Submission from Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta
to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism

Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (FNT) is an all-Ireland voluntary company which supports the promotion of services, care and education through Irish for children from cradle age onwards, but especially pre-school children. It gives ongoing support to ensure that child care of the highest standard is available through the medium of Irish. The appropriation of Irish is done through total early immersion with the pre-school children in the naíonraí. It is in the development of naíonraí and in the giving of support to childcare services that FNT works for the most part on the island of Ireland. FNT encourages the use of Irish in the early years through providing publications of material which is suitable to pre-school children and training in total early immersion for early years’ practitioners. FNT is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and we would like to draw the attention of the Forum to Article 30 of that Convention:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

Every child and parent has the right to get care and education services through Irish. There is great demand for childcare services throughout the country, 185 naíonraí outside the Gaeltacht (October 2011). For the past three years more than 40 new naíonraí services have been founded and this development shows the demand for early years’ services through the medium of Irish. There is a gap now in some areas re the provision of primary schooling through the medium of Irish because of this growth. Parents/guardians took a decision early in the life of their children to seek care and education through Irish for them, but some of them do not have the opportunity to undertake all-Irish education because of the barrier to the founding of new gaelscóileanna. FNT is co-operating closely with Gaeilscóileanna Teo on a plan for founding and extending gaelscóil education, a plan which comprehends the early years, primary education and post primary education, and we hope that that plan will be built on shortly.

Regarding the recommendation on a shared campus, FNT praises this approach especially when an
early years’ service is taken into account. It is extremely important that the transfer from an early years to primary school should be done in a measured way helpful to the full development of the child and to help towards favourable educational outcomes for every child. FNT and Gaelscoileanna Teo have carried out research this year on transfer from the naionra to the gaelscóil, *An Traein*, and recommendations are made and analysis done on the extensive work necessary to make that transition in a way that is favourable to every child. An example of this approach is to be found in the gaelscóil sector in Co Monaghan, where the VEC made a space available on the site of the Gaelcholáiste for the Gaeilscóil and for the Naíonra. There is ongoing co-operation between the staff and management of those services and first rate experience and knowledge of gaelscóil education is available to parents and children in that county.

At present there is pressure on early years’ services and on parents re the administration of the free pre-school year. The appropriate forms are filled in during the summer before the beginning of the ECCE year, when the children are 3 years old and upwards. The early years’ services, including naíonraí, support the parents in filling in the forms properly. Often parents do not understand that there is a choice of the kind of schooling available to children; they look for a ‘good school’ and/or a local school without thinking of anything else. According to the research of O’Kane and Hayes (to be published) there is a big information gap between providers of early education and primary schools and neither group has knowledge of the services of the other.

Much more administration and research will be needed from the DCYO and DES, not to mention parents, if the recommendation of the Forum on how to measure parental demand is proceeded with. It will be necessary to develop an information scheme in partnership with the relevant Departments of State and the other partners and education services. FNT recommends that information be provided, that is legible and comprehensible, regarding the kinds of education that are available and information on the various patrons and the approach that is being recommended by the respective patrons.

FNT welcomes the recommendation on religious education in regard to Ethics, Morality and World Religions. It seems to us that this recommendation is very much in keeping with that of *Aistear: Creathachaíl na Luath-Óige* (*Journey: Early Years Curricular Framework*), developed and published by the NCCA in 2009, in use already around the country in the early services and in the primary schools.
Aistear: Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige is based on four themes: Health and Welfare, Identity and Relationship, Communication, and Exploration and Reflection. FNT recommends building on this work as well as on the other Religious Education programmes available.

FNT congratulates the members of the Forum on the work done to date and we offer our best wishes for what is still to be done to provide the best opportunities and outcomes for the children of the country.

List of References


O’Kane M. agus Hayes, N. (le foilsiú). Supporting Early Childhood Educational Provision within a Cluster of DESI Preprimary and Primary School Settings. Baile Átha Cliath: An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna/Lárionad um Thaighde Shóisialta agus Oideachasúil
