On 10th December 2007, The Minister for Children, Brendan Smith T.D., launched the Government’s vision for Children’s Services in Ireland. This national policy document, *The Agenda for Children’s Services*, ‘is directing us all in a new way of working with children, their families and communities to ensure that our services are evidence-based, accessible, effective and sustainable… It is intended that the agenda serves as a broad statement of principles for all services concerned with children.’

The broad policy framework and principles set out in The Agenda are far reaching and to be welcomed. But what does it mean for childcare or early childhood care and education? Childcare in Ireland is in a transition phase having come through a significant stage of growth and development since 1999.

Childcare in Transition is the theme of this issue of *ChildLinks*. Dr Noirin Hayes reviews the developments of the last decade and argues for reform if Ireland is to achieve quality, sustainable, affordable and accessible early childhood education and care. In other articles, current key developments including the Framework for Early Learning, Síolta, the National Childcare Training Strategy and the revised Childcare Regulations are presented. In ‘Farewell to Childcare’, Professor Peter Moss presents an outside perspective and looks at how Ireland compares with European and New Zealand’s early years provision. He acknowledges that Ireland, like other English-speaking countries, has seen a recent upsurge in policy attention to early childhood education and care services and a rapid growth in services. He argues that, like most other countries, Ireland has expanded services without adequately addressing long-standing and deep-seated problems and without sufficient thought to the future.

Returning to *The Agenda for Children’s Services*, the document commits the OMC to publishing more specific policies in relation to certain aspects of services at a later stage. The National Childcare Strategy (1999) has served us well and much has been achieved. However, this is a timely opportunity for the OMC, in consultation with the childcare sector and parents, to develop an early childhood care and education policy framework, which sets out a vision and plan for ECCE for the next phase of development. Our children and future children deserve nothing less.
INTRODUCTION
Despite extensive investment in the community-based and private childcare/early childhood education and care (ECEC)* sector over the last decade, there continues to be parental dissatisfaction with the availability of quality, affordable services, and provider concern with quality and sustainability. In an effort to explain how this has come about, this paper reflects on the strategic focus of childcare policy in Ireland at a time when the overall investment strategy is moving from the EU supported Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) to the exchequer funded National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP).

Any consideration of childcare requires a clear understanding of what exactly is being considered. Under the National Childcare Strategy, childcare refers to two different service types: (i) for younger children childcare has come to mean a variety of early childhood education and care settings1 and (ii) for older children, generally up to about the age of 12 years, childcare refers to the variety of after-school arrangements that exist to meet differing needs at different times.

This broad definition of childcare has hindered the development, at both a conceptual and structural level, of an integrated approach to ECEC, which would be economically more efficient and developmentally more effective for young children. While the early childcare dimension of childcare covers the same age range and services as addressed by early education policy,2 it comes under different departmental auspices. Policy and planning persists in drawing a distinction between childcare and early education3 despite comprehensive and nuanced arguments in recent reports encouraging government towards the development of a coordinated and integrated policy approach.4 The policy distinction between childcare and early education in Ireland is not simply of academic interest. The outcome of such an approach impacts directly on the day-to-day reality of the early years experience for children and the likely effectiveness of the service, particularly for poorer children and their families. Such an approach misses the opportunity to realise the full potential of high-quality, integrated early childhood education and care for all children and fails to build on the potential of early childhood services as a mechanism for inclusion in an increasingly multi-cultural society.5

* For the purpose of this article the term early childhood education and care will generally be used. This is the term adopted by the OECD and captures the caring and educational role of service provided for young children and their families.
Ireland is a wealthy society and in a position to invest and support a viable early years service.

**TRACKING CHILDCARE POLICY**
The attention to ECEC as a policy initiative is of comparatively recent origin in Ireland. It stems from a confluence of factors including the recognition by government that the absence of childcare acts as a barrier to the participation of women in the labour force, the increased demand for childcare from parents, unions and employers, and the recognition of the value of quality childcare to young children as a right. The combination of EU funding, increased national demand and a growing awareness of the positive short and long-term benefits of ECEC on children and society provided space and funding for policy action.

There have been many reports on the topic of ECEC in Ireland over the last decade. These include the National Childcare Strategy (1999), *Ready to Learn*, the White Paper on Early Childhood Education (1999), the National Children’s Strategy (2000), the OECD Report on Early Childhood Education and Care (2004) and the NESF Report on Early Childhood Education (2005). The report of the Commission on the Family (1998) also included a comprehensive set of recommendations relating to childcare and the family. All of these reports agree on the importance of quality services and the value of such services to children and their families.

While the recommendations outlined in the report of the Commission on the Family located ECEC policy within the broader child and family context, a critical feature of the more influential National Childcare Strategy was the restrictive nature of its focus, limiting strategic development to the service needs of working parents. This focus laid the foundation for a fragmented policy response to ECEC and failed to recognise the wider issue of ECEC as a resource for all children, their families and society.

**WHY INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE?**
Before reviewing Irish policy direction, it is worth noting why it is considered a good thing for society to support quality ECEC. Investment in well-supported, high-quality ECEC leads to immediate benefits for children and their families, positive cross-generational benefits, valuable neighbourhood gains and indirect social and economic impacts over the long term. The indirect role quality early childhood services play in wider society has been demonstrated by research showing the positive impact of quality early childhood services on children, particularly disadvantaged children, and their families. Furthermore, studies have linked the long-term economic benefits that derive from reduced costs in education, health and criminal justice to the provision of supportive childcare to families of ‘at risk’ children from a young age.

Ireland is a wealthy society and in a position to invest and support a viable early years service. Ireland also has the strategic imperative to foster the development of a sustainable sector. The National Children’s Strategy presents a vision of Ireland where: all children are cherished and supported by family and wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential. Specifically Objective 1 states that Children’s early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures. Despite such laudable commitments, Irish ECEC policy fails to place children at the visible centre. Keeping young children visible in policy development and implementation is not easy. It requires a consensus on core values which acknowledges children as a shared responsibility, not the sole responsibility of parents. It also requires a refocus of macro economic policies which support benefits favouring children specifically. There is no evidence that Ireland meets these requirements.

**POLICY STRUCTURES, DRIVERS & IMPLEMENTATION**
The National Childcare Strategy has been in place since 2000. It aims to improve the availability and quality of childcare to meet the needs of children and their parents. Under the strategy, the government has committed to the creation of 90,000 childcare places. Under the EOCP, 35,000 have been created and the remainder will be developed under the NCIP.

The Strategy was operated through the EOCP with a budget of over €500 million through EU and exchequer funding from 2000–2006. To manage the impact of the EOCP, City and County Childcare Committees were established to develop locally focused strategies and support service delivery at local level. While the Strategy recommended the establishment of a national management board to manage these new structures, this was never established.

The EOCP was originally managed through the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. In 2006 however, in response to calls for a more coordinated approach, the Office of Minister for Children (OMC) was established. It is one of the most visible commitments to Irish children and it is charged with the coordination of policies for children across the three main departments of Health and Children, Education and Science, and Justice. Interestingly, the structures within the OMC perpetuate the care and education divide referred to earlier – the Childcare Directorate is responsible for the NCIP while the Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU) is responsible for, among other things, a national training initiative.
While the remit of the EYEPUs covers settings for children from birth to six years, it excludes the infant classes of the primary school — although they are named as coming under the early education policy brief elsewhere.13

Children are embedded in a network of influencing factors. Policy impacts on them even when at a remove. Policy choices privilege particular constructions of ECEC by defining our understanding of the policy problem and the characteristics of the focus populations. Policy design legitimises and institutionalises approaches to governmental involvement in children’s lives — giving power and voice to some interests over others.13

The type of state support for ECEC varies across countries according to public policy ethos.14 Differences can be seen when considering the underlying policy guidance in two different socio-political contexts. In the Social Democratic approach evident in Nordic countries, the primary policy motivators are child well-being and gender equality. The ideological basis for investment derives from the democratic principle that ECEC is viewed as a public good and responsibility. The sector is supported through generous statutory subsidisation and high-quality, well-trained personnel. These policies have been found to impact positively on child well-being, and children’s future are comparatively bright from international perspective.

Contrast this with the Liberal Welfare approach, emerging as the dominant approach in Ireland. In this socio-political landscape the policy motivators are needs-based and selective. The majority of provision is private market or community/voluntary. Funding is directed to a small number of targeted programmes. The market is fragmented, of variable quality and costly, with inequitable access resulting in a threat to equality of opportunity for disadvantaged children from a young age.15

To date, Irish childcare policy has been driven by the two main agendas of equality and educational disadvantage and this has hindered the development of an integrated policy for the support of high-quality early childhood services for all young children. However, there is another driver — the tension between Ireland’s traditional ideology, which places a strong value on the place of women in the home, and the policy driver that encourages increased female labour market participation. The state treads carefully not to favour either group of women over the other. The focus in respect of ECEC is therefore primarily on women and not on children, resulting in investment policy which creates childcare spaces for children, gives cash payments to parents and facilitates market growth.

The investment focus on creating spaces dominates policy with targets set relating to the number of childcare spaces created, rather than considering the sustainability and quality of the services developed. Of the total EOCPS funding, 53% was allocated in capital investment, 33% in the three-year staffing grants and 14% funded a variety of quality initiatives including structural support to County/City Childcare Committees and capacity building funding to National Voluntary Organisations. Indications are that the NCIP expenditure will be predominantly on the creation of spaces with the removal of support for staffing grants. A Subvention Scheme to assist settings cover fees where parents are unemployed or in low-income families will be introduced.

If policy success is measured by reference to places created, future economic analysis may well record a positive rate of return but the actual return for children and their families is very sensitive to assumptions being made about sustainability and quality, which are not being supported by an equal level of funding. Over time it may well be that the construction sector, rather than children, families or the early childhood care and education sector itself, will be seen as the real beneficiary. In order to meet the growing demand for early childhood services and to achieve government commitments to European targets, there is a need to invest in more spaces. However, to do so without parallel and equivalent support for training, quality enhancement measures and sectoral support for sustainability is inefficient at best.

One of the less successful aspects of the EOCP Programme relates to affordability. As it stands, the Programme can only attempt to reduce costs indirectly through increasing supply, a strategy which so far has failed as childcare costs continue to expand beyond the means of an increasing number of households. The OECD shows that Ireland has a particularly high female drop-out rate after the birth of a first and second child. Typically, a second earner in a couple family, with two young children in ECEC, with earnings at two thirds of the average salary has no net return after ECEC costs.16 Such high costs have negative implications for equality among children, as very often children from more vulnerable households, who ironically have been proven to benefit most from quality early childhood education and care, are excluded.

The policy response to affordability has been to encourage settings to provide a tiered fees scheme and to allocate funding directly to parents by way of universal benefits to cover the costs. There are a number of unsustainable assumptions underpinning this approach. In the first place, the current costs of certain services are depressed because of the staffing grants allocated. When grants are withdrawn, settings will be required to raise fees to remain viable. Second, there is no evidence that the increases in Child Benefit or the 2006 Early Childcare Supplement (ECS), both universal payments, are benefiting the childcare sector. The cost of the ECS, over €400 million annually in exchequer funds, is staggering and would, if allocated directly towards the support of quality provision in a sustainable ECEC sector, ameliorate many current difficulties.

The consequence of this funding approach is that, despite extensive investment, there is no secure support for the ECEC sector, as there is, for instance, for the primary school sector. This lack of secure funding weakens the sustainability and reliability of the service and compromises the quality of the provision. Until the mid-1990s, Irish children were largely
cared for at home until they entered school at age four. In recognition of the importance of these two institutions of home and school, the state supported parents directly with a universal child benefit and supported a national school system of free primary education. In contemporary Ireland the landscape has changed. A majority of children now spend time in various ‘bridging settings’ between the home and school. In fact, Irish children are now attending a wider range of settings for longer periods of time from a younger age than ever before. These various early childhood settings provide an important service to families and society and it is time that Irish policy makers recognised this and supported them directly in a manner comparable to that for similar services. The Department of Education and Science (DES) has invested in some small-scale projects in the policy area of early education such as funding the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE). The CECDE has, through a process of extensive research and consultation, published Síolta – National Quality Framework. However, this Framework is not part of national policy and there is no commitment for national implementation. Through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the DES is also supporting a potentially valuable initiative, the National Framework for Early Learning. However, like Síolta, there is no indication that this will be implemented nationally either. These two frameworks afford a valuable base upon which a comprehensive quality enhancement strategy could be developed for the ECEC sector in Ireland. There is also limited DES funding through the DEIS programme for enhancing quality in ECEC settings in disadvantaged areas. However, research is clear that targeted funding in the absence of a universal vision for early childhood services and associated family supports will have very limited effect.17 Indeed, in countries where targeting is the dominant model for supported ECEC child poverty levels are highest.18

CHANGING POLICY FOR A CHANGED IRELAND

Policy development reflects a particular approach to children, their well-being and their families. There has been extensive investment and many excellent initiatives developed over the last decade. Nonetheless there are some fundamental flaws in the current focus of policy, which mitigate the full realisation of a high-quality ECEC sector. For an effective early childhood education and care policy to function:

- The unresolved conflict between traditional ideology of the family vis-à-vis children and the necessity to attract women into the workforce should be addressed and children placed centrally in future policy developments.
- A truly integrated policy across early childcare and early education for children from birth to six must be developed and realised.
- The multiple investment lines should be integrated to support varied high-quality early childhood education and care services and broader family supports to a percentage GDP investment level in line with international standards.
- The many innovative initiatives funded to date should be integrated and embedded for policy implementation. Specifically Síolta and the NCCA Framework must be integrated into national policy and supported.
- Existing local structures should be strengthened but within a strong, visionary and empowered national support structure.
- A policy of sustainable, quality universal provision with targeted support across a variety of initiatives for families (including extended maternity and parental leave) should be vigorously supported.
- A high-quality ECEC sector with a well-qualified, motivated workforce should be provided and supported.

Reform is essential if Ireland is to achieve quality, sustainable ECEC that is affordable and accessible. It requires investment directly into services for sustainability and support for staff training and qualifications to enhance and maintain quality. Leadership is necessary to translate lofty ambition to functioning policy implementation, recognising children as the primary focus.

REFERENCES

6 Hayes & Bradley, 2006
11 NESF, 2005; OECD, 2004
12 Ireland (1999b)
14 OECD, 2004
16 OECD, 2004
17 Sylva et al., 2004
INTRODUCTION

It’s an exciting time for early childhood in Ireland at the moment. In 2006, the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) launched Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.\(^1\) September this year saw the Revised Pre-school Regulations come into operation.\(^2\) In addition, a national Childcare Training Strategy is under development.\(^3\) Next year, 2008, will mark another important milestone with the launch of the Framework for Early Learning developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). This article outlines the purpose of this framework, and looks at its different components.

ARGLENE FORSTER Director, The National Council for Curriculum & Assessment

THE NCCA’S ROLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

The NCCA advises the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to the curriculum for early childhood, primary and post-primary education.\(^4\) As part of this role, the NCCA is presently completing the development of a national curriculum framework called the Framework for Early Learning. The purpose of the Framework is to help adults extend and enrich children’s learning and development. The Framework will do this by describing the types of learning opportunities that are important to enable children from birth to six years to develop as competent and confident learners.

THE BENEFIT OF A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

In recent years, countries such as New Zealand and Sweden have developed curriculum frameworks for the early years.\(^5,6\) One of the purposes of these frameworks has been to bring about greater connectedness and progression in children’s experiences throughout early childhood. In Ireland there are a number of curricula and curriculum guidelines in use across early childhood settings. Many of these have been developed by national voluntary organisations, and organisations which support a particular philosophy or tradition in early childhood care and education. There are also national curriculum developments. These include the Infant Curriculum as part of the Primary School Curriculum,\(^7\) and the Early Start Pre-School Intervention Project – Curricular Guidelines for Good Practice.\(^8\) As yet there is no single curriculum framework for the whole early childhood period, a gap identified at the National Forum on Early Childhood Education in 1998. The Framework for Early Learning will address this gap.

the framework for early learning

6
DEVELOPING THE FRAMEWORK

Context

Informed by the discussions at the forum* the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, Ready to Learn® recommended the development of broad curriculum guidelines for children from birth to three years, and a ‘specimen’ curriculum for three to four year olds. Responding to these recommendations and based on a review of curriculums nationally and internationally, the NCCA advised the Minister for Education and Science to develop one curriculum framework for the whole early childhood period.

A consultative document

The publication of the consultative document, Towards a Framework for Early Learning1 is an important stepping stone in the NCCA’s work in developing the Framework. The consultative document outlined the purpose of the Framework, its vision and aims, and proposed presenting children’s early learning and development through themes. The early childhood sector contributed to the Framework’s philosophy and to its design through the consultation that followed.12 Participants also highlighted the importance of continuing to include children’s, parents’ and practitioners’ experiences and voices in the development of the Framework.

A portraiture study

In 2006, the NCCA carried out a portraiture study as part of the ongoing work on the Framework. The purpose of the study was to include the voices of children in the Framework for Early Learning. Portraiture is a type of qualitative research which focuses on an individual’s experiences in a particular place and at a particular time. The researcher aims to highlight positive experiences, and listens for a story. Building the story is described as painting with words.13 During the study, the NCCA worked with twelve children in eleven settings around Ireland. These settings included a child’s home, a childminder’s home, two crèches, a nursery, a Montessori pre-school, a naíonra, a Traveller pre-school, an Early Start setting and infant classes in two primary schools. The children included four girls and eight boys ranging in age from nine months to almost six years.

The portraits provided rich descriptions of individual children’s experiences and reflections on their time in their settings – what they enjoyed doing, whom they enjoyed being with, where they liked spending time, and what they would like to change.14 The study highlighted a number of shared messages about the children’s experiences. These focused on their enjoyment and motivation to learn and develop through play and active exploration; the importance of relationships to them and in particular the role of their parents; the power of communication; the importance of a sense of identity and belonging; and the benefits of observing and listening to the children. These messages connected with the findings from the consultation in 2004, and with the NCCA’s extensive review of literature (described below). The portraiture study enabled the NCCA to ‘see’ the messages through the children’s real-life experiences. In this way, the study will help the NCCA to ensure the Framework for Early Learning is relevant and helpful to those who care for and educate children under the age of six years in Ireland.

Literature review

The NCCA completed an extensive literature review to inform the development of the Framework for Early Learning. This included a review of early childhood curriculum development nationally and internationally, as well as literature on how children learn and develop. Much of this review is summarised in a series of background papers commissioned by the NCCA. These papers focus on:

- Children’s early learning and development.15
- Perspectives on the relationship between education and care in early childhood.16
- Play as a context for early learning and development.17
- Supporting early learning through assessment (under development).

DESIGN OF THE FRAMEWORK

Who and what is the Framework for?

The Framework will be for all adults who support children’s learning and development from birth to six years. This includes parents* and families, childminders, and practitioners**. This means the Framework will be relevant for those working in the range of out-of-home settings including:

- crèches
- playgroups
- naíonraí
- after-school settings
- infant classes in mainstream and special schools

The Framework will help adults to develop a shared understanding of good practice in supporting children’s early learning and development. It will do this by describing the types of learning opportunities that are important for children in their early years. The Framework will also help people from different professions to work together for the benefit of children.

How will the Framework be used with other curriculums?

The Framework will complement the curriculums/guidelines already in use in the early childhood sector. It will bring greater continuity and progression in children’s learning and development as they move from home to settings like crèches and pre-schools, and then on to primary school. As the Framework is based on a set of broad principles of how children learn and develop, it will be relevant across the different approaches, traditions and structures characteristic of early childhood practices and settings in Ireland.

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* The NCCA uses the term parents to refer to the child’s primary caregivers and educators. These include the child’s father and mother and/or guardian(s).

** The NCCA uses the term practitioners to refer to all those working in a specialised manner with children in early childhood settings. Practitioners have a diversity of experience and qualifications ranging from unaccredited through to postgraduate level.
What will the Framework contain?
Within the Framework, the child will be seen as a unique individual who is an active, capable and competent learner. He/she learns through play, relationships, language, and everyday experiences. The Framework will recognise the importance of experiences which respond to the child’s interests, strengths and needs. In supporting the child to learn and develop, the Framework will emphasise the adult’s crucial role in ‘tuning’ in to and recognising learning opportunities, and extending and enriching these.

The Framework will consist of two parts as shown in Table A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART 1</th>
<th>PART 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principles</td>
<td>Guidelines on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Interacting with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being</td>
<td>Building partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity and belonging</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring and thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A: The Framework’s components

PART 1 OF THE FRAMEWORK
The Framework will be based on 11 principles of early learning and development. These will be presented and described in three groups as shown in Table B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children &amp; their lives in early childhood</th>
<th>Children’s connections to others</th>
<th>How children learn &amp; develop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness of the child</td>
<td>Relationships &amp; the adult’s role</td>
<td>Holistic learning &amp; development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality &amp; diversity</td>
<td>Parents &amp; family</td>
<td>Active learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children as citizens</td>
<td></td>
<td>Play and first-hand experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B: The Framework’s principles

The Framework will present children’s learning and development through four themes – Well-being, Identity & Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring & Thinking. Based on the understanding that all learning is connected, these themes link with, and complement each other. A brief description of each theme is presented in Table C.

...the Framework will focus on developing children’s dispositions and skills, nurturing attitudes and values...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WELL-BEING</th>
<th>IDENTITY &amp; BELONGING</th>
<th>COMMUNICATING</th>
<th>EXPLORING &amp; THINKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... children develop as happy and healthy individuals.</td>
<td>... children develop a positive sense of who they are, and feel connected to the early childhood group/setting, their community and wider society.</td>
<td>... children share their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings with others with growing confidence and competence for a variety of purposes.</td>
<td>... children investigate and make sense of the world around them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table C: The Framework’s themes

Through the four themes, the Framework will focus on developing children’s dispositions and skills, nurturing attitudes and values, and building knowledge and understanding of their world. For example:

- Dispositions like curiosity, concentration, resilience…
- Skills like walking, climbing, cutting, writing…
- Attitudes and values like respect for others, positive attitudes to learning and to life...
- Knowledge and understanding like developing a sense of colour, shape, place, and space; learning that words have meaning; finding out how things work…

The themes will be presented using aims and broad learning goals. Sample activities will be used to illustrate good practice by adults in supporting children to learn and develop. The Framework will present these sample activities in three overlapping age phases:

- Babies – birth to eighteen months
- Toddlers – twelve months to three years
- Young children – two and a half to six years.

PART 2 OF THE FRAMEWORK
Part 2 of the Framework will provide information to adults to further support the development of their early years practice. This information will be presented in four sets of guidelines. These will focus on

- Interacting with children.
- Developing partnerships with parents and families.
- Using play to support learning and development.
- Gathering information about children’s progress in learning, and using this to plan for the next steps.

Each set of guidelines will contain questions to help adults reflect on their practice and identify how they might improve it. The guidelines will also include examples to illustrate what good practice might look like in action in a variety of early childhood settings.
CONNECTED WITH SÍOLTA & THE REGULATIONS

Underpinned by similar principles, Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, and the Framework for Early Learning both support adults in improving the quality of their work with children from birth to six years. The Framework for Early Learning, as its title suggests, concentrates on extending and enriching children’s early learning and development by giving adults information and examples to help them work towards improving their practice in areas such as curriculum, partnership with parents and families, interactions, and play. By doing this, the Framework will help practitioners and childminders work towards meeting a number of standards as set out in Síolta.

Article 5 of the Revised Pre-school Regulations (2006) places a strong emphasis on children’s development and states that

A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that each child’s learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child and the child’s cultural context.

With children’s learning and development at the heart of the Framework for Early Learning, using the Framework will help practitioners and childminders to provide children with appropriately challenging, motivating, rewarding and enjoyable experiences as set out in the regulations.

CONCLUSION

Early childhood is a time of tremendous opportunity for learning, and is the foundation of all subsequent learning. The Framework for Early Learning can play an important role in supporting children during this period of their lives. As highlighted in the consultation in 2004, the impact of the Framework on children’s experiences will be enhanced through opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) for practitioners and childminders. In contributing to shaping this CPD, the NCCA is currently inputting to the development of the national Childcare Training Strategy by the Office of the Minister for Children. Over the coming months, the NCCA will also look at ways in which the organisation can disseminate key information about the Framework to support the sector in using it across the diversity of early childhood settings.

The launch of the Framework for Early Learning in 2008 will mark a milestone in early childhood education in Ireland. If you would like to find out more about the Framework before then, you can access information on the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie.

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3. Office of the Minister for Children, ongoing
18. NCCA, 2005

SEE ALSO:


Síolta is a quality assurance programme that has been developed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) in consultation with the wider early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector in Ireland. It is applicable to all settings in which children aged birth to six years are present and therefore crosses many of the traditional divides between care and education and between the formal school sector and the informal ECCE sector. The National Quality Framework (NQF) has been produced at a time when national and international attention is focused as never before on the issue of quality ECCE services, and their role in enhancing the lives of our youngest children. It demonstrates the concerted momentum of the sector in recent years towards the attainment of quality and provides a reference point for all those involved in ECCE services towards this end.

Traditionally, the term ‘quality’ was not an integral element in the vocabulary of ECCE services. However, in the last decade, the use of the term quality has become an inherent part of the vocabulary relating to ECCE services, both in Ireland and internationally. Quality in ECCE services is now viewed holistically, taking into account the range of experiences of the child, in relation to both care and education. This has superseded the historic divide that existed between the ‘care’ and ‘education’ of young children, with a perception at both policy and practice level that these elements are “…inextricably linked…”

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The process of developing Síolta has been underway since the CECDE was established in 2002. From the outset, the CECDE has ensured that the NQF is evidence-based and builds on existing national and international experience and expertise.

Síolta has been developed in relation to the three strands of defining, assessing and supporting quality. This approach evolved from initial consultation with the ECCE sector, which identified these as the overarching variables contributing to the achievement of quality in early education settings. The main focus of the initial stages of the development process concentrated on the definition of quality, namely identifying and agreeing the Principles, Standards and Components of Quality.
A specific and focused consultative process was undertaken with parents in March 2005 in recognition of their primary role in the care and education of their children. This consultation represented an additional strand of consultation with parents, who are also represented on our Consultative Committee. This process identified key issues for parents in relation to quality ECCE services. Feedback was also provided on the Principles and Standards of the NQF, which had already been developed at this time.

CONTENT OF SÍOLTA – STANDARDS, COMPONENTS AND SIGNPOSTS

Síolta is designed to allow ECCE settings to evaluate their level of quality provision and to determine the quality of the service they are providing. Accordingly, the framework recognises elements of practice that are successful within the setting, as well as identifying aspects in need of attention and improvement. In this way, it acts as a tool to promote continuous quality improvement and planning. The NQF is comprised of three distinct but interrelated elements, namely Principles, Standards and Components (and their associated Signposts) of Quality. The Principles form the overall vision of the Framework, within which all other elements are couched. The Standards, Components and Signposts afford a practical application of this vision in all settings in which children aged from birth to six are present.

The Principles contained within Síolta span twelve general areas:

- The value of early childhood
- Children first
- Parents as partners
- Relationships
- Equality
- Diversity
- Enriching environments
- Safety, welfare and well-being
- Role of the adult
- Teamwork
- Pedagogy
- Play

Each of the Principles are presented individually and include explanatory notes, intended to inform and guide the practitioner. They are inter-dependent and not intended for use in isolation. For example, while one Principle refers to the role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences as fundamental, it should be viewed in context of another Principle which re-iterates the pre-eminent role of the child’s parents in their child’s well-being, learning and development. Furthermore, the role of the adult is also influenced by the environment in which adult/child interactions take place and the extent to which play is incorporated into that environment.

Example is perhaps the best method of demonstrating how the Framework has been designed to work. In keeping with the example outlined above, the Principle states:

Parents are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his well-being, learning and development.

The explanatory note that accompanies that particular principle then offers the practitioner a more detailed interpretation:

Quality early childhood care and education must value and support the role of parents. Open, honest and respectful partnership with parents is essential in promoting the best interests of the child. Mutual partnership contributes to establishing harmony and continuity between the diverse environments the child experiences in the early years. The development of connections and interactions between the early childhood setting, parents, the extended family and the wider community also adds to the enrichment of early childhood experiences by reflecting the environment in which the child lives and grows.

The sixteen national Standards translate the vision of the Principles into the reality of practice in settings where children aged from birth to six years are present. They are broad-based and comprehensive in nature, and represent an agreed framework for quality practice within settings. As with the Principles, the Standards are interrelated and interdependent and should not be viewed in isolation, as only together do they form a cohesive and comprehensive framework for quality practice. Each Standard is explained by a statement agreed by the representative Consultative Committee of the CECDE, with the sixteen national Standards being:

- Organisation
- Professional practice
- The rights of the child
- Parents and families
- Environments
- Curriculum
- Consultation
- Identity and belonging
- Planning and evaluation
- Interactions
- Play
- Communication
- Health and welfare
- Community Involvement
- Transitions
- Legislation and regulation

The Components of Quality have a direct relationship with the Standards, with each Component further unpacking the detail within the Standards. Each Standard has a varying number of Components, incorporating seventy-five Components in total within the Framework. The Components of Quality act as indicators or guidelines for all those engaging with the Framework towards providing quality experiences for our youngest children.
Each Component of Quality is accompanied by a variety of Signposts for Reflection. These are open-ended questions that act as a tool for self-reflection for practitioners to review and consider their current practice within the broad area of the sixteen Standards. They further support the dialogue required for the achievement of the national Standards.

While the Principles, Standards and Components are applicable to all settings in which children aged birth to six years are present, the Signposts for Reflection are mediated in two different ways to ensure they are appropriate to the needs of all children. First of all, they are moderated for four distinct settings that were identified by the NQF, specifically; Full and Part-time Daycare; Sessional Services; Infant Classes of Primary Schools; and Childminding. Secondly, where appropriate, they are mediated for three specific age ranges, namely birth to eighteen months, one to three years and two-and-a-half to six years.

Many of these Signposts are further supported by a list of ‘Think Abouts’, which prompt the reflective practitioner to consider various aspects of her/his practice. They can be used by individual practitioners or by groups/teams that are planning for an entire setting. The selection of Signposts and ‘Think Abouts’ provided act as examples or prompts to stimulate discussion. They are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive in nature and practitioners are at liberty to add to, edit or remove those presented to make them more supportive, personalised or relevant to their own unique situation.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment within Síolta can be loosely described, depending on time or context, as being formal or informal, external or internal. As such, Síolta is designed to facilitate and support all forms of assessment. The richness and diversity of practice in ECCE in Ireland cannot be appreciated through a narrow assessment lens. Multiple assessment methods will be necessary and it is envisaged that an essential aspect of the supports for quality will focus on preparing practitioners and assessors to engage with a wide variety of assessment methods and approaches. This flexibility is only possible because of the strength and solidity of the core elements of the NQF, specifically the National Standards and Components of Quality. These are the benchmark for all assessment and as such will inform and be the focus of developments in practice.

An individual practitioner, keen to assess her/his own practice, may draw on a range of assessment data. These could include, keeping a practice journal, inviting peer observation, participating in formal educational examinations or testing. As long as the benchmark for assessment in all of these processes is the core Standards, then the data will provide valuable evidence for the practitioner on her/his level of performance in relation to the NQF. Indeed it is good practice to draw upon more that one source of assessment data as consistency across all methods means the overall outcome of assessment is more likely to be accurate and reliable.

SUPPORTING QUALITY

The CECDE has recognised, from the earliest stages of the development of Síolta, that practitioners should receive support in engaging with the framework in pursuit of quality improvement. The provision of such high-quality services is not viewed the responsibility of practitioners alone, but as a mutual effort, undertaken co-operatively and involving all facets of the system – individual, local, regional and national.

During consultation seminars held by the CECDE in 2003, participants were asked to enumerate supports required to enhance quality provision, which were categorised as follows:

- Funding/financial support
- Professional development
- Staff training and qualifications
- Networking and mentoring
- Standards/guidelines/regulations/curriculum
- Resources and equipment
- Government supports/political commitment
- Availability of information
- Parental/community involvement
- Time for teamwork
- Other

For the purposes of establishing a comprehensive picture of current views from practice, policy and research in ECCE, this initial analysis was augmented with information from a number of other sources (national and international literature reviews and submissions from the Consultative Committee), and two separate levels of support were identified. The first concerns the macro level of support for quality and highlights issues that need to be addressed at national level, and which are identified as fundamental to the overall development of quality ECCE provision in Ireland (e.g. funding, co-ordination, training and qualifications, national practice frameworks, parental and community involvement, evaluation and dissemination). The second relates more specifically to supports which stakeholders have identified as necessary in order for practitioners and services to successfully implement Síolta in practice settings.

The CECDE is committed to supporting quality, and in May of this year launched the Síolta Workshop Materials pack. The publication and dissemination of these materials marked the first in a series of steps to assist in the translation of a theoretical vision of quality into a practical reality. The main aim of these materials is to enable those delivering practical support to ECCE service providers and practitioners to actively use Síolta in their work. In addition, there are Research Digests – samples of research that support and extend understanding of the sixteen Standards – collated into one publication.
IMPLEMENTATION
In order to realise the ultimate objective of a national quality assurance scheme for early childhood education in Ireland, a period of test implementation and evaluation of Síolta is essential. This phase will need to facilitate a number of key aims and objectives:

- To review, refine and revise the indicators of quality outlined within the NQF.
- To model, evaluate and refine the assessment and support functions within the NQF.
- To develop the capacity of the ECCE sector to engage with quality improvement processes.
- To develop ancillary support materials (such as the aforementioned Workshop Materials Pack).
- To facilitate aspects of the overall CECDE Research Strategy, such as exploration of parental involvement structures, professional development issues and targeted interventions, such as those suggested in the DEIS strategy.
- To raise awareness of the critical nature of early education in the lives of young children.

CONCLUSION
Síolta has been designed to achieve a number of key objectives in relation to the development of early childhood education services in Ireland. It seeks:

- To clearly identify a vision of quality which reflects the unique cultural, social and environmental context of Ireland;
- To build on existing knowledge and expertise relating to the provision of quality ECCE services;
- To promote and support the rich diversity of provision that characterises ECCE service in Ireland;
- To develop the capacity of ECCE services to provide quality experiences for children aged from birth to six years and their families;
- To promote assessment as an essential element of the developmental processes necessary for the achievement of quality;
- To recognise and reinforce quality practice;
- To provide a coordinating framework for all aspects of early childhood provision in Ireland;
- To support the development of professionalism in all aspects of practice in a dynamic and expanding sector.

Síolta is a significant contribution to the development of early childhood education, and education generally in the Republic of Ireland. Together with the Framework for Early Learning by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2005) it will provide the vision and blueprint for a future of early childhood care and education which will meet the needs of our youngest children.

For any further information, or to request copies of the materials outlined, please contact the CECDE’s Information Officer, Peadar Cassidy on (01) 884 2113/peadar.cassidy@spd.dcu.ie

REFERENCES


See also:


These Strategy documents were produced through extensive consultation with and with the agreement of the Childcare sector. As the National Childcare Training Strategy will be derived in part from the work done to date, it is important to look at the evolution of policy within the sector since the 1990s.

NATIONAL FORUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The first National Forum in the early childhood education and care sector, the National Forum on Early Childhood Education, was convened in March 1998 and gave the ECCE sector in Ireland the opportunity to come together to express their concerns and share their insights. Many organisations representing the workforce came together to produce the National Forum Report, which ultimately led to the publication.
of Ready to Learn, the White Paper on Early Childhood Education. As part of an analysis of the early years education workforce, a number of core knowledge areas were identified as essential in pre-service education for those adults wishing to deliver education-based care to children aged birth to six years. These core knowledge areas included child development and learning principles, a safe and caring environment, teaching methodologies, curriculum, administration and record keeping, and working with parents and guardians. The Forum report expressed a vision that all those involved in early education provision should be suitably knowledgeable and receive the appropriate supports and recognition for the important work they were engaged in. The question of quality was also explored extensively. Participants identified five core interdependent indicators of quality (with multiple subheadings).

NATIONAL CHILDCARE STRATEGY
At almost the same time as this National Forum event was being held, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) established the Expert Working Group on Childcare to develop the National Childcare Strategy. The main driver behind this initiative was the urgent need to address childcare provision as a support to parents of young children. A number of background reports were prepared as input to the Strategy, including one which attempted to identify the nature of the workforce in terms of qualifications, occupational profiles and the terms and conditions of employment. While these background reports highlighted the difficulty in accessing accurate information on these issues, the final report of the Expert Working Group did publish an agreed set of occupational profiles with associated qualification levels for childcare services. These attempts to bring some degree of order and regulation to the diverse workforce within the ECCE sector and furthermore to clarify the knowledge, skills, competences and responsibilities associated with each role. In addition, the National Childcare Strategy developed a set of recommendations regarding the development of a professional workforce for the ECCE sector.

THE NATIONAL CHILDREN’S STRATEGY
In 2000, another seminal policy publication was launched in the form of ‘Our Children, Their Lives’ The National Children’s Strategy. This provides a framework for Ireland regarding children and young people and follows on from the ratification by Ireland in 1992 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It aspires to ‘…enhance the status and further improve the quality of life of Ireland’s children’ and outlines a number of strategies for the realisation of these objectives.

The vision of the National Children’s Strategy is as follows: An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.

This vision incorporates three national goals:

- Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
- Children’s lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services.
- Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development.

Objective A of the Strategy relates to the provision of high-quality childcare for all children and states that

Children’s early education and developmental need will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures.

It further elaborates on this objective, outlining the various positive effects of high-quality ECCE services for all children, with a particular emphasis placed on the benefits to those with special needs and those affected by disadvantage.

While this publication does not comment directly on the role of adults delivering these services, the actual publication of this strategy shows the national commitment to, and recognition of, the importance of the work of early childhood care and education practitioners.

2000 ONWARD
Since 2000, Ireland has seen an intensive period of change and development for ECCE. Child abuse revelations, which had begun to become public in the late 1990s, prompted a range of initiatives and publications related to child protection. The economy continued to grow, placing even greater pressure on childcare needs.

Regulation of pre-school services became firmly established and the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000–2006 was set up, giving unprecedented levels of funding into the development and provision of childcare. Groups that had participated in the two consultative fora in 1998/9 were now regularly participating in policy development processes at national and local level. Education and training programmes expanded at all levels of provision, particularly at third level with new degree and postgraduate opportunities. Additionally, a new regional infrastructure comprising 33 City and County Childcare Committees was established, creating new occupational roles and opportunities for the workforce.

All of these changes impacted on the work of staff delivering early care and education services to young children.
THE MODEL FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION, TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2001, the Certifying Bodies Subgroup of the National Coordinating Childcare Committee (NCCC)* was set up to develop a model framework for education, training and qualifications for ECCE in Ireland. To produce this framework, a consultation on occupational profiles was carried out as well as a detailed consultation on the key knowledge, skills and competencies required for practitioners in the ECCE sector. Significant progress was made regarding identifying occupational roles and associated education and training and, perhaps more importantly, articulating a set of agreed values that could underpin practice in early childhood care and education. In September 2002, it was agreed that the DJELR could publish the Model Framework document and present it to the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland as an agreed statement from practitioners in ECCE regarding the parameters of their professional practice.

The core value statements for the ECCE sector in Ireland set out in the Model Framework are as follows.

The early childhood care and education sector values:

- Childhood in its own right.
- The rights of children, who are active agents in their own growth and development.
- Parents, guardians and family as the child’s primary source of well-being.
- Professional development as central to good practice.
- The role of the practitioner as the facilitator of enhanced well-being and development of the child.
- Diversity by acknowledging and promoting each child’s and each adult’s individual, personal and cultural identity.
- Equality of access and participation in services.
- A positive approach to Irish language and culture.
- The right of children to protection from any form of abuse, neglect and discrimination.
- The right of children, families and childcare staff to confidentiality, balanced with the interests of the child and the right of all to protection from harm.
- Experiences and activities which support learning and allow children to actively explore, to experience, to make choices a decision and to share in the learning process.
- Play as the natural, constructive mode of children’s interactions with their peers, adults and environment. (DJELR, 2002 p 17).

This is a comprehensive vision for professionalism in practice. In addition, the Model Framework also made specific reference to management practice considered to be appropriate in early childhood services.

In terms of occupational profiles, the Model Framework built upon those proposed in The National Childcare Strategy but further developed and clarified the levels of expected knowledge, skill, competencies and responsibilities. As well as providing this clarity, the Model Framework also addressed the issue of the infrastructures necessary to implementing the vision in practice. A model of delivery was proposed which built in flexibility in terms of pathways to qualifications and which again took account of the large numbers within the workforce who needed to combine work and education opportunities.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Between 2002 and the present, the pace of development within the ECCE sector has continued to accelerate with commitments under the EOCP and its follow on programme the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP). The NCIP aims to deliver quality early childhood care and educational services centred on the needs of the child. A key factor in the provision of quality services and set out in Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, is that ‘individuals have skills, knowledge, values and attitudes appropriate to their role and responsibility within the (childcare) setting.’

DEVELOPING THE CHILDCARE TRAINING STRATEGY

The Early Years Education Policy of the Department of Education and Science is now co-located with the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC). The unit is working closely with the OMC and with representatives from the main funding Departments in the development of the strategy. A sub-group drawn from the Awarding Bodies has also been established to adopt sectoral standards for the education, training and professional development of the childcare sector parallel to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Building on the work of the 2002 Model Framework, some of the issues that need to be addressed in developing the strategy include:

- Quality of initial training based on appropriate levels of skills and knowledge.
- Developing a capacity at all levels to create a quality learning environment for children in childcare and pre-school settings.
- Mapping training and education requirements on to the National Qualifications Framework.
- Provision of ongoing professional development opportunities
- Recognition of experience and prior learning.
- Importance of flexible and affordable training pathways.
- Capitalising on experience in the VECs, FAS, the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs), Coty and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) and third-level institutions.
- Versatile and flexible modes of delivery.

* The Certifying Bodies sub-group had been instituted by the DJELR as part of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme.
PREPARATORY WORK
The Childcare Training Strategy will draw heavily on existing policy documents and also take cognisance of developments in the sector such as Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and the NCCA’s Framework for Early Learning.

The preparatory work has included an audit of existing childcare training places and analysis of the qualifications of the workforce in the sector. As the 2002 Model Framework pre-dated the NFQ, the validity of the occupational profiles set out in the 2002 Model Framework has also been referenced against the 10 level NFQ.

SUPPLY OF TRAINING PLACES
An audit of existing childcare training places has been carried out across the different training providers. The training providers include FÁS, the PLC sector, the NVCOs, the Institutes of Technology and the Universities. Data is available on the supply of existing childcare training places by level and by location. Data is also available on the overall number of people who achieve a major FETAC level 5 or FETAC level 6 award and on the number of students who graduate from third-level institutions.

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE WORKFORCE
There is information available through the Central Statistics Office (CSO) on the numbers and qualifications of people employed in the childcare and education sector. The data available is aggregate data using the following Standard Occupational Classifications:

- 650 Nursery nurses
- 651 Playgroup leaders
- 652 Educational assistants
- 659 Other childcare and related occupations

The CSO data shows that employment in the childcare and education sector (using the above classification) almost trebled between 1998 and 2006, growing from just over 10,000 in 1998 to almost 30,000 in 2006.

The CSO data also shows the educational attainment of people working in the sector and the upward shift in the attainment of qualifications. In 1999, more than 40% of the workforce had less than secondary level education. This compares to 23% holding less than secondary level education in 2006. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of people employed with third-level qualifications, which now stands at 29%.

This information is, however, aggregate information and includes people working within the education sector. To validate the qualifications data for people working only within the childcare sector, a survey of childcare providers has been commissioned. The survey has been disseminated through 33 CCCs who were asked to distribute the survey to the childcare providers in their region. Data will be available from the survey on an individual CCC basis as well as nationally.

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NEXT STEPS
The work done to date by the inter-Departmental group and the sectoral standards sub-group will inform the development of a consultative paper and a widespread consultative process. The timeframe for publication of the consultative paper is the first quarter of 2008. Details of the accompanying consultative process will be widely available. Following the consultative process, work will continue on drafting the Strategy leading to its publication in 2008.

REFERENCES
The childcare provision in Ireland has changed considerably since 1996, both in quantity and diversity. This means considerable change in the range of services and settings. These include childminders, playgroups, crèches, naíonra, drop-in centres and now over-night services. It is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE) Pre-School Inspection Teams to assess whether the needs of children are being met in any childcare environment. The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 2006, a revision of the 1996 regulations, are basic requirements in childcare provision. The issue of quality assurance and quality improvement will aid parents, those working in the early years sector and Pre-School Inspectors and will be the greatest challenge in the future.

The new Pre-School Regulations came into operation on 3rd September 2007. With the development of the HSE, it became a challenge for the Pre-School Service Officers to provide a standardised way of working throughout the country. In order to uniformly implement the Regulations some changes were introduced.

**PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTIONS**

A standardised structure has been put in place. This will lead to a consistent and effective system of inspection and reporting across the HSE. It is also important to facilitate transparency and accountability for providers and consumers of the service.

- The **Pre-School Service Inspection Tool** is intended for use by the Pre-School Service Officer to enable them to assess compliance or non-compliance. This form is organised under the different categories which the articles are grouped.
- The **Pre-School Service Officers Outcome Report** is the report that is sent to the provider after an inspection. It should be available to parents, guardian and other interested persons. It is used to record all compliances and non-compliances with each Regulation. If a Pre-School Service has a number of non-compliances or the breaches are considered serious enough by the Pre-School Service Officer, the service could be considered for prosecution.
- The **Pre-School Inspection Guidance Note** should be used by Pre-School Service Officers in conjunction with the Pre-School Inspection Tool and is provided to give assistance on the use of the tool and the inspection outcome report.

All Pre-School Inspection Outcome Reports will be available on the HSE website in the future. A list of all Pre-School Services notified to the HSE is also available on this website.
MAIN CHANGES IN THE REGULATIONS

CATEGORIES OF PRE-SCHOOL SERVICE

- **Sessional Services**: No change.
- **Full Day Care**: No change.
- **Part-Time Day Care**: New type of service offering a structured day care service for pre-school children for more than 3.5 hours and less than 5 hours a day. This service will be required to meet the same rest and play facilities as Full Day Care Services. This service does not have to provide a hot meal but will be required to have adequate food storage and food heating facilities if required.
- **Overnight Services**: These are services that are provided for more than 2 hours between 7:00p.m. and 6:00a.m. If a service is providing this facility it will be inspected to ensure the service is suitable for over-night care and supervision is adequate.
- **Drop-In Services**: These services must notify the HSE at least 14 days before the commencement of the service (it is 28 days for all other services).
  (For childminders see below)

ADULT CHILD RATIOS  
(Explanatory Guide – Regulation 8)

**Full Day Care & Part Time Services**

- 0–1 year 1:3 (no change)
- 1–2 years 1:5 (changed from 1:6)
- 2–3 years 1:6 (new age range)
- 3–6 years 1:8 (no change)

**Sessional Services**

- 0–1 year 1:3 (changed from 1:10)
- 1–2½ years 1:5 (changed from 1:10)
- 2½–6 years 1:10 (no change)

The interaction of siblings attending the Pre-School Service is promoted in the new Regulations.

**Childminders**

In the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 2006, childminders are required to care for no more than five children at any one time (some exemptions apply). This is a reduction from six children at any one time. The childminder will not be required to reduce the number cared for to five until the first child from that group leaves to start school or leaves voluntarily.

SPACE RATIOS  
(Explanatory Guide Regulation 18)

Space requirements refer to the recommended clear floor space. This has changed for day care services.

**Full Day Care & Part-Time Services**

- 0–1 year 3.5m² from 3.7m²
- 1–2 years 2.8m² (no change)
- 2–3 years 2.35m² from 2.32m²
- 3–6 years 2.3m² from 2.32m²

HEALTH WELFARE & DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD  
(Regulation 5)

The revised inspection tool allows the inspection to assess compliance of the care provided with regard to the age, stage of development and child’s cultural context. This holistic approach provides a detailed assessment of the following:

- a The basic physical needs of the child.
- b The emotional well being and social development of the child.
- c That learning and development opportunities are adequately provided.
- d That learning experiences and cognitive development for children is facilitated within the daily life of the service.
- e The service is responsive to the children’s learning, development and well-being on an individual basis.

This assessment is in accordance with the ‘Whole Child Perspective’ as outlined in the *National Children’s Strategy*. The article supports the value of play as part of the child’s development. As Inspectors, we are delighted to note the increased focus on the quality of the child’s experience with the service and the increased emphasis on care that is age appropriate and child centered.

REFERENCES & GARDA VETTING  
(Regulation 8)

It is now required that pre-school providers obtain Garda vetting of their staff, students and volunteers. Three national organisations – Barnardos, the National Children’s Nurseries Association (NCNA) and the Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association (IPPA) – have arrangements in place to assist with this process. Garda vetting in the Pre-School Section is still at an early implementation stage. Regulation 14 requires a written record of Garda clearance to be kept on the premises.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT  
(Regulation 9)

In the 1996 Regulations this was referred to as Corporal Punishment. This has been broadened to specify that the service must ensure that there are no harmful practices that are disrespectful, degrading, exploitive, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful to the children attending the service. Written policies must be in place to manage children’s behaviour appropriate to their age and stage of development.

RECORDS  
(Regulation 14)

There is now a requirement that all services keep a record in writing of references for all staff, students and volunteers working the service. Pre-school providers should have written policies on the management, recruitment and training policies with the service. These records must be available for inspection.

FEES  
(Regulation 31)

The annual fees have been changed as follows:

- Sessional Service €40 (was €32)
- Childminder €40 (was €63)
- All other services €80 (was €63)
CONCLUSION

Pre-School Inspectors are pleased to see the 2006 Regulations in place. We would view compliance with the Regulations as a basic standard of care and we appreciate that many Pre-School Providers strive for quality well above and beyond the requirements of the current legislations.

It is now only 10 years since legislation for childcare was introduced in this country. While the Pre-School Inspections were welcomed by many, they were often met with resistance and mistrust. In recent years there has been much more inter-agency work between HSE Pre-School Inspectors and National Voluntary Agencies and Childcare Committees and other bodies with a commitment to quality childcare provision. This partnership approach helps to promote the highest standard for care and protection of children and helps us as inspectors to do our job.

In the future we look forward to the introduction of National Standards in Childcare, which at present is a 'work in progress'. The publication of inspection outcome reports on the HSE website will be welcomed by parents and those looking for quality childcare.

However, further progress in the development of childcare in Ireland is required and Pre-School Inspectors have a vital contribution to make in this area.

This article has only covered the main areas of change. It is important that those working in the pre-school sector are familiar with the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006 and the Explanatory Guide that supports them.

The HSE-West Pre-School Inspection Service also offers support and advice to the Pre-School Providers who are proposing to start a new pre-school service in order to assist them to be compliant with the inspections and understand the process.

A PROVIDER’S PERSPECTIVE

SHARON BYRNE
Finglas Childcare Centre

Having worked in the early years sector for over ten years, I can remember a time when there were no Pre-School Regulations, as we know them today. Most childcare providers at the time met the impending introduction of Regulations with dread. I remember attending meetings for a whole year beforehand to prepare us for the huge changes that we would all have to make if we were to survive this legislation. Many smaller playgroups just shut up shop. Ten years on and I survived, as did the rest of us.

It was two years ago when I first heard talk of a review of the 1996 Pre-School Regulations. This time, instead of dreading what was to come, most providers I knew welcomed them. It was an opportunity to improve on the existing legislation and we had many suggestions. There were rumours of including school-aged childcare services and of changing from a notification to a registration system among others.

An announcement was made in 2006 that the Regulations would come into operation from January 2007. Many childcare providers were hoping to be briefed well in advance so they could prepare for any changes they might have to make to their service. I approached my local pre-school officer for advice but I was told that as they had still to be trained themselves, this was not a possibility. Finally the date was set, September 2007.

I first received notice from the Dublin City Childcare Committee that the amended Pre-school Regulations were available to download. This document was over 80 pages long and on first glance seemed much the same as the old version (a couple of months later I again received notice of a second edition which was now over 90 pages long!) There was no summary of changes to accompany it and so the provider was expected to trawl through them and note for themselves any new additions or alterations. Thankfully around this time many of the childcare networks and organisations organised information nights and I went to one that the IPPA spoke at which highlighted the main changes that the new Regulations would bring. This experience brought home to me the importance of childcare support agencies in this country. In what other sector would the government introduce new Regulations in such an ad hoc manner and expect mainly not for profit organisations to carry out its awareness campaign?

There are two new categories of pre-school services defined in the Regulations: part-time day care and overnight pre-school service. I have no experience of the second type but the part-time day care is a long overdue category and, being manager of a crèche that provides two four-hour sessions, we can now notify ourselves to the HSE more accurately. Previously, settings like ours had to notify as full day care, which was confusing to both prospective parents and to the various funding agencies that we have to report to. It is interesting to see that although there is now a part-time category, I can barely make out any differences between this and the full-time category.

The review of the Pre-School Regulations provided the opportunity for the HSE to make a requirement of many of the best practice guidelines that had been previously promoted or distributed by the Pre-School Officers.
ChildLinks

For example the ‘Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-School Services’ and the ‘Fire Safety in Pre-Schools’ publications have now been written into the Regulations and explanatory guide. This means that providers must also be well versed in these publications to ensure compliance. A welcome addition for all is the inclusion of Regulation 9, Behaviour Management, which has evolved from simply banning corporal punishment in pre-schools and expanded to ensure that “no practices that are disrespectful, degrading, exploitive, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful are carried out in respect of any child and that written procedures are in place for managing behaviour. For me as a provider, it has meant revisiting the policies and practices that are in place in our setting because like many other providers we have a written general policy on behaviour management, but we do not have all our practices written into procedures, particularly in relation to how they are implemented for the different ages of the children. This piece of work will take time as it needs the input of all stakeholders (staff, children, parents) but hopefully will result in a practical document that fully reflects our ethos in this area.

Some of the changes were minor, for example Regulation 13 (1) (i) requires written parental consent for medical treatment in the event of an emergency. This is a new regulation but most childcare providers would already have included this on each child’s registration form. I have also had to change the staff signing-in book so staff can sign in and out for breaks. There were significant changes to the staff ratio for sessional services that cater for babies and toddlers but, as a provider of a part-time service, for me the significant change was the introduction of an age range category of 1-2 years with an adult/child ratio of 1:5. Fortunately this did not impact on our service as we already operated within this ratio.

Regulation 5, Health, Welfare and Development of the Child seems to be one of the main amendments and the one that is causing concern for a lot of providers. The previous Regulations were content to confine the role of the pre-school in the development of the child to the equipment they provided but now they have been expanded to include the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interaction, materials and equipment. While I’m sure that most, if not all, childcare workers will agree on the importance of the above in the pre-school setting, I seriously doubt if any would agree on exactly what it would look like. If this can be said about childcare providers, who have trained and worked in the early years, then what can we say about pre-school officers who may have come from a multitude of non-childcare backgrounds. The impact of this regulation for me as a provider is the onus on our service to demonstrate (on paper) how our curriculum meets the health, welfare and development needs of each child in our care.

I welcome the introduction of Garda vetting of childcare workers. As a childcare provider I have been involved in lobbying the government for the introduction of Garda vetting for all childcare staff. This campaign has been going on for years and finally it has been written into the Regulations. However, the Government is again relying on childcare organisations to carry out a lot of its duties in this area with childcare providers applying through Barnardos, NCNA or IPPA for clearance of their staff. I understand this process will take time, as there is obviously a huge backlog of childcare workers waiting for Garda clearance. For now what will be on file in our centre is a copy of any letters/forms that have been forwarded to the appropriate organisation.

The HSE has designed a new process for inspections of pre-school services. The Pre-School Inspection Team when carrying out inspections will use a new Standardised Inspection Tool. The tool will cover all the elements of the Pre-school Regulations and should identify if services are compliant/non compliant in certain areas. The benefit for providers is that this tool should mean that all providers would be judged by the same standards and not at the discretion of the individual pre-school officers. Following an inspection of a service, a report will be made and this report will ultimately be available to read on the HSE’s website. This is a scary prospect for providers, particularly in light of the negative media attention that pre-school inspections and complaints have drawn in recent times. The proposed system will result in an unfair situation where providers may be ‘hung out to dry’ on often trivial misdemeanours which are easily rectified with no right to reply. If a provider is found to be non-compliant in an area and takes the necessary steps to correct the situation, surely this should be acknowledged on the HSE’s website, otherwise where is the natural justice?

To conclude, the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006 have not had a huge impact on our service. There have been significant changes we have had to make, particularly in how we record staff details and how we document aspects of our curriculum, but in the main we seem to be on track for compliance. I do not mean this to undermine the impact of the Regulations in general on the childcare sector as it is made up of such a variety of services operating under a variety of circumstances but from my experience the support of childcare organisations and networks has meant that the promotion of best practice for the past number of years has pre-empted many of the possible implications the new Regulations and requirements would have brought.

The Child Care (Pre-School Service) Regulations, 2006 and the standardised documents can be downloaded from: www.hse.ie
Ireland, like other English-speaking countries, has seen a recent upsurge in policy attention to early childhood education and care services (ECEC) and a rapid growth in services. But, like most other of these countries, it has expanded services without adequately addressing long-standing and deep-seated problems and without sufficient thought to the future. Instead of treating expansion as an opportunity to define and take a new direction, it has been a case of more of the same, exacerbating rather than eradicating the problems.

Farewell to Childcare: Re-thinking & Re-forming Early Childhood Education & Care

IRELAND: Part & Parcel of the English-speaking World
What are these long-standing and deep-seated problems, found in most English-speaking countries? First and foremost, an ECEC system that is split conceptually and structurally between ‘childcare’ and ‘early education’. There are separate services for ‘childcare’ and ‘early education’, and they are separately administered and funded, staffed and regulated. But equally important, these services are viewed, by government and also many in the media and general public, quite differently. ‘Childcare’ is seen as basically a private commodity, which working parents are responsible for accessing and purchasing through the market. ‘Early education’ is regarded as a ‘public good’, a government responsibility, available free and a right for children from 3 or 4 years of age. Further fragmentation takes place as publicly-funded but targeted ‘early intervention’ services and programmes are developed for disadvantaged families, with the intention of reducing the high levels of poverty and exclusion that are common in English-speaking countries.

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The result of these developments is a dysfunctional, divided and divisive system, each group of services intended for a particular purpose and a particular group of families. ‘Childcare’ services provide for families where both parents are employed; ‘early education’ services, usually located in primary schools, offer limited amounts of education for older pre-school children; while ‘early intervention’ services are intended to provide a social welfare function for a minority of families deemed problematic. Overall, since ‘childcare’ is treated as a private responsibility, much of the overall cost of ECEC services comes from parental fees, and public investment is low. According to a recent report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, public funding for ECEC services in Ireland comes to just 0.4 per cent of GDP; Australia, Canada, UK and US all spend around the same, far behind the Nordic countries, world leaders, who spend 1.5–2 per cent (and who, today, have a lower per capita GDP than Ireland). The other side of this coin is that parents contribute a large share of funding, the same report noting that in Ireland the ‘costs to parents are among the highest in Europe’. This situation, in turn, contributes to a recurring story across most of the English-speaking world: a ‘childcare’ workforce that is devalued, poorly qualified and poorly paid, usually with little or no industrial organisation or collective voice, second or third-class workers compared to the minority of teachers working in early education. Once again, Ireland is typical: low status, low rates of pay and high staff turnover are features of child care positions. Trade union representation for child care workers does not exist. Heavy reliance on parental payments places a firm ceiling on workforce improvements, producing a situation where both parents and childcare workers feel badly treated. The former complain they pay too much, the latter that they are poorly paid and undervalued.

RE-THINKING...

This approach to ECEC services is, in my view, neither desirable nor necessary. Developments in other countries, and the excellent review of ECEC services conducted by OECD, whose final report Starting Strong II was recently published, provide unequalled opportunities to re-think and re-form ECEC services based on learning with other countries and benefiting from their experience. There is really no excuse for keeping with split and dysfunctional systems: there are alternatives.

I refer in my title and just now to ‘re-thinking’, because the first step in developing a better ECEC system is to have a different image or understanding of the system and its services, in other words to think of it in a different way. It is a case of ‘farewell to childcare’, not abandoning childcare for working parents as a purpose of ECEC, but no longer treating ‘childcare’ as the only or defining purpose for a separate part of the system. Instead of some ECEC services being thought of as for childcare, others as for early education and yet others as for social welfare or family support, all services can and should be re-thought and viewed as a public good and a public responsibility, an expression of a community taking responsibility for the education and upbringing of its young children. Services feel a responsibility for and wish to be open to all local families, not just for those wanting to pay for childcare; committed to participation, these services want to be both inclusive and responsive to the needs of all families. ECEC services, along with schools, are recognised as unique and uniquely important public institutions, since all citizens attend them on a regular basis for a considerable period of time. They are, therefore, vital to the creation of social cohesion and solidarity.

Viewed in this way, ECEC services (but this understanding can be extended to schools) are forums, or places of encounter for citizens, young and old, in which many purposes and projects are possible – social, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, economic and political. Some of these purposes and projects will be anticipated, others will be unexpected, emerging from the encounters within a service and its
openness to its local community. Here are just a few of these purposes and projects, to give a hint of the potential of these social institutions, definitely not a complete inventory:

- Construction of knowledge, values and identities
- Researching, for example children’s learning processes
- Community and group support and empowerment
- Cultural (including linguistic) sustainability and renewal
- Promoting gender equality
- Supporting economic development
- Providing sites for democratic and ethical practice

**ECEC services...** are forums, or places of encounter for citizens, young and old, in which many purposes and projects are possible — social, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, economic and political.

**...RE-FORMING**

From this re-thinking of ECEC services — as socially important, multi-purpose public institutions for all children and families — follows re-form. One department of government — probably education — assumes complete responsibility for ECEC. This entails risks of ‘schoolification’ unless re-thinking and re-form is extended to compulsory schooling and the relationship between ECEC and schooling, following the principle proposed by OECD of a ‘strong and equal partnership’. Provision needs to be reshaped, moving towards multi-purpose ‘Children’s Centres’, contributing to their local communities with a wide range of services, which gradually become an entitlement for all children from birth to six years and their families.

Increased public funding will enable the reform of the workforce. A new profession, specialising in work with children from birth to six years and their families, will be at the heart of this integrated service, enjoying parity — of qualification and employment conditions — with school teachers, and accounting for at least half the workforce. There are choices to be made here. For example, this professional could be a new teacher, specialising in work with young children and families (as in New Zealand, Spain or Sweden). Or she or he could be a pedagogue (as in Denmark or Germany), a practitioner of pedagogy, a theory and practice discussed further below.

England has begun this process of re-form. Responsibility for ECEC services (but also for child welfare and most other policy areas for children, young people and families) has been moved into the education ministry, now renamed the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The government is committed to providing 3,500 Children’s Centres by 2010, one for each community. There is a single curriculum framework for children from birth to six years. But welcome as these developments are, the English re-form process has a long way to go, not least because there has been insufficient re-thinking. Despite a rhetoric of ‘care’ and ‘education’ being inseparable, in practice policy makers and public still compartmentalise ‘childcare’ and ‘early education’ in how they think and talk: and this is reflected in continuing structural divisions. There remains, in effect, one system of services, funding and staffing for ‘childcare’, another for ‘early education’.

**LOOKING NORTH...**

To see countries which have fully re-thought and re-formed, it is necessary to look elsewhere in Europe, to the Nordic world. All five Nordic countries have moved to ECEC systems that are fully integrated, in concept and structure. In three cases — Iceland, Norway and Sweden — these integrated 0–6 services are located in education, while Denmark and Finland are, for the moment, still in welfare. Let me use Sweden as an example of how this approach works.

Provision needs to be reshaped, moving towards multi-purpose ‘Children’s Centres’, contributing to their local communities with a wide range of services, which gradually become an entitlement for all children from birth to six years and their families.

Sweden has developed a fully integrated ECEC system since the 1960s. Originally in welfare, the system was transferred (with free-time services — out-of-school childcare) to
education in 1996. There was subsequently an awareness that this transfer might lead to schools exerting a downward pressure on ECEC services, ‘schoolification'; so much emphasis has been placed on creating a ‘strong and equal partnership'. Göran Persson, Swedish Prime Minister at the time of transfer, stated that early childhood education and care should be the first step of lifelong learning and that the ECEC services should influence, at least, the early years of compulsory schooling: ‘initiatives taken since have sought to build closer links between pre-school, free-time services and school, treating all as equal parts of the education system’.8

Underpinning the Swedish system are three cardinal principles: entitlement, democracy and pedagogy... pre-school is now defined as a child’s entitlement, irrespective of parental employment status or of the child’s additional needs. The pre-school curriculum spells out the second principle: ‘Democracy forms the foundation of the pre-school. For this reason, all pre-school activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values.’9 The same curriculum also adds that ‘the pre-school should provide children with good pedagogical activities, where care, nurturing and learning together form a coherent whole.’10

This concept of pedagogy provides Sweden (and also other Nordic countries) with a strong integrative concept, a way of viewing children and ECEC in a holistic way: such a concept is, I believe, a necessary part of re-thinking and re-forming an ECEC system. Pedagogy is a theory, practice and profession widespread in Continental Europe, but largely unknown in the English-speaking world, where ‘pedagogy’ is often translated and understood as the science of education, while the ‘pedagogue’ is similarly miscast as ‘teacher’. Pedagogy is a relational and holistic approach to working with people. The pedagogue sets out ‘to address the whole child, the child with body, mind, emotions, creativity, history and social identity. This is not the child only of emotions, the psycho-therapeutical approach, nor only of the body, the medical approach, nor only of the mind, the traditional teaching approach’.11 For the pedagogue, the practitioner of pedagogy, learning, care and upbringing (erziehung in German, a typically pedagogical term) are indivisible activities; these are not distinct fields that must somehow be joined up, but interconnected facets of life that cannot be envisaged separately.12

...AND SOUTH
Perhaps the closest translation of pedagogy into English would be ‘education in its broadest sense', and it is this concept that underpins the important experience of New Zealand, the main exception to the general picture of English-speaking countries outlined above. The New Zealand experience is particularly relevant to a country like Ireland because it, too, has a complex mix of services, most provided privately, and little tradition of local authorities playing an active role in this field (unlike the Nordic countries, where local authorities are key players, including providing many services).

New Zealand has been engaged in developing an integrated ECEC system since 1988, when responsibility for all services was placed in education. Subsequent development has been based on a broad and integrating concept of education – the policy discussion in New Zealand is always
framed in terms of ‘early childhood education’ – and an understanding of the multiple purposes of early childhood education. The system addresses three related sets of interests: the child, parents/caregivers and cultural survival (e.g. of Maori culture and language). The foundational policy document – ‘Education to be More’, published in 1988 – emphasises that ‘it is important that all three elements are present in every arrangement… Correct balance is crucial’.13

The New Zealand journey has been not been smooth with changes in government leading to reversals. But today, New Zealand has got further down the road to a fully integrated ECEC system than any other non-Nordic country. Recently it has enjoyed a number of years of political continuity, and is currently half way through a 10-year Early Childhood Education Strategic Plan, Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2002). A central goal is a 100 per cent graduate workforce by 2012, made up of teachers specialising in work with children from birth to 5 years. This is supported by most public finance going directly into services, and linked to the growth of qualified workers in each service: funding increases as qualified staff numbers grow. A third structural development, supporting integration, is a highly innovative 0–5 curriculum, Te Whāriki, described as ‘an inclusive curriculum based on a Maori conceptual framework’, complemented by a rich mix of other materials and methods to support innovative educational work.

It is creating a climate of innovative educational thought and practice, with a strong research community working closely with practitioners, and supported by a committed and knowledgeable Ministry of Education.

New Zealand still has some way to travel before it achieves its goal of a fully integrated system. But it has already taken major steps. It has re-thought and it has re-formed. It has tackled the ‘wicked issues’ of revaluing the workforce and putting in place a coherent funding mechanism. It is creating a climate of innovative educational thought and practice, with a strong research community working closely with practitioners, and supported by a committed and knowledgeable Ministry of Education. Now, too, there are the beginnings of a closer and reciprocal relationship with the school sector, with key concepts in Te Whāriki, being recognised in a new school curriculum.

ECEC services can, and should be, key social institutions in modern societies, along with schools; they can and should be places of encounter, solidarity and possibilities that play an important role in the lives of most citizens.

It seems to me that the main lesson for Ireland to be drawn from countries like Sweden and New Zealand is that there are other ways of thinking and doing early childhood education and care, based on holistic and integrative concepts, structures and practices. ECEC services can, and should be, key social institutions in modern societies, along with schools; they can and should be places of encounter, solidarity and possibilities that play an important role in the lives of most citizens. As such, they can resist the atomisation and isolation of our hyper-individualistic societies. But to play this role, we have to say ‘farewell to childcare’.

A final word. I would urge anyone concerned with the future direction of ECEC in Ireland to read the final report of the OECD review of early childhood education and care: Starting Strong II. It is the product of a multi-national enquiry led by a fellow countryman, John Bennett. It is full of rich information and insightful comments and conclusions. But it is more than a technical guide, realising the importance of understandings and visions. So I want to end by quoting from the final chapter, which offers an image of the early childhood centre that I find very important. This chapter sets out ten ‘policy areas for consideration’ and my selected quotation comes from the tenth area headed ‘To aspire toward ECEC systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy’:

It is creating a climate of innovative educational thought and practice, with a strong research community working closely with practitioners, and supported by a committed and knowledgeable Ministry of Education.
In addition to learning and the acquisition of knowledge, an abiding purpose of public education is to enhance understanding of society and encourage democratic reflexes in children. Today, societies seem to be less concerned with such ideals. Reflecting the growing marketisation of public services, consumer attitudes towards education and knowledge are increasing. Individual choice is put forward as a supreme value, without reference to social cohesion or the needs of the local community...

Faced by this challenge it seems particularly important that the early childhood centre should become a community of learners, where children are encouraged to participate and share with others, and where learning is seen as primarily interactive, experiential and social. Learning to be, learning to do, learning to learn and learning to live together are each important goals for young children...

The vision of early childhood services as a life space where educators and families work together to promote the well-being, participation and learning of young children is based on the principle of democratic participation.”

REFERENCES

2 Ibid, p.355
3 Ibid, p.356
4 Ibid
Useful Resources on Developments in Childcare

You can search the NCRC library catalogue on www.barnardos.ie

The following resources are available from the NCRC:

An Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education 1990–2006
Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2007

Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 505 of 2006)
The Stationery Office, 2006

Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 and Explanatory Guide to Requirements and Procedures for Notification and Inspection
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Early Assessment and Intervention in Educational Disadvantage
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