Rhetoric to Reality: 
Early Childhood Education 
Funding Policy

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Meg Moss
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Abstract

In the 1997 budget the Government increased bulk funding to early childhood education centres by 5%.

Since 1990 the amount of State spending on early childhood education has increased annually, more early childhood centres have opened and more children are attending. There has been a trend to a “New Right” approach, allowing market forces to regulate quality and supply. The current Government does not wish to foster welfare dependence and wishes to clarify that parents are responsible for the care and education of children under five. Given this political context the 1997 increase was a surprise to some stakeholders.

This research examines the goals behind the 1997 funding increase. It focuses on a particular, discrete injection of public money and analyses the rationale behind it.

The questions for this research are:

• What does the government intend to achieve by increased State investment in early childhood education and care?

• How is the success of this investment to be judged?

• Who makes the decisions on spending of government funding in centres?

• Does the decision maker’s understanding about the use of this money coincide with that of the policy makers?
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