



The Teen Parents Support Programme

The Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) consists of eleven separate projects funded mainly by TUSLA and the HSE and located throughout the country in a range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations. The TPSP engages with young people who become parents when they are under 20 years of age and supports them to build their capacity as parents as well as completing their own development as adolescents moving towards early adulthood. See www.tpsp.ie. During 2015 the TPSP supported 952 young parents, their children and families.

Young Parents and Education

Teen pregnancy is closely associated with early school leaving, both as a cause and a consequence, and with long-term dependence on state income support. The link between educational attainment, health, well-being and enhanced life chances are well documented. In particular, research has shown a clear link between the educational level of a mother and the well-being and future educational attainment of her family. For example, *Understanding Childhood Deprivation in Ireland* published by the Department of Social Protection and the ESRI (2012) found that child deprivation is linked not to the age at which a mother gives birth but to her level of education. The Report states: “*This highlights the importance of a basic level of educational qualifications for the mother, even apart from the link between education and earnings*” (P.42).

Experience of the Teen Parents Support Programme

A large part of the work of the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) involves supporting young parents to complete their education. In the experience of the TPSP, a young mother who drops out of school is unlikely to return at a later date to complete her Leaving Certificate. For this reason, the TPSP encourages and supports mothers to continue their education without a break if that is their choice. In Chapter 10 of *A Programme for a Partnership Government*, the Government undertakes to ‘*evaluate transition supports available to young people at all levels of the education (sic), with a view to promoting initiatives which support young people at critical points in their lives*’. Early parenthood is one of the most critical transition points that any young person can experience. These young people need additional interventions to enable them combine parenthood with remaining in second level education and to keep open the possibility of their progressing to Higher Education.

This submission will concentrate on the following:

- Childcare support for young parents in education
- The Home Tuition Grant for secondary school students on maternity related absences
- Supports for young parents progressing to Third Level Education and
- The need for data on young parents in education.

Childcare support for young parents in education

In the experience of the TPSP, where childcare is not available free within the family, the possibility of young mothers finding good quality affordable childcare elsewhere is limited. Apart from a small and very restricted contribution from Tusla's School Completion Programme (which is only available to a limited number of mothers living in 8 of the 11 areas covered by the TPSP) currently there is no targeted financial support for young mothers in secondary education. Similarly, for parents in Third Level institutions, Student Assistance Funds are inadequate to meet the costs of childcare. This makes the transition to Further Education unattainable for many parents, particularly for those who must move with their child to attend College.

A Programme for Partnership Government states, however, that 'we are committed to investing an extra €500million in education by 2021 through measures including childcare subventions.'

The TPSP proposes that some of this funding be directed to the support of young mothers in education. This could be done through one or both of the following:

- the introduction of a separate Scheme which targets young parents similar to the Care to Learn Scheme which exists in the UK, including Northern Ireland, and/or
- the extension of the Childcare Employment & Training Support Scheme (CETS) to those in mainstream education.

Care to Learn Scheme NI

In Northern Ireland this Scheme funds childcare and other associated costs for parents aged between 16 and 20 years up to £160 per week per child. There are other arrangements for parents under and over these ages. See <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/care-learn-scheme>.

CETS

Currently parents in mainstream education rely almost entirely for childcare support on the Community Childcare Subvention Programme (CCS). This provides a subsidy of €95 per week per full-time childcare place. Leaving aside the question of supply, even in a low cost community crèche the CCS leaves the parent paying a minimum of €70 per week from One Parent Family Payment (OFP) of €217.80 for a lone parent with one child. For most lone parents this is unaffordable. On the other hand the CETS scheme (which is currently restricted to Solas and certain ETB courses) requires a parent to pay a maximum of €25 per child per week for a full-time place. In some cases they may pay less than this.

Example

Community crèche in North Dublin used by mothers engaged with TPSP

Full cost of childcare place	Subsidy	Amount payable by parent
€165	CCS €95	€70
€165	CETS €145	€20

The TPSP is aware of the historical reasons why only some courses come with CETS funding. We strongly recommend that some of the additional investment referred to in *A Programme for Partnership Government* be used to subvent the childcare needs of young parents in education. In addition to increasing access to affordable childcare this proposal would also address the discrepancy whereby mothers attending Youthreach are eligible for CETS while mothers who wish to do their Leaving Cert in mainstream secondary schools are not.

In terms of costing this proposal, the precise number of pregnant or parenting students in second level education is not known as this data is not collected by the Department of Education and Skills. However, based on the number of teen births annually and extrapolating from data on its own referrals, the TPSP estimates that there are unlikely to be more than 250 mothers in second level education currently. The take-up of CETS or the Care to Learn Scheme is likely to be lower again. This is because, regardless of the subsidies available, most young parents, where possible, will prefer to have their children minded by a family member particularly when they are young babies. In addition, because of their age profile, the duration for which secondary school students need support with childcare is time limited and often very short. Furthermore, teen births are steadily decreasing year-on-year with a 50% reduction over the past decade.

The TPSP would be happy to work with the Department of Education and Skills to cost these proposals more precisely.

The Home Tuition Grant for secondary school students on maternity related absences

The Home Tuition Grant for students on maternity related absences makes a valuable contribution to pregnant and parenting students in second level education. When fully utilised, it can make the difference between a student remaining in school or dropping out or between a student getting the grades to continue to further education or not. However, this resource is under-used by both schools and parents. In the view of the TPSP one of the main reasons for this is that the conditions attached to the grant are overly restrictive and do not respond realistically to the demands and complexities of being both a secondary school student and a mother.

The TPSP is currently in discussions with the Home Tuition Section of the Department of Education and Skills about removing these restrictions so that the Grant has the flexibility it needs to serve its purpose i.e. to enable young mothers complete their second level education. Most of the suggestions put forward by the TPSP in this regard have no cost implications. These include allowing pregnant and parenting students avail of Home Tuition on a needs basis; allowing them to attend school part-time while in receipt of additional tuition and allowing them to avail of Home Tuition after school hours and at weekends when other family members may be able to provide childcare.

The TPSP hopes that this current consultation process and the Government's renewed commitment to supporting students at critical points in their lives will help expedite the current discussions with the Department of Education and Skills so that there is an adequate response to the challenges of being both a secondary school student and mother.

Supports for young parents progressing to Third Level Education

For all young people the transition to Third Level Education can be a demanding time in their lives and a costly undertaking for their parents. For young parents, however, there are

additional financial considerations. These include the cost of childcare (as outlined above) and additional accommodation costs for those who need to move away from home with their child. The fact that these additional obstacles exist is acknowledged by *A Programme for Partnership Government* which undertakes to ‘*commission an independent examination to identify the supports and barriers to accessing higher education for lone parents, and examine measures to increase participation*’.

In addition to the recommendation regarding childcare supports referred to above, the TPSP is proposing:

- that where students under 23 years of age are also parents, they be assessed for Third Level Maintenance Grants on their own means. This is consistent with other Government Departments (such as the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Health) which correctly treat these young people as heads of a separate family even when living in the family home. It is unacceptable that to be eligible to apply for the Third Level Maintenance Grant in their own right, young parents must be able to demonstrate that they are ‘estranged’ from their family of origin. This rule also acts as a barrier to those who are ineligible for grants or are on the margins of grant eligibility due to their parents’ income.
- that the Third Level Maintenance Grant be re-instated for mothers in receipt of BTEA and Rent Supplement. This is to take account of the additional costs referred to above. The TPSP is aware of student mothers who for various reasons (including the recommendation of Tusla Social Workers) must leave the family home and have to choose between remaining in rented accommodation or progressing to Higher Level education. The investment of a Third Level Maintenance Grant for the time-limited duration of a course at Higher Level will be quickly recovered when the beneficiary enters the labour market as a graduate.

These types of ‘joined-up’ and long range thinking are crucial to lifting parents and their families out of long-term dependence on social welfare, intergenerational poverty and underachievement.

The need for data on young parents in education

Finally, it is very difficult to plan and cost interventions and evaluate outcomes for young student parents without adequate baseline data. For this reason the TPSP recommends:

- that the Department of Education collect data on the number of student mothers in second level education and
- that the Higher Education Authority include young parents as an underrepresented student group and, as they do with other such groups, set targets for their access to and completion of Higher Education.

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