



Developing the workforce in the early childhood care and education sector Consultation document



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Foreword

The generation of a Workforce Development Plan for the early childhood care and education sector is a key element of the Government's commitment to the sector and will provide an important support to the implementation of the newly announced free pre-school place for children in the year prior to commencing primary school. The publication of this consultative document is an important step towards the finalisation of this plan.

The research reports which support the contents of this consultative document set out the background to the development of the early childhood care and education sector and update the occupational profiles associated with those working in the sector. They examine the profile of the current workforce and consider a number of important questions about the nature of learning for those entering into the workforce and for those already in the workforce.

I would like to invite all partners involved in early childhood care and education to consider the issues raised in this consultative paper and to engage in a proactive way in the consultative process that is being organised. It is very important that all involved in the sector engage effectively in the consultation process given the importance of the sector and of ensuring that the workforce has the skills required to engage positively with the care and education of our youngest citizens.

Barry Andrews
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Introduction

This consultative document provides an overview of the key issues that have emerged from the research phase of the development of the Workforce Development Plan for the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector. These issues are dealt with in-depth in the full report and accompanying background papers. This summary also includes a feedback template to facilitate consultation with interested stakeholders.

Rationale

The National Childcare Strategy 2006 – 2010 outlines a programme of investment to further develop the childcare infrastructure to meet the needs of children and their parents for quality early childhood care and education. As a quality improvement measure, the importance of a trained workforce for the future development of childcare services is recognised. The commitment given in the National Childcare Strategy is to produce a Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector which would look at the role of education and training programmes and how they can support the childcare sector by increasing the number of trained childcare personnel.

To produce the Workforce Development Plan, an inter-Departmental group was set up drawn from the funding Departments such as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Education and Science and their agencies including FÁS and the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education¹ (CECDE). Their work was supported by a sectoral standards sub-group drawn from the Awarding Bodies² and from the training providers. Membership details can be seen at Appendices A and B of the full version of this report.

In working towards the Workforce Development Plan, the 2002 *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in Early Childhood Care and Education* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform [DJELR], 2002) was validated against later developments in the sector to assess its continuing relevance. The outcome of this validation process has been issued as a background paper. The background papers also include:

- An analysis by FÁS of the demand and supply of labour in the childcare related sector.
- A comparative mapping across the 2002 *Model Framework*, *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning.
- An analysis of a 2007 survey of the educational attainment of the workforce.
- An analysis of course provision at Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) level.
- An analysis of Future Skills Needs in the Childcare sector in Ireland (FGS Consulting, forthcoming).

¹ The CECDE closed on 30th November 2008

² The Awarding Bodies are the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology.

The Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector will also build on the analysis of Ireland's labour market and skills needs for the period to 2020. This analysis was carried out by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) and reported on in the 2007 publication *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy*. The National Skills Strategy examines the skills needs of the economy as a whole and sets out its vision of an Ireland where a well-educated and highly skilled population contributes optimally to a competitive, innovation-driven, knowledge-based, participative and inclusive economy.

Consultation

It is planned that consultation on the Workforce Development Plan will take place over the next three months. To facilitate and structure this consultation a set of core questions, which have emerged from the background research, have been incorporated into a feedback template which is to be found at the end of this document, in the full version of the report and on the OMCYA website. The template can be completed online or downloaded and completed in hardcopy and returned to The Early Years Education Policy Unit, Floor 1 Hawkins House, Hawkins Street, Dublin 1 or online to earlychildhood@education.gov.ie before end September 2009.

Stakeholder organisations are also invited to make written submissions concerning the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector. These will be published online and will be included in the analysis of the consultation process. It is planned that a consultation event will be held to provide an opportunity for feedback and discussion based on the outcomes of the consultation process. Details of this event will be communicated once the consultation time period has closed.

Terminology

Despite the fact that, historically, the term 'childcare' is used to refer to services for children aged birth to six years, it is evident that it cannot be interpreted narrowly and should be understood as interchangeable with 'early childhood education' and with the more widely used and accepted term of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Recent national policy initiatives such as the development of *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning (NCCA, 2009), have further embedded this term within the lexicon of practice in early childhood. The recently announced free pre-school place for children in the year before attending primary school will also bring greater cohesion to the nature of children's experiences in a range of early childhood settings.

This definition of ECCE incorporates a broad range of workers in services targeted at the birth to six years age range including, for example, full and part-time day care, sessional pre-schools and playgroups, childminders and after school clubs. Staff working in infant classes or in the Early Start programme within the primary school system are not included.

Data

The preparation of this discussion document necessitated the collection and analysis, for the first time, of a significant amount of data from a wide variety of sources. The availability of good baseline data is recognised as an essential prerequisite to sound policy development. There are gaps in the data which will be addressed with the development of a national data strategy which will support policy decisions on the development and delivery of services to children.

The Key Challenges

The background information on the ECCE sector has yielded several important insights into the nature of the current ECCE workforce and the key challenges that must be addressed by the development plan if this workforce is to meet the future demands of practice and service delivery. These key challenges are summarised briefly here.

Changing Practice Environments

The current ECCE workforce has developed historically in response to a diverse range of needs for out-of-home care and education for young children. In the majority of instances, these needs were met by community, voluntary or private interests and operated largely without State intervention. Since the late 1990s, the national context for the delivery of ECCE services has changed dramatically as the State has become proactive in supporting the development and delivery of a broad range of service provision. The research data, gathered in preparation for the publication of this document, clearly shows that the impact of State support, in terms of both Regulation and funding, on the ECCE workforce has been to encourage and promote a more qualified profile for many practitioners. In light of the established relationship between the qualifications profile of the ECCE workforce and the quality of both service provision and outcomes for children, this is a welcome development. However, despite the progress that has been made in a relatively short space of time, it is evident that more attention needs to be paid to the development of the ECCE workforce if future service provision and national and international policy commitments are to be met.

Conclusion

Current and future policy commitments regarding the development of early childhood care and education services in Ireland reinforce the need for developing the workforce.

The Demand for Education and Training

It is clear from the survey data in the full version of this report that the most significant change in the profile of the workforce between 1999, when ADM³ gathered data on the qualifications of the ECCE workforce, and today is the general rise in attainment levels of all staff in centre based settings. The findings of the 2007 Department of Education and Science survey of the ECCE workforce showed that 41% of staff had achieved an ECCE related qualification at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications, 11% had achieved a Level 6 qualification and 9% had completed qualifications at Level 7 (bachelors ordinary degree) or higher. Only 12% of the workforce had no formal qualifications at all with the remainder achieving minor awards or awards at Levels 1-4 of the NFQ. Despite this welcome progress, there are challenges regarding the demand for education and training in ECCE into the future. Firstly, new entrants to the field need to be appropriately qualified, secondly, unqualified or under-qualified practitioners already working in services need to become appropriately qualified. The appropriate qualification may be Level 5, Level 6 or higher depending on the role and level of responsibility. Qualified people already working in the sector also need to be facilitated to progress to higher levels.

³ Area Development Management now known as POBAL

Conclusion

In developing a Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector, the current profile of the ECCE workforce presents a number of challenges that relate to both pre-service and in-service education:

- 1. To ensure that all new entrants to the workforce are appropriately qualified for their role and level of responsibility.**
- 2. To afford unqualified practitioners the opportunity to achieve a Level 5 award.**
- 3. To facilitate those holding Level 5 awards to progress to higher levels.**

Meeting this Demand

While the Workforce Development Plan needs to take initiatives on both pre-service and in-service education and training, the challenges and strategies associated with this are complex. They can be characterised as relating to two distinct issues, the design and relevance of education and training programmes and supporting learners' engagement with and completion of these programmes.

Design and Relevance of Education and Training Programmes

In 2002, an extensive consultation process with a broad range of stakeholders in the early childhood care and education sector in Ireland resulted in the publication of *Quality Childcare and Lifelong Learning: a Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development for ECCE in Ireland*⁴. The main purpose of this Framework was to achieve sectoral consensus on the core values, content and practice that should inform national standards for education and training courses at all levels in ECCE. In effect, this Framework was prepared to support the setting of sectoral standards for national awards, as detailed in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. Sectoral award standards would help to ensure that all nationally accredited education and training programmes would adequately prepare practitioners to meet the demands of practice. This process is now underway within the Awards Councils⁵ across a range of sectors, and is soon to commence for ECCE.

While the *Model Framework* achieved a high degree of consensus across the ECCE sector, there have been, since then, a number of important policy initiatives relating to qualifications and practice in ECCE. Two cross-referencing exercises were carried out to ensure that the content of the *Model Framework* continued to be valid and reliable for the purposes of contributing to the setting of sectoral standards for national awards in 2009.

The first of these exercises cross-referenced the occupational profiles in the *Model Framework* with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFO) and agreed an appropriate level of award for each occupational profile descriptor. The cross-referencing resulted in the following mapping:

⁴ Hereafter referred to as the *Model Framework*

⁵ National Awards Councils comprise the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)

Occupational Profile from the 2002 Model Framework	NFQ Level	Comment
Basic Practitioner	Level 4	This may need to equate to a major award or the best fit may be to a minor or special purpose award at that level.
Intermediate Practitioner	Level 5	This would generally equate to a major award (FETAC Level 5 Certificate) while it may also equate to a minor or a special purpose award.
Experienced Practitioner	Level 6	This would generally equate to a FETAC Advanced Certificate at Level 6.
Advanced Practitioner	Level 7/8	This would equate to at least an Ordinary Bachelor Degree.
Expert Practitioner	Level 8/9	This would equate to at least an Honours Bachelor Degree.

The second exercise cross-referenced the occupational profiles in the *Model Framework* with *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework in Early Childhood Education and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning. These latter documents have both undergone rigorous, evidence based development processes, including extensive consultation and directly impact on the nature and expectations of practice in ECCE. The outcome of this analysis showed a high degree of coherence between the three documents and proved the continued validity of the *Model Framework*. The two practice frameworks, *Síolta* and *Aistear*, should be referred to in the setting of sectoral standards for national awards as they are important national guidelines and benchmarks of professional practice in ECCE into the future and supplement the *Model Framework*.

Conclusion

It is considered that the *Model Framework* which has been validated against developments in the sector will, together with the National Framework of Qualifications and with *Síolta* and *Aistear*, inform the development of sectoral standards for all awards in early childhood care and education. The setting of these sectoral award standards is a necessary prerequisite to the effective implementation of the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector.

Access and Effective Participation in Education and Training Programmes

In 2002, the *Model Framework* identified a number of issues that would need to be addressed in order to allow learners in the ECCE sector to access and successfully participate in education and training opportunities.

With the work of the NQAI and the Awarding Bodies there has been a lot of progress in removing barriers for learners. The establishment of sectoral award standards in ECCE will also facilitate the review of established programmes. Challenges for the successful delivery of and participation in ECCE courses can be summarised as follows:

- Range of duration of courses leading to a particular award.
- The development of national standards for all awards.
- Flexibility in the delivery of programmes.
- The challenges of funding programmes (e.g., the non-availability of grant aid for part-time degree courses) for both learners and education and training providers.
- Releasing staff from the workplace to attend programmes.
- Adult guidance and support for non-traditional learners (e.g., literacy support or language support for those whose mother tongue is not English).

Work has already been undertaken to improve the flexibility of programme delivery in ECCE. Work based education programmes such as 'One Step Up' and the Traineeship model offered by FÁS have the potential to play an important role in meeting the needs of the ECCE workforce, particularly those currently unqualified workers who wish to achieve Level 5 awards. The work of FETAC relating to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has shown that there is a potential role for RPL in the promotion of a skilled and qualified workforce. RPL may also facilitate progression for practitioners to higher level awards. Geographical barriers to participation on courses are evident from this review. However, web-based delivery of courses may have the potential to overcome geographical barriers for learners.

While ensuring that programmes are available and appropriate to the needs of the ECCE workforce is a central concern, the resolution of these challenges alone will not ensure that the ECCE workforce benefits from an improved qualifications profile. Once learners have enrolled they need to be effectively supported to fully participate in and achieve the final award.

Conclusion

Access and effective participation in education and training programmes continue to be important issues to be addressed by the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector. Specifically, education and training provision in ECCE will need to address issues such as flexible delivery, RPL and the engagement and retention of learners.

Supply of Education and Training Places

Analysis of current supply of courses at all levels would indicate that there has been significant growth in the availability of places on ECCE courses at all levels since 2000. This expansion is welcome, particularly at third level, as international trends towards the professionalisation of ECCE would indicate that demand for third level courses is likely to increase. The forecasting exercise undertaken as part of the development of the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector will provide a more detailed insight into the future demand for courses at all levels.

Conclusion

The current supply of education and training places in ECCE courses has expanded significantly from 2000 to date. However the current concentration of resources into provision of full time places may need to be reviewed if the diverse education and training demands of the ECCE workforce are to be met.

Retention of Qualified Staff in the ECCE Workforce

Evidence supplied by third level colleges indicates that the ECCE sector is experiencing difficulty in retaining qualified graduates in service provision. This may, in part, be due to the traditional low wages and status afforded to work in this area. However, regardless of the root cause, it is of concern to the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector as the success of this initiative is not only measured in the creation of new education and training places but in the achievement of an appropriately trained workforce in early childhood care and education services in Ireland.

Conclusion

Measures to address retention of qualified staff in the ECCE workforce are essential to the future development of the ECCE sector.

Concluding Comments

This report has attempted to identify the challenges that need to be addressed by the Workforce Development Plan. It has drawn together, for the first time, datasets which afford a baseline view on the current profile of the ECCE workforce in Ireland and an overview of the complex and diverse array of current educational and training opportunities available. Analysis of current and future national and international policy relating to ECCE provision and practice has highlighted the need for a skilled workforce that can deliver on the demanding challenges of supporting young children's well-being, development and learning and also contribute to the realisation of national policy objectives. The challenges for the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE sector are to recognise the complex nature of the current workforce, acknowledge and build upon the important contribution of practitioners at all levels of practice and create opportunities for continued growth and success into the future.

Acronyms

ADM – Area Development Management

CECDE - Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

DES – Department of Education and Science

DJELR – Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

ECCE – Early Childhood Care and Education

EGFSN - Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

FÁS – Foras Áiseanna Saothair

FETAC – Further Education and Training Awards Council

HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council

NCCA – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NFQ – National Framework of Qualifications

NQAI – National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

OMCYA – Office for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

PLC – Post Leaving Certificate

RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning

Feedback Template

Your comments and suggestions on the following key issues would make a valuable contribution to the development of the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE sector. It is essential that this consultation process is as inclusive, open and transparent as possible, and for this reason, all submissions received will be published to support information sharing and informed debate of the core issues. Please ensure that you have completed the short informed consent section below otherwise your submission will not be included.

Name: _____

Organisation (if appropriate): _____

Location: _____

Please indicate your current role/interest in the ECCE sector

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Parent/guardian | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Service provider (owner/manager) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Practitioner/childminder | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Education and training provider | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Researcher | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Student | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Policy maker | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) _____ | |

I consent that my feedback on the development of the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE sector may be published as part of the public consultation process.

Signed _____

Please feel free to include additional pages if the response space allowed is insufficient. Alternatively this template is available online at www.omc.gov.ie.

