



SIPTU Big Start  
Campaign

**Early Years  
Staffing and Pay  
Survey**

August 2022





## Foreword



**Low pay has caused a recruitment and retention crisis in Early Years. This is undermining the sustainability of services, quality for children and accessibility for parents. However, the introduction of a new 'Core Funding' scheme offers light at the end of the tunnel by supporting an historic first pay deal for Early Years Professionals.**

Historically, low pay has been a hallmark of the Early Years sector. According to the most recent POBAL Early Years Sector Profile 2020/2021, a majority of Early Years Educators earn below the Living Wage of €12.90 per hour, while a Lead Educator with an honours degree earns just €13.21 per hour on average.

Unsurprisingly this has resulted in an annual staff turnover of 19%.

The results of this survey show how these rates of pay impact on workers, parents, services, and children. Specifically, the survey reveals how recruitment and retention challenges are undermining the sustainability of services and quality for children.

However, there is light at the tunnel.

After years of campaigning by SIPTU and other groups, the Department of Children is significantly increasing investment in Early Years to address low pay. A new 'Core Funding' scheme is due to be introduced in September 2022. This investment will support an historic first pay deal for Early Years Professionals negotiated by SIPTU. A large majority of managers and staff believe that this pay deal, together with ongoing improvements in pay, will address the recruitment and retention crisis.

**Darragh O'Connor**  
**Head of Strategic Organising and Campaigns,**  
**SIPTU**

August 2022

## Key Findings

### Recruitment

The survey showed that recruitment is a major issue for Early Years services with 68% of managers and owners finding it 'extremely difficult' to recruit staff.

Poor pay was identified as the 'biggest obstacle' to recruitment (52%), with almost 36% citing it as a 'significant obstacle.'

Managers and owners also stated that issues over recruiting and retaining staff will reduce the number of children that can be cared for (67%), affect the quality of services (64%), and lead to difficulty in maintaining staff to child ratios (56%).

However, 73% believe that the new rates of pay<sup>1</sup> negotiated by SIPTU on behalf of workers will "help address the recruitment and retention crisis".

**"There is a shortage of good teachers out there because the pay and conditions are appalling for the amount of stress they endure and the years of study"**

*Comment from respondent*

### Retention

For those working on the front line, 39% of Early Years staff are actively looking for a job outside their profession. This increases to 41% for Lead Educators who generally have higher qualifications.

Low pay is by far the biggest push factor across all grades (65%).

**"The lack of staff entering the profession brings a lot of stress and work on to those who are left due to very high turnover"**

*Comment from respondent*

Just 13% would recommend a career in Early Years to a friend or family member.

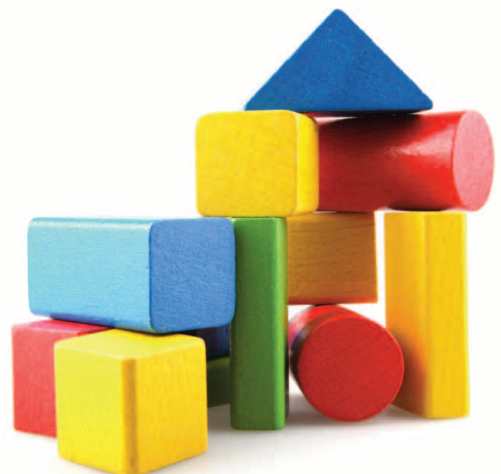
**"I love working in the early years sector, but I am not paid enough to stay long term. I am 53 and I need to secure my future financially. As it is, I live from paycheck to paycheck"**

*Comment from respondent*

The upcoming pay deal is also having an impact on workers future intentions. A majority of workers (65%) stated that the agreed rates of pay, and future increases, would make them more likely to stay in their profession.

### About the Survey

The Survey was conducted between 3rd – 14th August 2022 and was completed by 1,977 people. The profile of the respondents reflects that of the sector in terms of county, job role and service type.



# Survey Results

**Total Responses: 1,977**  
**Managers & Owner Managers Responses: 403**

### Did you have to recruit staff in the last 12 months?

Yes:	83.64%
No:	16.36%

### If yes, what was your experience of recruiting new staff?

Extremely Difficult:	68.07%
Difficult:	25.63%
Easy:	5.04%
Very Easy:	1.26%

### To what extent is low pay an obstacle to recruiting new staff?

The biggest obstacle:	52.38%
A significant obstacle:	35.53%
Somewhat an obstacle:	8.06%
Not an obstacle:	4.03%

### Have any staff left your service in the past 12 months?

Yes:	71.64%
No:	28.36%

### If yes, why did they leave?

To improve their pay in another job:	65.33%
Return to education/training:	13.33%
Retired/No longer working:	7.11%
Stress Burnout:	34.22%
Don't know:	8.44%
Other:	19.56%

### Are you concerned that problems recruiting and retaining staff will negatively affect service provision?

Yes:	94.91%
No:	5.09%

### If yes, what will be the impact?

Reduced number of children that can be cared for:	67.78%
Closure of service:	38.89%
Closure of room (e.g. baby room):	33.33%
Longer waiting list:	32.96%
Difficulty in maintaining child/staff ratios:	55.56%
Use of staff with limited experience:	50.00%
Impact on quality for children:	63.70%
Other:	9.63%

### If things stay the same, I will still be working in the Early Years Sector in 12 months' time.

Yes:	36.60%
No:	63.40%

## The Early Years pay talks have proposed minimum rates of pay

Educator:	€13 per hour
Room Leader:	€14 per hour
Graduate Room Leader:	€15.50 per hour
Deputy Manager:	€15.70 per hour
Manager:	€16.50 per hour
Graduate Manager:	€17.25 per hour

### Do you think these rates will help address recruitment and retention issues generally?

Yes, these minimum rates will help with recruitment and retention:	12.87%
Yes, if there are further pay increases year on year:	60.29%
No, these minimum rates will not help with recruitment and retention:	22.43%
No, these minimum rates will make recruitment and retention issues worse:	4.41%

### How will the proposed rates of pay impact on your future in Early Years?

I am more likely to stay in Early Years:	11.94%
I am more likely to stay in Early Years, if there are further pay increases year on year:	54.85%
These minimum rates will not influence my future in Early Years:	19.40%
These minimum rates make me more likely to leave Early Years:	13.81%

## Educator, Lead Educators & Deputy Manager responses

Respondents: 1,574

### I am actively looking for another job

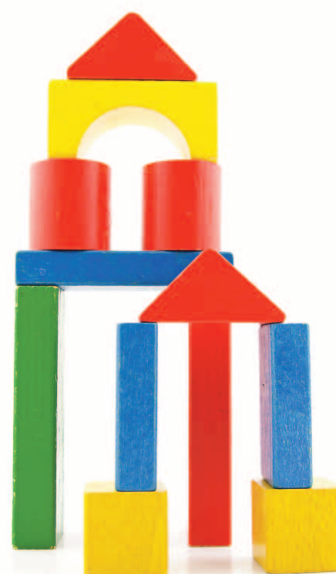
Yes, in another Early Years' service:	9.84%
Yes, in another sector:	38.88%
No, I am not actively looking for another job:	51.28%

### If you intend to leave your job, what would be the main reason?

Low pay:	65.05%
Lack of recognition:	5.59%
Lack of benefits (sick pay, pension):	13.32%
Unpaid contact time:	3.24%
Lack of job security:	2.13%
Stress:	10.67%

### If things stay the same, I'll be working in the sector in 12 months time

Yes:	20.44%
No:	79.56%



## The Early Years pay talks have proposed new minimum rates of pay set out below

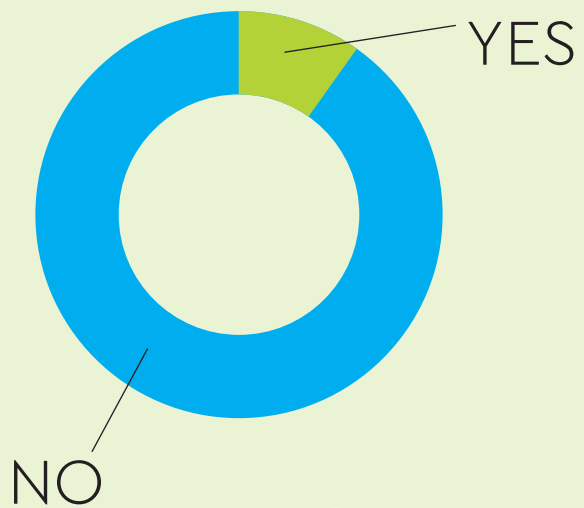
Educator:	€13 per hour
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Graduate Room Leader:	€15.50 per hour
Deputy Manager:	€15.70 per hour

### How will these rates of pay impact on your future in Early Years?

I am more likely to stay in Early Years:	11.53%
I am more likely to say in Early Years, if there are further pay increases year on year:	53.18%
These minimum rates will not influence my future in Early Years:	14.19%
These minimum rates make me more likely to leave Early Years:	21.10%

## Would you recommend a career in Early Years to a friend or family member?

Yes:	12.92%
No:	87.08%









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