Conference Papers   Centre for Social and Educational Research

2010

Right by Children?:Considering ECEC Policy in Ireland Designing Policy Tools to Give Voice

Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes
Technological University Dublin, bernie.odonoghue@tudublin.ie

Noirin Hayes
Technological University Dublin, noirin.hayes@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: https://arrow.tudublin.ie/csercon

Right by Children? Considering ECEC Policy in Ireland
Designing Policy Tools to Give Voice

Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes & Prof. Noirin Hayes

DIT, Centre for Social and Educational Research
bernie.odonoghue@dit.ie

EECERA 2010

Presentation Outline

- Introduction: Policy Design Theory

- Part 1: Policy Tool Selection & Design in Ireland

- Part 2: Design of 'Subsidies' in Ireland

- Concluding Observations

Policy Design Theory

- Tools or Instruments that 'operationalise' policy
- Empirical research includes:

  "*not only technical aspects of a policy but also its implicit ideas, values and broader meaning in society*" (Schneider & Sidney, 2009: 112)

- Interpretive research that seeks to reveal meaning in what policy makers 'do' rather than (as well as) what they 'say'. (Yanow, 2007)
  - Comparison can reveal policy misalignment between policy 'goals' and policy 'means'. (Howlett, 2009)

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Policy Tool Selection and Design in Ireland

PART ONE

Range of ECEC Policy Tools Selected

- Tools Favoured:
    1. **Cash Payments**
    2. **Active Labour Market Programme**
    3. **Capital Grants**
    4. **Subsidies**
    5. **Tax-Relief for home based service providers**
    6. **Regulations**
    7. **Voluntary Frameworks**

- Anglo/American Model
    - No State Provision of Services
    - Reliance on Free Market & NGOs (targeting)
    - 2005 [Investment of 0.3% of GDP; OECD 0.6% Avg.] (OECD, 2010)

2004, OECD Childcare Costs and Benefits in % average wages
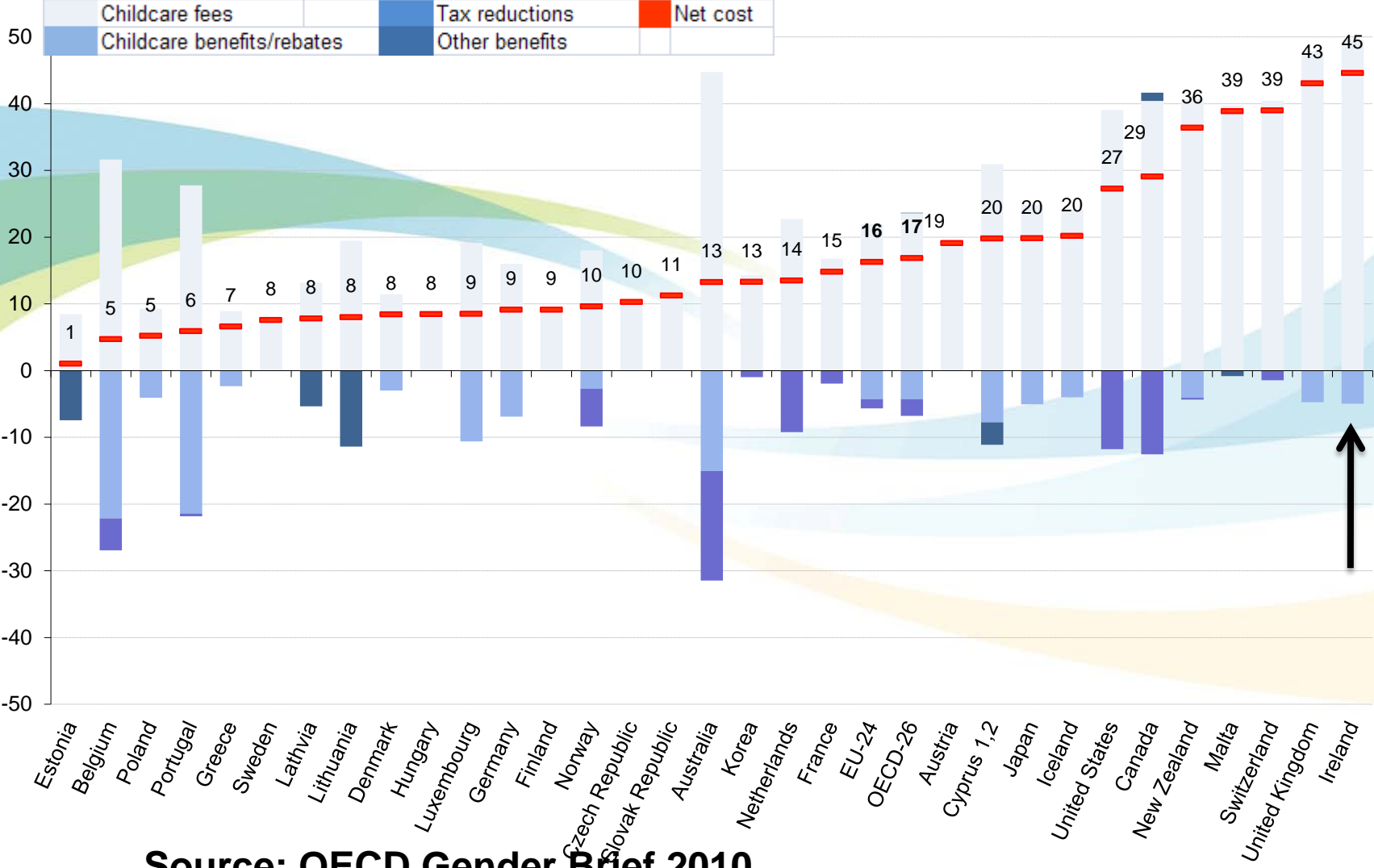
Source: OECD Gender Brief 2010

Net childcare costs for a dual earner family with full-time arrangements of 167% of the average wage, 2004

Range of ECEC Policy Tools Selected

1. CASH BENEFITS:

- **Historic Expertise:** History of High Reliance on Cash Payments as a *Family Support* Mechanism

Public expenditure on _family_ benefits in cash, services and tax measures, per cent of GDP, 2005

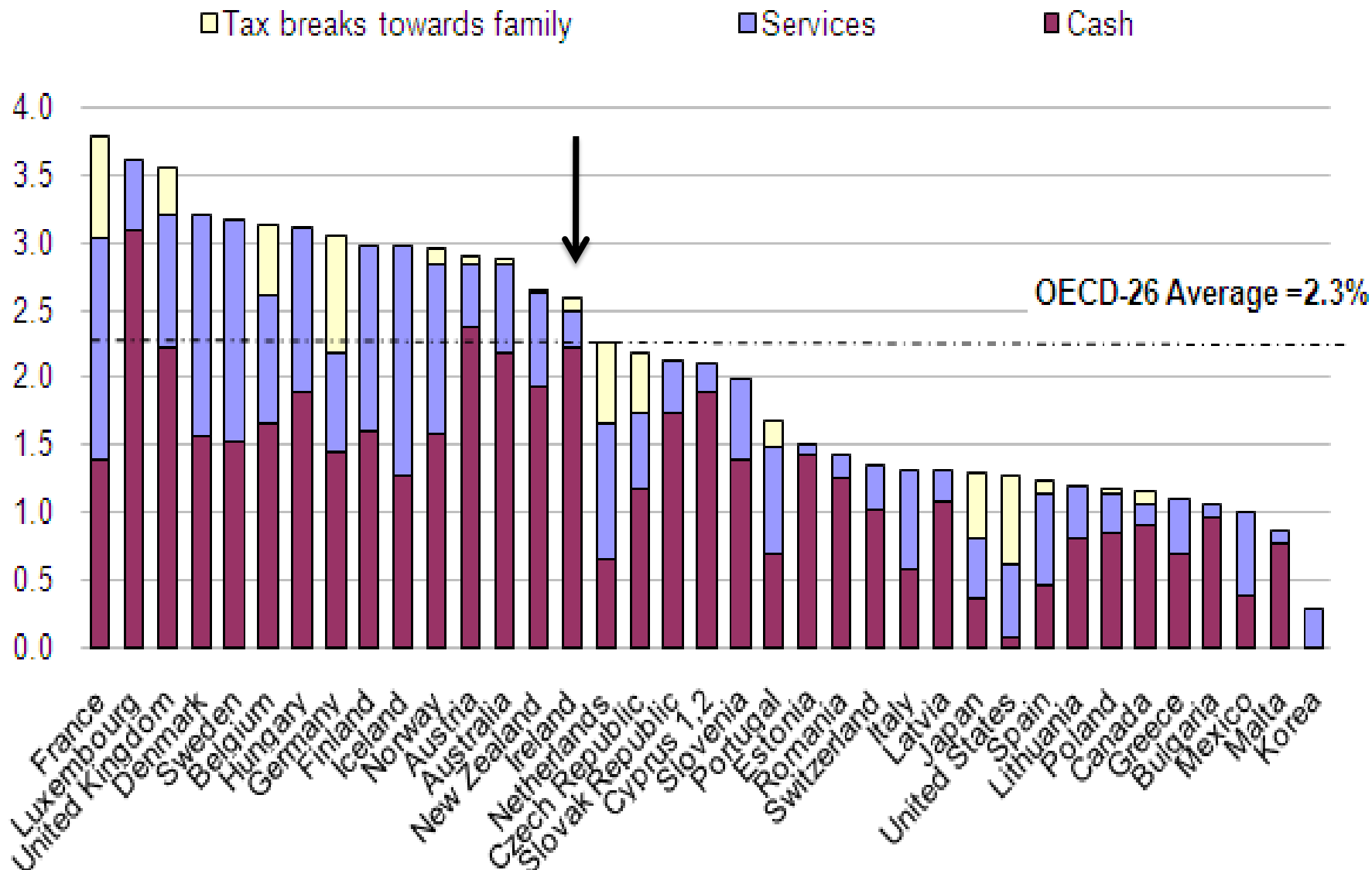
Source: OECD Gender Brief (2010)

Range of ECEC Policy Tools Selected

1. CASH BENEFITS:

- **Historic Expertise:** History of High Reliance on Cash Payments as a *Family Support* Mechanism

- **Universal Child Benefit Payment:** referred to nationally as ECEC mechanism but family support;

  – "The decision by Government to fund childcare expenses with Child Benefit misinterprets the original purpose of Child Benefit."(SIPTU Trade Union 2005);

- **Early Childcare Supplement:** 2006-2009; Dedicated ECEC support

  Features:

  – Cash Benefits not isolated for use for ECEC (O'Donoghue Hynes & Hayes 2010)
  – Indirect & Non-Coercive (Salamon 2002):
    - parental discretion; avoid the care/work dilemma (Salamon 2002)
  – Discourages female labour force participation (Lewis 2006)
  – Encourages use of *informal* childcare arrangements (OECD 2006)
  – High visibility (politically & budgetary) – expensive (Salamon 2002)

Range of Tools Selected

2. **Active Labour Market Programme** *Supply*
   - Labour for Non-Profit/Community and Voluntary Sector

3. **Capital Grants** *Supply*
   - Community/Non-Profit & Private (€500m)
   - Minor equipment grants for Childminders/Home Based & Parent &Toddler Groups

4. **Subsidies**
   - Staffing Grant (*abolished in 2008, replaced with the CCSS*) *Supply*
   - Community Childcare Subvention Scheme 2008 – CCSS (€50m approx) *Demand*
   - Free Pre-School Year in ECCE Scheme 2010 – FPSY (€177m approx) *Demand*

5. **Tax-Relief** for Childminder (up to €15,000 p.a.) *Supply*

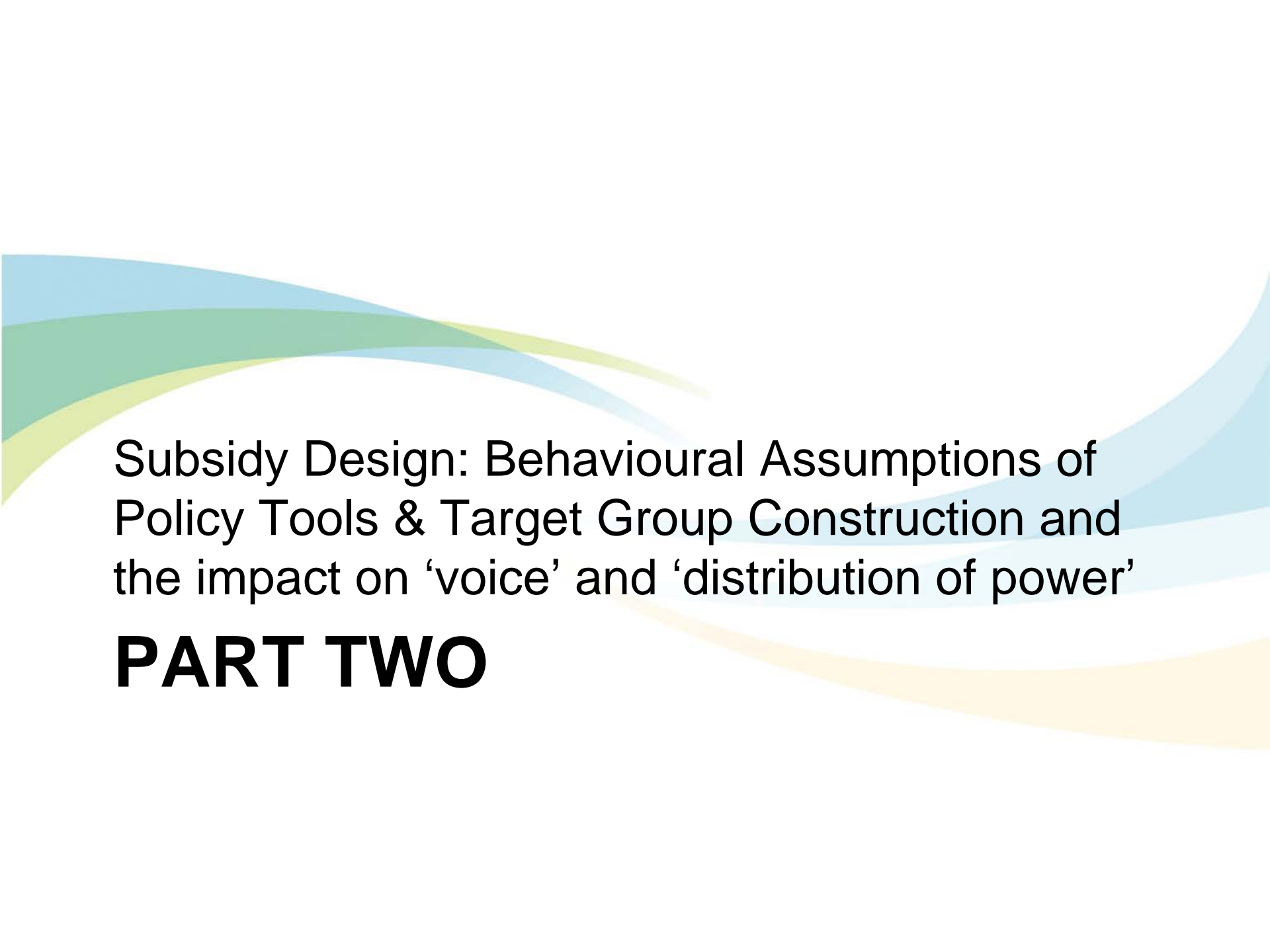6. Childcare **Regulations** (Health & Safety, Ratios)

7. Quality & Curriculum **Frameworks:** Siolta (CECDE 2006) & Aistear (NCCA 2009)

Characteristics of Tools Selected

- Contextual Timing:
  - Access to EU funding critical in addressing 'childcare problem' emerging from the 1990s. Post 2006 reliance of national exchequer funding. Post 2008 economic recession.

- Shift away from Cash Benefits and Grants over to **Subsidies**;
  - Decreased cost to State *but*
  - Forced to address dilemma of parent as 'worker' or 'carer'
  - Separation of "Education" & "Care" becoming more apparent;
  - Focus on child 'becoming' (Qvortrup, 1994)
  - Reduction in level of consultation: more obvious focus on efficiency rather than equity (Sapir , 2005)
  - Redesign of subsidies from Supply to Demand Side/Consumer subsidy funding model (OECD 2006)

Subsidy Design: Behavioural Assumptions of Policy Tools & Target Group Construction and the impact on 'voice' and 'distribution of power'

PART TWO

Schneider & Ingram's
Policy Tool Behavioural Assumptions (1993)

- Authority Tools: obey the law
  - grant permission or prohibit
- Incentive Tools: tangible payoffs
  - Inducements or charges/sanctions
- Capacity Building Tools: information provided to inform decisions
  - Outreach, information campaign, training, etc.
- Symbolic & Hortatory Tools: alter perception of policy preferred action
  - Images, symbols, labels persuade consistent with their beliefs
- Learning Tools: joint problem solving
  - Pilot projects, experimentation with other approaches

Increasing levels of participation and distribution of power

Policy Tool Revision: Social Inclusion

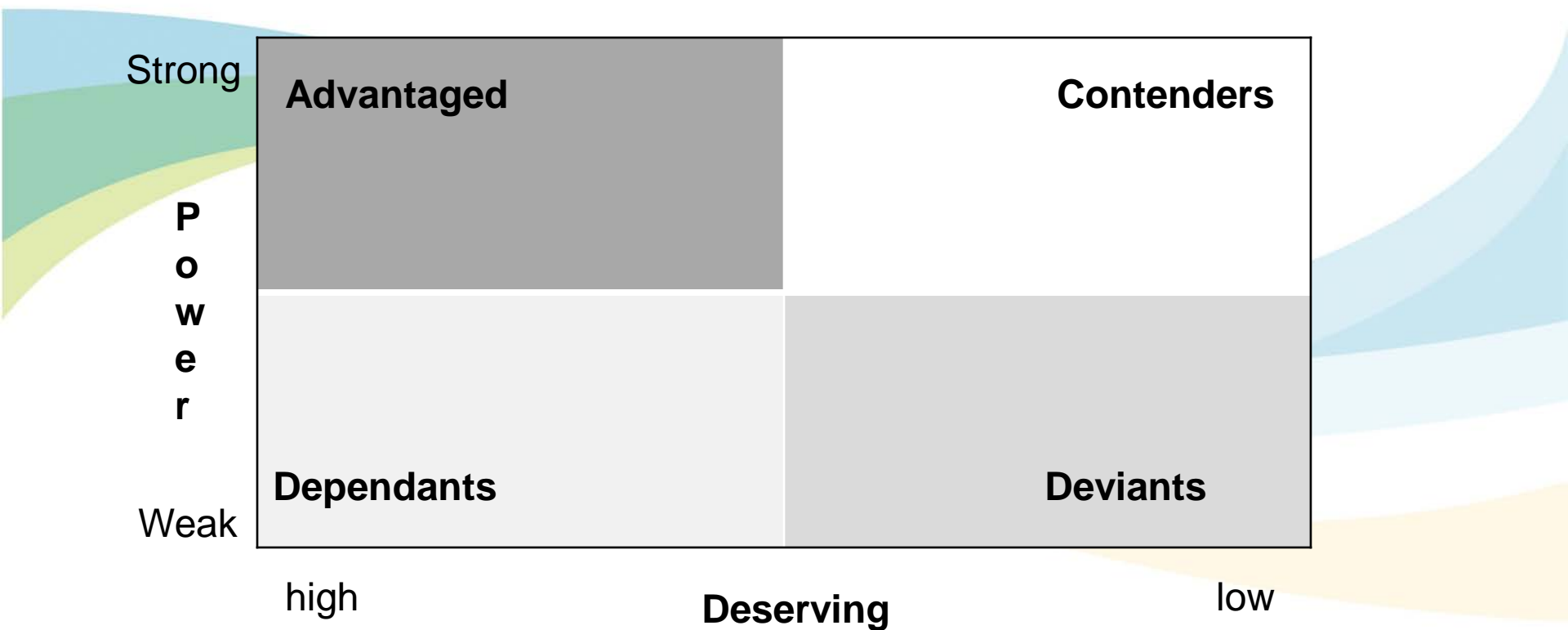| Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP 2000-2006) **Staffing Grant**	National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP 2007-2010) **Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS)**
• **Operational [SUPPLY] Subsidy** paid directly to community service provider to cover salaries. •**Criteria** for payment based on level of disadvantage of local area & size of the service. Objective to facilitate local parents return to work, education or training. • **Cost to Parents:** Service Provider developed a sliding scale of fees based on the needs of local parents.	• **Fee [DEMAND] Subsidy** paid directly to community service provider based on the number of qualifying parents using the service. • **Criteria:** Parents' welfare status determine entitlement to a sliding subsidy level. No subsidy for non-welfare parents. • **Cost to Parents:** Fee set at cost of providing the place less the subsidy, fee policy reviewed and approved by State.
Capacity Building – assess local need & part of wider regeneration of local area; **Learning Tool** – pilot phase with feedback to State; **Symbolic & Hortatory** – empowerment of *parents* via return to work education or training. CHILD INVISIBLE	**Incentive –** financial incentive to enrol children. Single measure of eligibility: welfare status. Limited consultation with service providers. Distanced from parents – present to provider to give information to qualify. CHILD INVISIBLE

Interviews with nine service providers & questionnaires completed by sixty two parents:

IMPACT within sample: Displacement of children of working and married parents; Target groups deeper in 'welfare trap'; Provider budgeting difficulties;
Decreased visibility of fathers; Tension between qualifying & non-qualifying parents; No cap on cost of fees to parent –ranging between €130 -€197p.w. full-time; €65–€107p.w. part-time

Mapping ECEC Subsidy Target Groups in Ireland

	high **Deserving** low
Strong	**Advantaged** **Contenders**
Power	
Weak	**Dependants** **Deviants**

Adapted from Schneider & Ingram 1993

Subsidy Design for Different Target Groups

| NCIP **Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS)**	NCIP **Free Pre-school Year in ECCE (FPSY)**
Targeted Social Inclusion Measure **Aim**: "*provide quality childcare services at reduced rates to disadvantaged parents*" (OMCYA 2008) **Criteria**: Welfare Status of *Parent* **Quality**: Symbolic rhetoric, no mechanism identified to address quality above legal requirements to comply with regulations **Parents:** present themselves as an applicant; no problem solving capacity; possible stigmatisation. *Dependent* **Children:** invisible & *Dependent*	**Universal Entitlement** **Aim**: "*provide children with their first formal experience of early learning*" (OMCYA, 2009) **Criteria**: Age of the *Child* **Quality**: Minimum staff qualification levels set and additional subsidy paid for more qualified staff. Must adhere principles of National Quality Framework. **Parents' Capacity Building role:** Parents encouraged to enrol service providers into the scheme. *Advantaged* **Children:** *Dependent*
Service Providers: Gate Keepers; Reliant on State for funding; representative groups funded by State–revision of role; individual negotiations; *Contenders/Dependent* **Overall Design: Opaque & Incremental with frequent use of symbolic rhetoric.**	**Service Providers**: individual negotiations; Mobilised but positive press difficult to get; Cap on Income; *Contenders /Dependent* **Overall Design: Opaque & Incremental with frequent use of symbolic rhetoric.**

Mapping ECEC Subsidy Target Groups in Ireland
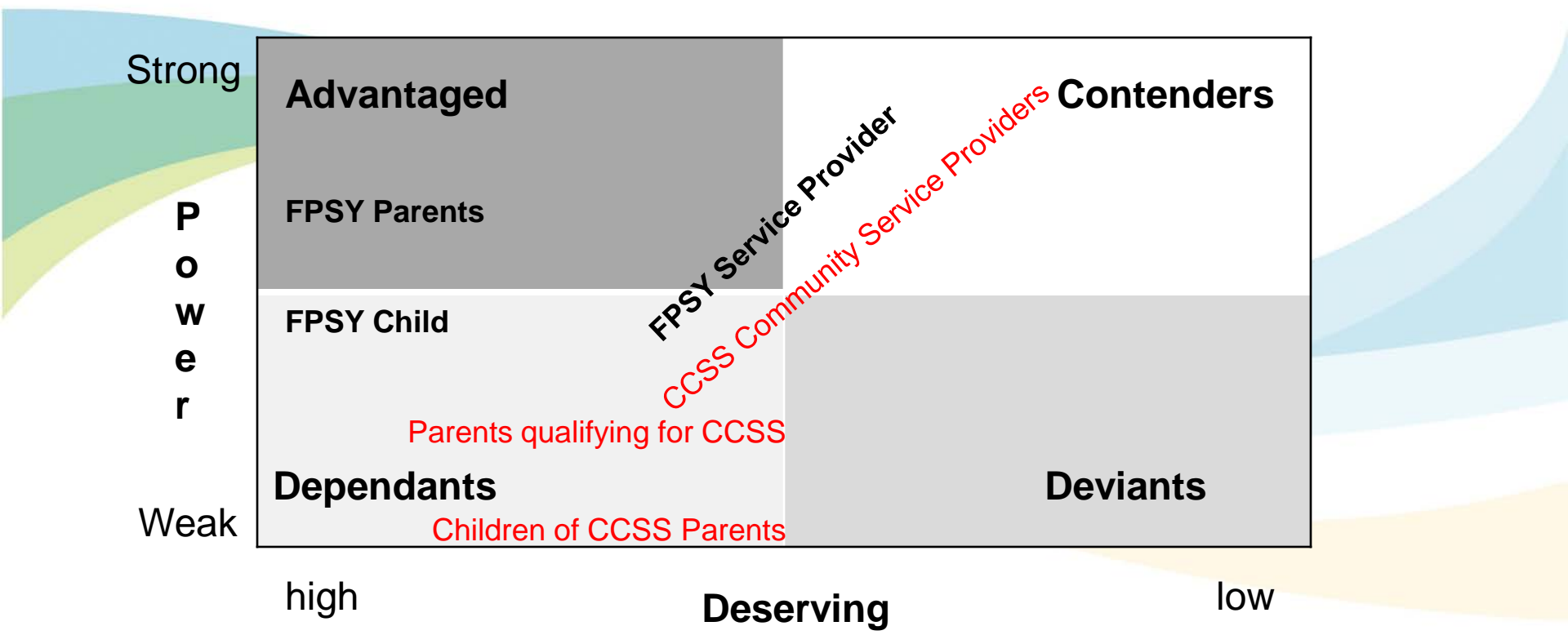
Adapted from Schneider & Ingram 1993

Concluding Observations

- In Ireland a review of Policy Tool selection and design reveals a misalignment (Howlett 2009) between the 'policy goal' to develop quality supports and services that focus on children's needs (Ireland, 2000), and the 'policy means' selected to realise these goals under the NCIP.

- General Conclusions:
    - Weak Commitment to 'Supply-Side' funding & Quality
    - Low financial commitment to ECEC relative to Family Supports
    - Capacity Building, Symbolic & Hortatory and Learning Tools facilitate **participation, voice and equitable distribution of power.** These tools are frequently reserved more 'powerful' and **advantaged** groups.
    - Incentive Tools when designed with a negative social construction of the target group as 'powerless' although deserving, tend to result in stigmatisation and perpetuation of stereotypes, while also inculcating a sense of "**incapacity, lack of deservedness, and culpability for their own problems**" (Schneider & Ingram, 1990:523).

- Recognition of Children's Rights increase the expectation of receiving benefits from policy. Rules designed to mandate actions taken, not discretionary.

- A shift needed in the structural prioritisation of efficiency over equity

THANK YOU

bernie.odonoghue@dit.ie