

PRESS RELEASE



**An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige**
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

Minister Zappone chairs meeting of the ‘Advisory Group on Reopening Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services

Monday 18th May 2020

Dr. Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, chaired the second meeting of the ‘Advisory Group on Reopening Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services’ on Friday (15 May 2020).

The Minister and the Department are continuing to make preparations for phased reopening of childcare services in line with the Government’s Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business.

Six sectoral representatives, nominated by the sector, participated in the group. These include representatives from the Association of Childhood Professionals (ACP), National Childhood Network (NCN), National Forum for Community Childcare Services, Seas Suas, Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) and Plé (an organisation representing academics in early childhood studies).

SIPTU is a member of the group in accordance with the requirement of the Return to Work Safely Protocol issued by Government on 9th May to consult with Trade Unions. Childminders are represented by Childminding Ireland.

The Minister said: "A phased reopening of early learning and care and school-age childcare services is outlined in the Government’s Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. I understand that providers, their staff, parents and children have very many questions and concerns about this at present. I recognised the importance of involving the sector from the very beginning of this process and their engagement to date has provided a wealth of information as we continue to work through a range of issues over the coming days and weeks."

Amongst other roles, the Group will be developing guidelines to support providers, their staff, parents and children return to familiar, albeit different, environments, in a phased manner over the coming months.

The Minister said: "I am very pleased to have chaired two meetings of the working group this week on reopening early education and childcare services. It is important that childcare staff and providers have the opportunity to sit around a virtual table to raise their issues in relation to reopening services and for me, as Minister, to listen to these views. This process will also enable us develop solutions to the challenges that exist. COVID-19 has reminded us of the importance of the early learning and care and school-age childcare sector to children, families and the economy."

As the first step to prepare to re-open childcare services, the Department is encouraging service providers to review the [Return to Work Safely Protocol](#), published by Government this week, but to be aware that assistance will be made available to them in the coming weeks to meet its requirements.

Various childcare specific guidance cleared by Public Health experts will be issued to services by the Department over the coming weeks.

The Department is also planning an opportunity for public consultation.

Ends