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## Letter from Dr Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to All early learning and care and school age childcare providers [and] All members of the Early Years Forum, CCC Managers, SIPTU and Federation

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**To:** All early learning and care and school age childcare providers  
All members of the Early Years Forum, CCC Managers, SIPTU and Federation

20th March 2020

Dear colleagues,

As you are all aware, we are in truly unprecedented times. The Taoiseach's address on 17<sup>th</sup> March was a clear message to us about the nature of the crisis that faces us.

My thoughts are with you all, and I want to assure you that my officials and I are working extremely hard to address all the urgent needs that are being brought to our attention.

I want to express my gratitude for your communications with us at the Early Years Forum, through telephone calls and emails with my officials, and for your submissions regarding possible solutions to the challenges that you face. I have been briefed on all of these communications.

We are working with a number of Departments, Agencies and teams and it may be next week before all our questions can be answered. For now, please be assured that we are working on your behalf. We are also engaged to do whatever is required to help our colleagues in the health service and other essential services at this time. We will communicate with you as soon as we have clarity on these matters so that decisions can be made.

As you are acutely aware, all early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) services were asked to close at 6pm on 12<sup>th</sup> March and remain closed until 29<sup>th</sup> March. My Department announced that payments of DCYA Funding Programmes would continue as normal during this closure period.

In my Department's FAQ document issued on 13 March 2020, it was noted that a significant proportion of the sector's income at a national level comes from the State.

It is envisaged that this State income will support many services to continue to pay staff, many on full wages, during this closure period.

I am aware however that, regrettably, for some employers in our sector, the lay-off of staff may be the only option available to them. Colleagues in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) have advised DCYA that a significant number of ELC and SAC employees have



already presented at Intreo offices throughout the country. I would ask that where possible, employers in the sector would explore any and all options available to them to maintain an employment relationship with their workforce and I strongly encourage employers and employees to seek the supports available.

I know from your communications with us, that you have a similar ambition. I note that the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection is to make further announcements with regard to these issues.

My officials and I are currently considering funding options for the period beyond 29<sup>th</sup> March and what conditions may need to apply so that we can best use the public funding available to support the sector during this time. An updated summary of supports available to sectors impacted by COVID-19 is being compiled by my officials and will be made available to you. We apologise for the delay in sharing this with you but we want to ensure it is absolutely accurate and hence we are working very closely with DEASP to finalise.

We will also continue to work closely with other Departments and Agencies to ensure that any further necessary steps that need to be taken are taken in collaboration, and that these steps are reasonable and proportionate.

It is my intention to hold an Early Years Forum meeting (virtually) next week some time when we have clearer answers on sector funding post-March. A couple of key meetings with other departments need to take place before that.

I understand that this is a very difficult time for you as employers, for your staff and for the families and children that you support. I wish to reiterate that I really appreciate all of your efforts to do what's right during these difficult and unprecedented times, as invoked by our Taoiseach on our National Day.

Best wishes

Dr. Katherine Zappone  
Minister for Children & Youth Affairs