

Firs Playgroup  
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BT61 7NP

28 November 2007

Caitriona Ruane **MLA**  
Minister for Education  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
Bangor  
BT19 7PR

Dear Minister

Following the launch of the Executive's Draft Programme for Government and Draft Budget for 2008-11 and as a member of **Early Years - the organisation for young children**, Firs Playgroup is asking for your support for the introduction of a Transformation Fund here, similar to the one already operating in England and Wales.

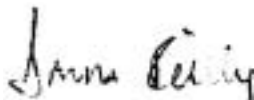
Staff in the childcare sector are keen to update their qualifications to ensure their knowledge and practice is up-to-date, reflecting current research on what is best for young children. This will guarantee that all children in Northern Ireland get **the** best possible start in life. Recent research has reinforced the importance of the education of early childhood educators as the study found that children fare significantly better in language skills development with teachers who have achieved a higher level of education.

However currently staff working in community or voluntary pre-schools and day care services here who want to further their careers are having to pay for their own training and professional development, at the cost of several thousand pounds per year, and also face a significant disparity in levels of pay with the statutory sector. In England and Wales £200 million has been allocated for this type of training.

We know that you supported the motion for a Transformation Fund in the debate that took place on the 26th June 2007 and we now urge you to work with your colleagues in other departments to allocate the necessary resources for a Transformation Fund.

I look forward to hearing your response to this matter.

Yours sincerely



Firs Playgroup