractive option because it can be incorporated into a workplace with minimum financial commitment and the service can be easily extended or scaled down in response to current needs.

Other Measures

Many employers have demonstrated a high degree of innovation in implementing child-friendly measures. The example below illustrates that a little creativity can result in simple measures that contribute to boosting staff morale.

Goldene Textilien - Small measures-Big impact

Goldene Textilien is a manufacturing company situated in Munich, Germany. 95% of their employees are women. In 1992, following a survey carried out by the Human Resources Department on job satisfaction, a number of measures were introduced to support staff. Some of these were specifically targeted at working parents. Gabbie Bauer of Goldene Textilien comments, "We were not in a position to establish an on-site childcare centre but we introduced a series of small measures which contribute to the 'feel good factor' for employees. Our priority here is to get a job done. To us it makes good business sense to introduce measures that help contribute to the creation of a loyal and happy workforce."

Some of the measures include:

- Baby equipment hire
- Babysitting for social occasions. Each employee receives monthly "credits" towards babysitting
- Drop-in crèches for "out-of-hours" conferences and meetings
- A bulletin board aimed at parents
- Parenting workshops
- Social events aimed at employee's children

Leading by Example: The Employer Demonstration Initiative

The eight pilot projects that participated in this initiative were all employer-led. They demonstrate a variety of approaches to childcare provision from direct provision of daycare in the workplace to partnership arrangements with local childcare providers. The projects are at varying stages of development but all have the common aim of increasing the number of childcare places available to employees.

Childcare Community Business Limited, Ballyfermot, Dublin

Childcare Community Business opened its doors to the first customers in January 2000. It aims to encourage opportunities for local people to return to work by providing full daycare and after school care. The centre now caters for 22 children

Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Crumlin, Dublin

Our Lady's Hospital strives to encourage equality of opportunity for all staff by promoting a work environment that is family-friendly. A number of measures have been introduced including flexitime, part-time work and job sharing. The opening of the new purpose built "Kiddies Kingdom Crèche" in August 1999 is another means of enabling employees balance the demands of work and their personal lives. Situated in the grounds of the hospital the crèche now caters for 34 children and employs 7 full-time staff.

Midland Health Board/Mountmellick Development Association

The project aims to develop a childcare facility including a crèche, toddlers group, playschool and out-of-school care. It proposes to cater for children aged 3 months to 13 years. A feasibility study has been carried out and a project officer has been appointed to co-ordinate the project. Her role is to prepare a brief for the architects, to ensure the facility is compliant with legislation, to prepare a business plan, to design operational policies and to recruit staff. The facility will be situated on Mountmellick development association lands.

Galway City Partnership/ Nortell

A full daycare facility became available to the employees of Nortell at the beginning of 2000. The facility is managed under a new management structure consisting of Galway City Partnership and an employee forum. The Partnership owns the premises. The ultimate aim is that by 2002 the employee forum will set up a company and will purchase the premises from the Partnership.

Fujisawa Ireland Limited/South Kerry Partnership Limited

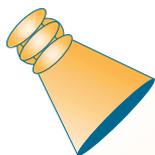
Fujisawa was interested in exploring the possibility of building a childcare facility following a request from the Fujisawa Employer Forum. Other local companies also expressed an interest in this initiative. A formal project management group was established to explore the possibility of establishing a high quality childcare facility to meet the needs of employees. The group consisted of representatives from the employers, the employees, the Southern Health Board and the Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association. Fujisawa sponsored a consultant engineer to research, draw up a design plan, and identify suitable sites. A financial feasibility study was also commissioned. The outcome of the feasibility study caused a shift in the direction of the project. It is hoped that the project will proceed but on a scaled down level than what was initially planned.

Esat Digifone

The purpose of this project is to provide a childcare service for employees of Esat Digifone via Trinity Tots (an established childcare provider). Trinity Tots purchased the building and a suitable contractual relationship was established between the two parties. Planning permission was refused. Esat Digifone is considering their options and it is hoped that the project will proceed.

Aer Rianta

Building on the company's well-established crèche facility, the aim of this project was to expand to offer after school and holiday care for children aged 4-12 years. A site in close proximity to the airport was identified but planning permission was refused. An alternative site is currently being sought.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

For a number of years, the University of Limerick subsidised and maintained an off-campus crèche.

This crèche was privately managed and catered for 20+ children of students, employees and others.

A number of factors resulted in the University agreeing, as a matter of policy, to build and locate on campus its own childcare facility. These factors included:

- The likelihood that the premises housing the off campus crèche was to be sold.
- The growing demand for childcare facilities from staff and students. This was confirmed by a survey.
- Changing demographics indicated future growth in mature and part-time student participation.

The childcare facility was to cater for 50 children ranging in age from 3 months to 12 years.

A Step-by-Step Approach

NOV1994	The University's Executive Committee agreed in principle to on-campus location of a childcare facility.
FEB 1995	A Buildings Committee was set up to undertake the tasks of site identification, concept design specification and construction project plan. This Committee reported to the University's Executive Committee.
MARCH 1995	Appointment of an architect.
MAY 1995	The Buildings Committee researched the legislative and functional requirements.
DEC 1995	Difficulties emerged re. the site identified by the Buildings Committee.
JAN 1996	An alternative premises was identified for the off campus childcare facility supported by the University.
JAN 1998	A suitable site was identified close to the University's new library.
JULY 1998	A grant under the Employer Demonstration Initiative propelled the construction project into rapid action. The University's Executive Committee confirmed its commitment to secure the balance of funding required for construction.
SEPT 1998	The University's Deputy Registrar participated in Childcare Programme organised by the Irish Institute at Boston College.
OCT 1998	Design plans were modified to accommodate a number of features observed in childcare facilities in Massachusetts.
NOV 1998	Planning Permission sought.
APRIL 1999	The building project plan was finalised and tenders were invited.
APRIL 1999	Negotiation took place with selected tenderer on cost. Facility plans were reviewed.
APRIL 1999	A Childcare Taskforce was set up to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• appoint an operator• develop a policy on allocation of places• name the facility• equip the facility It was decided that an operator with childcare knowledge would operate the facility on a self-funding, stand-alone basis.
MAY 1999	Construction commenced.
MAY-JUNE 1999	Appropriate documentation was drawn up, tenders were invited, interviews took place and an operator was selected.
JUNE 1999	Following a competition, two students from the Limerick College of Art & Design were contracted to develop artwork for the facility.
28 JUNE 1999	Expression of interest was sought from staff and students.
6 JULY 1999	An open evening attended by the operator was organised.
7-28 JULY 1999	Firm expression of interest was sought and places were allocated in accordance with the policy of payment of a non-refundable deposit.
JULY-NOV 1999	The operator played a key role in equipping and decorating the facility. Valuable inputs were given from the Mid Western Health Board Childcare Advisor and the National Children's Nurseries Association National Advisor.
NOV 1999	Fit out and commissioning of building
8 NOV 1999	An orientation/introductory week for prospective clients commenced.
15 NOV 1999	Facility open and operational.
JAN 2000	The facility was officially opened by Minister John O'Donoghue.

The employers who participated in research for this book were asked what advice they would give to other employers who may be considering the introduction of a childcare facility into their organisation. Here are some of their comments:

"It is absolutely essential to conduct a thorough study of the costs involved. We had two cash-flow projections carried out. They differed considerably because one of them did not take proper account of the nitty gritty day-to-day costs like arts and crafts materials, etc."

"Talk to health board officers and show them future plans for the crèche. They will advise you in the important health and safety areas."

"It is more expensive to build a stand-alone facility. Costs can be greatly reduced if the facility is incorporated into a bigger building."

"If you choose to build a stand-alone facility, cut down on capital costs by securing a site serviced by an existing industry."

"Careful attention to project planning is required. The involvement of an operator (childcare specialist) at the earliest stage in the project is very important."

"Cash-flow projections should be based on the gradual take-up of places. Irrespective of latent demand for places, parents will exercise caution and they will want to see how the facility is operating before terminating their existing arrangements and 'jumping in'."

Money Matters

Tax breaks

In the last budget and through changes to the Finance Act 1998, the Irish Government has introduced various amendments to encourage employers to provide childcare facilities for their staff.

These amendments include:

- Exemption from **Benefit In Kind (BIK)** on childcare provided by the employer
- 100% **Capital Allowance** on the construction cost of childcare facilities

Benefit in Kind

The exemption from BIK applies to childcare provided by employers who:

- make available the premises for childcare alone.

or

- provide a service jointly with others, for example, other employers. In these circumstances the employer must be wholly or partly responsible for both the financing and management of the service.

or

- provide a service on a premises made available by any other person or persons. Also in these circumstances, the employer must wholly or partly finance and manage the childcare facility.

The exemption does not apply if the employer simply pays or subsidises the cost of an independent nursery or crèche to assist employees. In addition the childcare service must be fully compliant with **the Childcare (Pre-school Services) Regulations, 1996**. See **LAW page 7**.

Sandra's Story

Sandra has worked for a computer software development company in the Dublin area for the past eight years. She has two young children. Sandra is faced with a weekly childcare bill of £120 or an annual outlay of £6000. Sandra pays for childcare for 50 weeks in the year. It is the policy of the crèche to charge for every week with the exception of the two-week period in August when the crèche closes. It takes over £11,000 (before tax) of Sandra's income to pay for her childcare.

The provision of free or subsidised childcare with the added bonus of no BIK would be a key incentive to continue working with a company that is, at present, experiencing a serious skills shortage.

There is no doubt that offering subsidised or free childcare is a major advantage in recruiting staff. This bonus system could be used in structuring attractive remuneration packages for staff.

Capital Allowance

The recent amendments to the legislation have accelerated the capital allowance on expenditure incurred on or after the 1st December 1999 on the construction, refurbishment or conversion of a childcare facility. Now 100% of this type of expenditure can be written off in the first year. Previously the write-off rate was 15% for the first 6 years and 10% in year 7.

Capital Allowances

- The 100% write-off of construction for the lessor or the owner-occupier.
- The building must be used as a childcare facility for 10 years. If not, the allowances can be clawed back.
- This relief will be available to all childcare facilities whether provided by employers or private providers.
- The relief will be available to both owners and investors who wish to invest by way of a leasing arrangement.
- Because top executives may be paying the high rate of 44% income tax, employers may consider passing the capital allowances to this group to maximise the benefit.
- Note there is a cap of £25,000 on the offset of capital allowances and a cap of 13 investors per project

Funding Opportunities

Traditionally, government expenditure on childcare has primarily been targeted at children in disadvantaged circumstances and the community sector. Opportunities for private providers has been very limited, although some private facilities have secured modest funding, of a capital nature, from city and county enterprise boards, LEADER companies and local area partnerships.

Whilst primarily promoting quality childcare from an equal opportunities/disadvantaged perspective, the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme under the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform initiated the Employer Demonstration Initiative with an allocation of £842,000. (see page 14)

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform continues to have responsibility for a childcare programme under the National Development Plan, 2000 - 2006. Although the emphasis continues to be put on disadvantage, this latest programme provides some opportunities for private providers. A total of £250 million has been allocated to the programme over the next seven years.

Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000 - 2006

The main objective of this programme is:

- To improve the quality of childcare in Ireland
- To increase the number of childcare facilities and childcare places
- To introduce a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of childcare services

Types of funding include:

CAPITAL: To establish, renovate and/or upgrade childcare facilities for Community/Not-for-Profit groups

STAFFING: To support staffing costs for community-based facilities

CAPITAL: To build, renovate or upgrade childcare facilities for self-employed childcare providers catering for not more than 20 children at a time

Other Funding under the programme

National Voluntary Childcare Organisations: Developmental support for the national voluntary organisations.

Local Networks: To support the development of local childcare network initiatives.

Innovative Projects: To support innovative projects in the childcare area.

Training: To encourage and promote local childcare training models that assist in the enhancement of quality childcare provision.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has established a National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee, and during 2000 a County Childcare Committee will be formalised in each county. The key aim of these structures is to assist in the co-ordination of childcare, both nationally and locally, and to assist in the prioritisation of funding.

SOURCE: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, April 2000

As you can see from the above, the new programme of funding does not specifically target employers. However, opportunities may exist to develop partnerships with private providers or community childcare services.

Useful Addresses

Association of Montessori Teachers of Ireland

20 Vernon Gardens
Clontarf
Dublin 3
Tel: 01 8331537

Barnardos' National Children's Resource Centres

Christchurch Square
Dublin 8
Tel: 01 4549699
e-mail: info@barnardos.ie
Website: www.barnardos.ie

18 St Patrick's Hill,
Cork
Tel: 021 522100
e-mail: info@cork.barnardos.ie

10 Sarsfield St
Limerick
Tel: 061 411313

6 St. Brendan's Road
Woodquay
Galway
Tel: 091 565058

Childminding Ireland

49 Applewood
Turnpike Lane
Greystones,
Co Wicklow
Tel: 01 2871111
e-mail: info@childmindingirl.com
Website: www.childmindingirl.com

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Equal Opportunities Childcare Section
Mespil Rd.
Dublin 2
Lo-call 1890 20 90 30
e-mail: childcare-mail@justice.ie
Website: www.irlgov.ie/justice

IBEC – The Employers' Organisation

84 Lr Baggot St.
Dublin 2
Tel: 01 6601011
Website: www.ibec.ie

IPPA – The Early Childhood Organisation

Spade Enterprise Centre
St. Paul's Church
North King St.
Dublin 7
Tel: 01 6174833
Fax: 01 6711356

Irish Youth Foundation

Renault House
Kylemore Road
Dublin 10
Tel: 01 6261090
Fax: 01 6261072

The National Children's Nurseries Association

Carmichael House
Nth Brunswick St
Dublin 7
Tel: 01 8722053
Website: www.ncna.net

National Youth Council of Ireland

3 Montague St
Dublin 2
Tel: 01 4784122
e-mail: info@nyci.ie
Fax: 01 4783974

St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland

16 Adelaide St.
Dun Laoghaire
Co Dublin
Tel: 01 2806064
Fax: 01 2844764

