

# CHAPTER THREE

## QUALITY

### *Integration of education and care*

- 3.1 The Government has made clear that its long-term goal is to integrate early education and care within a wider supportive framework of services for children and parents. Education and daycare services for young children, and services for their parents, should be better co-ordinated, and provided as close together as possible. The Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education, issued in 1997 by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, represents a shared view of what constitutes good quality of pre-school provision in the education and care sectors.
- 3.2 Responses to the consultation show that there are concerns among childcare providers about the different criteria applied by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the registration and inspection units within Health and Social Services Trusts and that there is a need for closer working to clarify for providers the respective roles and responsibilities of the two inspectorial regimes and the reasons for differences in standards. **ETI, SSI and registration and inspection units within Health and Social Services Trusts will work together to develop as far as possible common standards to inform inspection in early education and childcare settings.**

### *Registration and inspection*

- 3.3 Quality assurance for childcare is at present concentrated on registration, inspection, investigation and enforcement under the Children Order. The regulatory framework is supplemented by DHSS guidance on the suitability of service providers, premises and equipment; adult to child ratios; and the physical environment in which care takes place. **In response to concerns about differences between Health and Social Services Trusts in the standards expected, DHSS and SSI will promote training of registration and inspection staff to improve consistency in the application of the regulations and guidance associated with Part XI of the Children Order.**



## *Accreditation schemes*

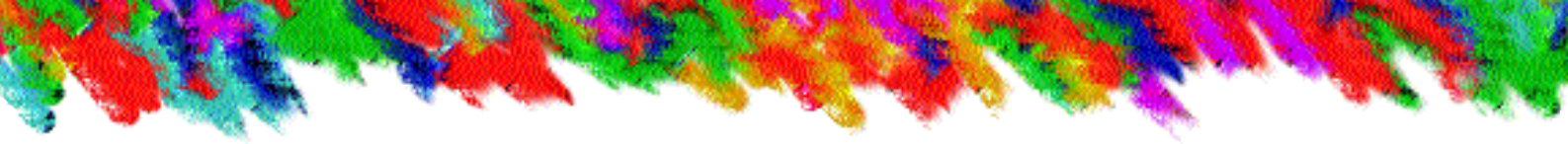
- 3.4 Statutory regulation helps to assure minimum standards, but childcare providers should be encouraged to go beyond that. Improvements in the quality of childcare can be supported in a range of ways, including accreditation schemes. Responses to the consultation called for a single accreditation scheme. **The Inter-Departmental Group on Early Years will invite relevant childcare organisations to work together with the group to develop common standards for accreditation in Northern Ireland.**

## *Good Practice Networks*

- 3.5 There was general support in the consultation for the development of Good Practice Networks in Northern Ireland. These may take the form of a network of associated services co-ordinated in such a way as to form an integrated response to children's and parents' needs within a local community. They will be expected to offer childcare and education, including education for children with special educational needs, and other services designed to support families, such as parenting skills, family learning and adult literacy. They will stimulate and disseminate good practice and offer support and training to other providers in their areas. **The Inter-Departmental Group on Early Years has set criteria and invited applications for the establishment of a small number of Good Practice Networks.**

## *Support for parents*

- 3.6 **Action to raise the quality of formal childcare will be complemented by support for parents and informal carers.** During 1999 the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment will be producing guidance for schools on teaching parenting skills. DHSS is working with the Parents' Advice Centre to strengthen their telephone helpline for parents; and Northern Ireland will be included in the National Family and Parenting Institute, which has been established to provide authoritative advice on parenting support issues. DHSS will identify other relevant elements of national family policy where action is required for Northern Ireland and put forward proposals for dealing with these.
- 3.7 The involvement of parents in their child's education has long been




recognised as instrumental in educational success at school, as well as having a positive effect on behaviour, and many schools already take active steps to involve parents as fully as possible in their work, through, for example, paired reading schemes, adult education classes on site and volunteer work.

**The Department of Education is working to increase parents' involvement and has secured some £600k across the 3 years 1999-2000 to 2001-2002 to establish pilot parenting groups across Northern Ireland.**

Education and Library Boards are currently working up proposals, but it is envisaged that these groups will be focussed on providing support to parents of pupils who are experiencing difficulties at school. The broad objective will be to help parents develop and increase their interest in, and contribution to, their child's education and thus to support the pupils concerned.

### *Qualifications and training*

- 3.8 The people delivering childcare are crucial to the quality of service provided. Many of them are volunteers or part-time employees with little or no career structure and little recognition of their skills and experience. In many cases, existing workers in the childcare field who have experience but no recognised qualification cannot afford to pay fees to gain a qualification. Existing mainstream vocational training programmes do not address the training and assessment needs of people already in employment in the childcare sector.
- 3.9 The Government is developing a national 'climbing frame' of qualifications to help people enter, move and progress in the childcare sector, as well as to move to other related occupations. The framework will map out the equivalencies between the various forms of training, qualifications and progression routes and relate these to NVQs. Within the framework there will need to be training on entry to the profession, ongoing skills training, support for working towards qualifications, and continuous development to keep skills updated and to enable progression to higher levels and into different areas of work. **The Inter-Departmental Group on Early Years will promote the use of the national 'climbing frame' of qualifications in Northern Ireland.**



3.10 T&EA will develop a childcare training strategy for Northern Ireland, in consultation with other relevant Departments and other stakeholders including employers in the sector and the National Training Organisations, and will aim to ensure that the resources available are used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

## *Recruitment*

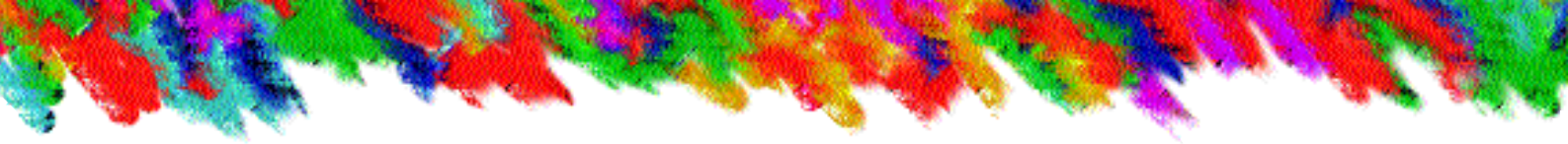
3.11 The increases in childcare provision required by this strategy will also require more new staff to be recruited into the field. In particular, the expansion in out-of-school childcare will need more people trained in playwork and youth work to work with older children. An early task will be to raise awareness among potential recruits of the opportunities available in work with children. **T&EA is working towards providing 1,250 training opportunities in childcare through the New Deal by the year 2002.**

3.12 Recruiting the right people to work with children also involves making sure employers have sound recruitment and employment practices, as well as good supervision procedures. **Under the strategy, more information will be available to parents on the standards required of those working in formal childcare.**

3.13 **The introduction of the minimum wage will ensure that childcare workers' pay does not fall short of a decent minimum.** Better pay and a better defined progression route for childcare workers, in conjunction with greater information for parents on the skills possessed by childcare workers, will help to raise the standards, status and attractiveness of childcare as an occupation.

## *Research*

3.14 It is important that the implementation of the strategy is fully informed by the most up-to-date research evidence available. **The Inter-Departmental Group will take forward the current research project on *Effective Pre-school provision in Northern Ireland* and will consider further research as the need arises.**



# CHAPTER FOUR

## ACCESS

- 4.1 The Government wants to ensure that a range of good quality childcare is available in every community to allow parents to choose childcare which meets their needs. A substantial increase in the number of childcare places available in different settings is essential to the success of *Children First*.

### *Sure Start*

- 4.2 Provision for children under 4 will be enhanced through the implementation in Northern Ireland of the Sure Start programme, adapted as necessary to Northern Ireland's particular priorities and circumstances. This programme aims to work with parents and children under 4 in areas of social disadvantage to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of pre-school children to ensure they have the best start in life. Sure Start is intended to build on evidence of what works well and will involve a range of services including early education and play, childcare, healthcare and family support. It will be important to incorporate and enhance existing services aimed at helping families in need. **An additional £9.9m over the period to March 2002 will be made available to support the implementation of Sure Start. The Inter-Departmental Group will work with the Childcare Partnerships to set up the first Sure Start programmes by April 2000. Detailed guidance will be issued in September.**

### *Pre-school education*

- 4.3 The Government is committed to providing a good quality pre-school education place for every 4 year old whose parents wish them to have it, and to extend this entitlement to 3 year olds over time. These commitments have been translated to suit Northern Ireland circumstances and are being delivered through the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme. **Some 4,500 additional pre-school education places have already been made available, and by 2002 we aim to have another 4,700 places available. This will cover 85% of children in their pre-school year.**



## *Out-of-school provision*

**4.4 As part of the Government's strategy for widening the benefits of the National Lottery, £9.9 million will be available through the New Opportunities Fund from 1999 to 2003 to support the establishment of out-of-school childcare in Northern Ireland.**

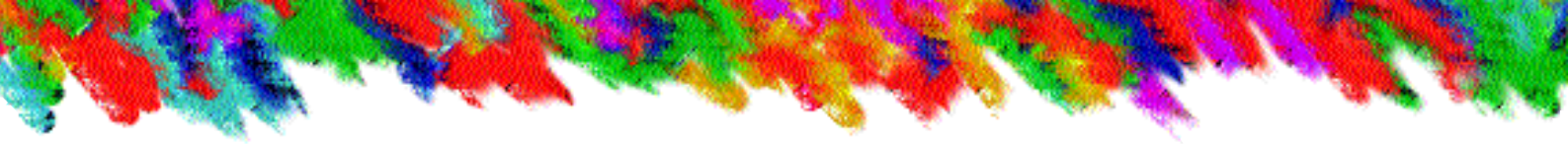
This investment will allow an expansion of about 12,000 places. The aim is to have an out-of-school project available in every community. In addition, funding will be available for out-of-school learning activities designed to enhance educational attainment. Some of these projects will include a childcare element. This will serve to strengthen the links between childcare and education services.

## *Meeting special needs*

**4.5 Plans for the development of childcare services (see para 7.4) will be required to meet the needs of all families,** including those where the children have special educational needs or disabilities; those from ethnic or linguistic minority communities; and families living in isolated rural communities.

## *Affordability*

4.6 The Government wants to ensure that those who need good quality childcare can afford it. **The Working Families Tax Credit will mean a fairer deal for around 1.5 million working families with children throughout the UK, including support for childcare costs.**



# CHAPTER FIVE

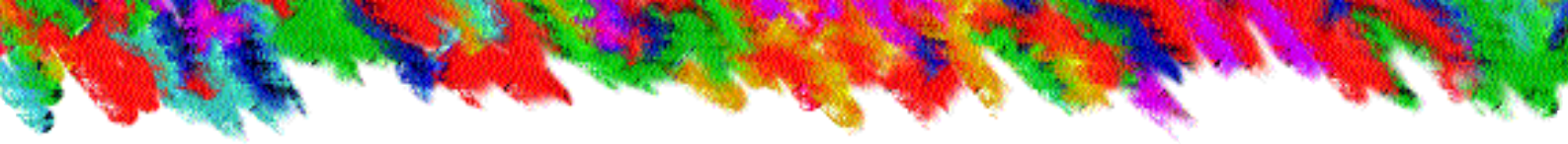
## CHILDCARE AND WORK

### *Government's role*

- 5.1 **The Government is reviewing arrangements for maternity leave and pay**, which are over-complex, outdated and unfair. Implementation of the EC Directive on parental leave is scheduled for December 1999 and the EC Directives on working time and part-time working provide opportunities for working parents to reconcile their earning and caring opportunities.

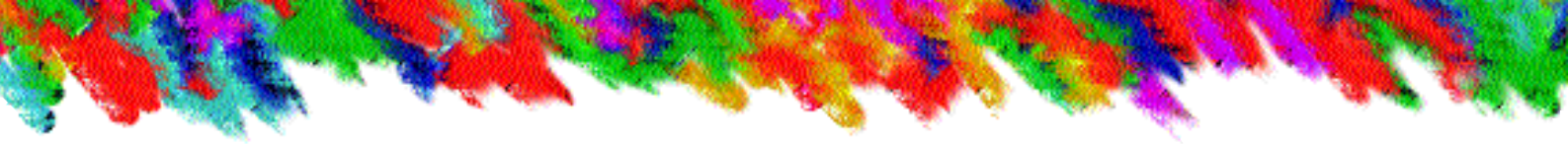
### *Employers' role*

- 5.2 Employers can play an important part in the development of childcare, and many have already recognised the strong business case for helping their staff to reconcile family and work responsibilities. The benefits to employers of 'family friendly' policies include the retention of skilled, trained workers, a wider pool of skilled personnel from which to recruit, and less stress and absenteeism among their workers. A significant number of employers provide some 'family friendly practices', such as flexible working patterns but there are also ways in which employers can help their employees to access childcare. **In co-operation with the Department for Education and Employment, Opportunity Now and other relevant agencies, T&EA will develop a communications strategy for promoting 'family friendly' employment in Northern Ireland.**



## *Government as an employer*

- 5.3 The Government has a significant role as an employer in Northern Ireland and recognises the importance of maintaining and reviewing the measures in place to help civil servants balance their work and family responsibilities. This approach is consistent with the Northern Ireland Civil Service's commitment to providing equality of opportunity for all its staff by seeking to recruit, retain and promote the best people available. Virtually all civil servants can now apply to vary their working hours, work part-time or job share or take a career break. There are various childcare arrangements within individual Departments and agencies.



# CHAPTER SIX

## INFORMATION

### *The requirement*

- 6.1 The increase in the supply of childcare places must be matched by improvements in the information available for parents, employers and childcare providers. Parents can only make good decisions about childcare for their family when they have access to up-to-date information on which to base their decisions. Good quality information can also be used by employers to support their employees who have childcare responsibilities. Good advice and information is also important for people who are considering offering new childcare services. Information held should be comprehensive, covering costs, opening times, vacancies, qualifications of provider staff and should be accessible in a wide range of facilities including libraries, schools, community centres, government public offices and primary care centres.

### *The sources*

- 6.2 Health and Social Services Trusts and organisations representing providers, such as the Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroup Association, PlayBoard and the Northern Ireland Childminding Association, are the main sources of information about childcare. In the consultation there was support for an agreed regional approach to the development of a comprehensive strategy to produce an information service, which could be delivered locally.
- 6.3 **DHSS will establish a Childcare Information Project Board with representation from all relevant agencies to identify childcare information needs and bring forward proposals about how these needs can best be met.** Funding will be made available for this regional development work. Childcare Plans will then be expected to demonstrate how information services in each Health and Social Services Board area will be developed to meet regional standards, building on Trusts' existing statutory role, so that all parents and employers can easily access the information they need, when they need it.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## PARTNERSHIP

### *Childcare Partnerships*



7.1 The effective delivery of this strategy will require a wide range of bodies to work in partnership: Government Departments, statutory agencies, employers, parents, voluntary and community organisations and childcare providers. Effective regional and local co-ordinating structures are needed.

**7.2 Four new Childcare Partnerships will be established to take forward this strategy.** Their key tasks will be:

- assessing the demand for childcare and family support for all children and the supply of places and services available to meet it;
- setting achievable local targets for filling the gap between existing supply and demand across the range of services;
- producing Childcare Plans (see para 7.4);
- ensuring that childcare information services are available which meet national standards; and
- raising the quality of childcare.

7.3 There will continue to be a single Partnership covering each Health and Social Services Board area. Each partnership will be expected to include adequate representation of community, parents' and employers' perspectives.



## *Childcare Plans*

- 7.4 **The new Childcare Partnerships will each be required to draw up a Childcare Plan setting out how childcare needs in its area will be met.** The Plan should identify priorities, timescales, local targets, responsibility for delivering different aspects of the strategy, and the use to be made of the various sources of funding available. The first plans should cover the year from April 2000 and will be required by January 2000.
- 7.5 In drawing up their Childcare Plans, Childcare Partnerships will need to pay particular attention to the wishes and needs of parents. They will be expected to promote a diversity of provision in partnership with providers.
- 7.6 **Partnerships will have to consider how they can best meet the needs of all children from all communities, including those with special social and educational needs and those with a disability.** They will need to recognise and respect the needs and expectations of children and families from ethnic or linguistic minorities and to reflect the principles and objectives of the Government's New Targeting Social Need initiative.
- 7.7 **The Inter-Departmental Group intends to issue guidance on the remit and membership of local Childcare Partnerships in September 1999.** This guidance will set out who should be represented on the Partnerships, what they will be expected to do and how they will be funded.

## *Planning and co-ordination at Northern Ireland level*

- 7.8 In view of the continuing interest of several Departments, there is still a need for a co-ordinating role at a Northern Ireland level to take forward work on this strategy. **The Inter-Departmental Group on Early Years will continue to carry out this function and will review the membership and remit of the Regional Consultative Forum on Early Years in the light of responses to the consultation on *Children First*.**

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## FUNDING



8.1 Existing funding for childcare comes from a mix of sources, including the Exchequer, parents' and employers' contributions, grants from statutory agencies, and special funds. Substantial additional Government funding has already been made available to Education and Library Boards to expand pre-school education (£10.4m in 1998/99) and to Health and Social Services Boards to meet their obligations under the Children Order. An additional £61m will be made available over the next three years, made up of:

- Sure Start (from April 2000) £9.9m
- Pre-school Education Expansion (3 and 4 year olds) £27.4m
- New Opportunities Fund support for out-of-school child care £ 9.9m
- Training under the New Deal for workers in the childcare sector £ 7.0m
- Childcare allowances for T&EA trainees £ 1.9m
- Childhood Fund (1999/2000 only) £ 4.9m

8.2 Some £0.6m will also be made available in 1999/2000 to Childcare Partnerships for infrastructure development.