

# **Workforce Development Plan for the ELC/SAC Sector**

## **Background Note and Draft Terms of Reference for the Steering Group**

### **1. Background and Context**

In 2010, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) published a Workforce Development Plan for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The Plan acknowledged the strong evidence base that early childhood experiences have a critical impact on the well-being, learning and development of children and that the skills, knowledge, competencies, values and attitudes of the workforce delivering early years services was a determining factor in the quality of those experiences.

At the time of preparing the 2010 report, a comprehensive skills forecasting exercise was not carried out as the desired profile of the workforce in terms of qualification levels was not defined or underpinned by any regulatory requirements.

Since 2010, the policy and practice landscape of early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) in Ireland has changed dramatically. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) was established in 2011 with overall policy responsibility for ELC and SAC, working in close collaboration with DES. The ECCE Programme, providing free universal pre-school provision, first introduced in 2010, was extended by DCYA in 2016 and again in 2018 and now offers two years of free pre-school provision before children enter primary school. The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was introduced in 2016 to support the meaningful participation of children with a disability in the ECCE Programme. A range of schemes have been put in place to subsidise the cost of ELC and SAC to families, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with work well underway to streamline these schemes into a single National Childcare Scheme from November 2019. The number of children benefitting from free or publicly subsidised ELC and SAC has risen sharply.

There has also been an increasing focus on quality, with new regulations introduced in December 2016 introducing a minimum qualification requirement for the ELC workforce for the first time (a Level 5 qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education on the National Framework for Qualifications). A contractual requirement for a higher level of qualification has been introduced into the ECCE Programme (Level 6 on the NFQ for ECCE room-leaders), as has an incentive for the employment of graduates with a relevant qualification at Level 7 or above through a Higher Capitation payment. In addition, a Learner Fund has been introduced to provide financial support for practitioners currently working in the sector to upskill (with funding provided for achievement of Level 5, 6, 7 and 8 qualifications), and a range of actions are under way to develop a national CPD infrastructure (through the Learner Fund as well as the National Síolta Aistear Initiative and AIM).

These changes have significantly altered the qualification and skills profile of the ELC workforce. For example, whereas 71% of practitioners had a qualification equal to or higher than NFQ Level 5 in 2010, by mid-2018 this proportion had risen to 94%. Taking into account the number of individuals who signed a 'grandfathering' declaration at the time the minimum qualification requirement was introduced, as well as students on placement and staff working solely with school-age children,<sup>2</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Early-Years/eye\\_workforce\\_dev\\_plan.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Early-Years/eye_workforce_dev_plan.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> There is not yet a minimum qualification requirement for staff working in SAC.

proportion of ELC practitioners with at least a Level 5 qualification is now likely to be very close to 100%. There has also been a sharp rise in the proportion of graduates with a relevant degree (level 7 or higher on the NFQ), which has risen from 12% in 2012 to 22% in 2018.

Also since 2010, there has been an emerging focus by DCYA on school-age childcare and on childminding, through for example the publication of the School-Age Childcare Action Plan in 2017,<sup>3</sup> the publication of the Report of the Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector in 2018,<sup>4</sup> and the introduction for the first time of SAC Regulations in 2019.

All of these changes have been made possible by an unprecedented 117% increase in State investment in ELC and SAC since 2015, with a further commitment to double current levels of investment by 2028. This commitment is articulated in *First 5*,<sup>5</sup> Ireland's first ever whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028).

Nevertheless, the target set in *First 5* of achieving a graduate-led workforce by 2028 is ambitious, particularly in the context of a high turnover rate of practitioners working in the sector. Data from Pobal's 2018 Early Years Sector Profile indicates an annual turnover rate of 25% among staff in ELC and SAC services, of which – based on responses to previous sector profiles – it is estimated that approximately half may have left the ELC/SAC sector in the previous year, with the remainder changing jobs within the sector.

Addressing the terms and conditions of employment for the ELC/SAC workforce, including wage-levels, is likely to be key to reducing the turnover rate and achieving the high qualification levels targeted in *First 5*. However, the Government's capacity to introduce measures to improve terms and conditions of employment is constrained by the fact that the State is not the employer. ELC and SAC services are owned and managed by a combination of independent centre-based providers, of which 74% are private and 26% are community-based (in the 2018 Early Years Sector Profile), and childminders, who may be self-employed or employed by parents. In the absence of measures by which the Government can directly influence wages and working conditions in the sector, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has called for the ELC sector to pursue a Sectoral Employment Order through the Workplace Relations Commission / Labour Court and has signalled her Department's willingness to cooperate with such a process.

It also remains the case that there is no professional regulator for ELC/SAC (equivalent to the Teaching Council or CORÚ). DCYA is responsible for the regulation of services providing ELC and SAC, with Tusla appointed as the statutory regulator under the Child Care Act 1991 (as amended by the Child and Family Agency Act 2013). In the absence of a professional regulator, DCYA maintains a list of approved qualifications for the purposes of compliance with statutory regulations and funding requirements of the ECCE Programme, and oversees a process to validate the qualifications of staff in the sector.

All these developments, and indeed other commitments set out in *First 5*, have and will impact significantly on the ELC and SAC workforce over the next 10 years.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/20170306SchoolAgeChildrenActionPlan.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.childminding.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ChildmindingVol1-230318.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/19112018\\_4966\\_DCYA\\_EarlyYears\\_Booklet\\_A4\\_v22\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/19112018_4966_DCYA_EarlyYears_Booklet_A4_v22_WEB.pdf)

## 2. Future Direction of ELC and SAC

*First 5, A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028)* was published by the DCYA in 2018.<sup>6</sup> One objective of this Strategy is that ‘babies and young children have access to safe, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate, integrated ELC (and school-age childcare), which reflects diversity of need’. To meet this objective and building on recent initiatives, the following Strategic Actions have been identified:

- Make high-quality ELC (and school-age childcare) for babies and young children more affordable (through for example continued funding and support for two full years of the ECCE programme, and the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) to publicly subsidise the cost of high-quality regulated ELC (and school-age childcare);
- Maintain and extend the supply of high-quality publicly subsidised ELC (and school-age childcare) to best serve the developmental needs of babies and young children, ensuring that it also reflects the needs and preferences of parents and families (through for example extending regulation to all paid, non-relative childminders) on a phased basis and developing a strategic capital investment plan to deliver large-scale capital investment under Project 2040 with the aim of ensuring that the demand for high-quality ELC and SAC places meets supply; and
- Ensure that ELC and SAC provision promotes participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity through the integration of additional supports and services for children and families with additional needs (through for example continued roll out of AIM to ensure the full inclusion of children with a disability in settings delivering the ECCE programme and possible extensions of AIM to meet the needs of other children).

In parallel, *First 5* includes a range of actions to improve the quality of ELC and SAC. *First 5* recognises that the workforce is at the heart of high-quality ELC and SAC and seeks to build ‘an appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families’. It identifies a range of challenges to be addressed over the coming decade (including the quality of initial and on-going training and workforce supply, recruitment and retention) and signposts major reforms that will build on recent work by DCYA and DES (including the Higher Capitation payment within the ECCE programme, the Learner Fund, a pilot of paid CPD, a review of occupational role profiles<sup>7</sup>, the development of criteria and guidelines for relevant higher education qualifications<sup>8</sup>, and a skills forecasting model commissioned by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs). *First 5* also sets ambitious targets for the ELC and SAC workforce, so that by 2028:

- All regulated childminders will hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by DCYA by end 2019). An appropriate period of time will be provided to meet this requirement;

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/19112018\\_4966\\_DCYA\\_EarlyYears\\_Booklet\\_A4\\_v22\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/19112018_4966_DCYA_EarlyYears_Booklet_A4_v22_WEB.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Final-Review-of-Occupational-Role-Profiles-in-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Care.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Early-Childhood/early-years-education-policy-consultation-14-december-2017.pdf>; <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Early-Childhood/evaluation-report-consultation-on-draft-criteria-and-guidelines.pdf>

- All regulated school-age childcare staff will hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by DCYA by end 2019). An appropriate period of time will be provided to meet this requirement; and
- A graduate-led ELC workforce, with at least 50% of staff (i.e. all room leaders, assistant manager and managers) working directly with children in centre-based ELC settings and coordinators supporting the work of childminders to hold an appropriate degree-level qualification (with an initial target of 30% to be reached by 2021).

The Workforce Development Plan will also draw on the EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (due to be finalised and agreed by the EU Council of Ministers in May 2019),<sup>9</sup> which calls for: well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enable them to fulfil their professional role; and supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents. Policy learning from international experience will be supported by the work of the EU ET2020 Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (which is working within the context of the EU Quality Framework) and the OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care.

### 3. Purpose of the Workforce Development Plan

*First 5* commits to developing ‘a Workforce Development Plan to ensure the appropriate number of ELC and SAC staff at all levels in the sector. The Workforce Development Plan will support the achievement of the above targets. The Workforce Development Plan will also set out plans to raise the profile of careers in ELC and SAC, establish a career framework and leadership development opportunities and will work towards building a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce. Consideration will also be given to broader ELC and school-age childcare workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles and support for those who facilitate practice placements.’

### 4. Scope of the Workforce Development Plan

The Workforce Development Plan will address the development of the ELC and SAC workforce, including both registered centre-based and registered home-based provision,<sup>10</sup> over the period to 2028. This workforce includes more than 30,000 staff working in centre-based services<sup>11</sup> and up to 35,000 childminders who will be subject to the phased introduction of regulations over the next decade.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/ecec/ecec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/ecec/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Registered home-based provision comprises self-employed childminders registered with Tusla, who are currently very low in number. Given the commitment in *First 5* to extend statutory regulations to cover all paid, non-relative childminders on a phased basis, it is envisaged that registered home-based provision of ELC/SAC will expand significantly during the time-period covered by the Workforce Development Plan. However, it is envisaged that nannies / childminders employed by parents will remain outside the scope of regulation and therefore outside the scope of the Workforce Development Plan.

<sup>11</sup> According to the 2018 Early Years Sector Profile (Pobal) there are an estimated 29,600 staff working in centre-based services, of which 25,900 are working directly with children. However, the only SAC services included within the Pobal survey are services with which DCYA has a current funding relationship. Following the regulation of SAC services, which came into force in February 2019, it is anticipated that there will be an increase in the number of SAC services falling within the scope of the Workforce Development Plan. <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2018/11/Early-Years-Sector-Profile-Report-2017-2018.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> The estimate of 35,000 childminders is based on CSO survey data on the proportion of children cared for by childminders and an assumption that each childminder cares for on average 2.5 children. However, introduction of regulations into childminding, as planned in *First 5*, may impact on the number of childminders.

The Workforce Development Plan will also give consideration to the broader ELC and SAC workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles and support for those who facilitate practice placements.

While ELC and SAC services may cater for children from less than one year of age up to 15 years of age, the majority (59%) of children using centre-based services are three or four years old, and only a small proportion (7%) are 8 years or older. In relative terms, a larger proportion of children using childminders are school-age. While the proportion of pre-school-children using childminders is significantly less than the proportion using centre-based services, among school-age children the proportion of children using childminders (8%, though this figure also includes au pairs and nannies) is the same as the proportion using centre-based services. (According to the most recent CSO data,<sup>13</sup> about 70% of children aged 0-12 are taken care of by a parent or the partner of a parent.)

While the Workforce Development Plan for the ELC/SAC sector will take into consideration commitments in *First 5* in relation to the wider workforce in services for young children and families e.g. in health services (such as the commitment to develop an Early Childhood Workforce Initiative), achievement of such commitments will not form part of the Workforce Development Plan.

## 5. Two stages in developing the Workforce Development Plan

The Workforce Development Plan, which will involve close collaboration between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills, will be developed in two stages, both of which will be overseen by the Steering Group.

**Stage 1**, which is expected to take approximately 12 months, for completion by Q2 of 2020, will involve:

- (a) Preparation of a core report that sets out: a **high-level vision** for the ELC and SAC workforce for the period 2020-2028, and a pathway for achieving the commitments set out in *First 5* in relation to development of the ELC and SAC workforce. The high-level vision should include the composition of the workforce in registered centre-based and home-based ELC and SAC settings, including composition by both qualification level and gender/diversity. It should also include occupational roles and career pathways for ELC and SAC (centre-based and home-based) practitioners working in the sector and in the support services for the sector (including inspection, mentoring and training roles); and relevant qualifications and knowledge/skills profiles that will achieve optimal ELC/SAC experiences for children.
- (b) Completion of a **skills forecast** setting out the projected demand and supply of ELC/SAC practitioners at different qualification levels over the period 2020-2028, to determine whether supply arrangements are adequate to meet demand. The skills forecast will use the model commissioned by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, combined with analysis of future needs of the sector (supply and demand at different qualification levels), taking into account attrition and turnover in the workforce.
- (c) Making decisions in relation to: **occupational roles** within the ELC/SAC workforce, including in support services for the sector (e.g. inspection, mentoring and training

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<sup>13</sup> CSO (2017) QNHS Module on Childcare, Q3 2016.

roles), **qualification requirements** for those roles (over the lifetime of the Workforce Development Plan) and **terminology** to describe the roles; and **minimum qualification requirements** to be introduced (over the lifetime of the Workforce Development Plan) for (i) childminders and (ii) the SAC workforce.

- (d) Agreement on Terms of Reference and membership of a small number of working groups that during Stage 2 will develop detailed implementation plans in key areas of workforce development.

**Stage 2**, which will commence either during or at the end of Stage 1, and should be completed by Q2 of 2021, will involve completion of **implementation plans** by working groups to be specified in Stage 1. The working groups will be tasked with developing implementation plans in a limited number of key areas in which more detailed planning is required. While specification of the working groups will be determined by the Steering Group during Stage 1, the areas of activity in which more detailed implementation plans are likely to be needed include:

- Initial education / training;
- CPD infrastructure (including leadership development);
- Mechanisms for upskilling the workforce (including funding and incentivisation mechanisms);
- Terms and conditions of employment (recognising that the State is not the employer);
- Professional and qualifications recognition;
- Legislative/regulatory implications for change.

Certain work-areas will not require establishment of Stage 2 Working Groups because detailed planning is under way through other channels. For example, a core mechanism for incentivising recruitment of more highly qualified staff and improved working conditions will be a new funding model for the ELC/SAC sector. While the Workforce Development Plan will specify some of the requirements to be achieved through the funding model, the funding model itself will be developed as a separate action under *First 5*. Similarly, a 10-year Childminding Action Plan is due for publication in 2019. While the Workforce Development Plan will involve specification of a minimum qualification requirement for childminders and the skills forecast will include childminders, much of the detailed planning for actions to support childminders will be set out through the Childminding Action Plan and workstreams that will flow from that Plan.

On establishment, the Steering Group will be briefed on other major and related projects to be commenced over the next year, for example, a review of the ELC and SAC operating system nationally, and the new funding model for ELC and SAC. Potential synergies with these other groups will be explored.

## 6. Role of the Steering Group

The Steering Group will report to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, who holds policy responsibility for ELC and SAC, and who will consult with the Minister for Education and Skills in respect of matters relevant to his complementary responsibility in supporting the quality of education provided in the ELC sector and the quality of the education and training programmes available to its workforce.

The role of the steering group will be to:

1. Prepare a report by Q2 of 2020 that sets out: a high-level vision for the ELC and SAC workforce for the period 2020-2028, and a pathway for achieving the related commitments set out in *First 5*; a skills forecast setting out the projected demand and supply of ELC/SAC practitioners at different qualification levels over the period 2020-2028, to determine whether supply arrangements are adequate to meet demand; and recommendations in relation to occupational roles within the ELC/SAC workforce, qualification requirements for those roles, terminology to describe the roles, and minimum qualification requirements to be introduced for childminders and for the school-age childcare workforce.
2. Oversee the preparation of detailed implementation plans in key areas of workforce development to support achievement of the high-level vision and pathway set out in the report, including: agreeing Terms of Reference and membership of working groups by Q2 of 2020, which will be chaired by DCYA and DES as per their areas of responsibility; monitoring the work of the working groups; and reviewing and finalising implementation plans developed by the working groups by Q2 of 2021.
3. During preparation of the report, carry out a public consultation – both with the ELC/SAC sector and with wider stakeholders including parents – on the basis of a consultation paper on a high-level vision for the workforce, including on the question of terminology to describe occupational roles within the sector, and consult the Stakeholder Group (see below) at key milestones in preparation of the Workforce Development Plan.
4. Make recommendations on mechanisms to monitor and review implementation of the Workforce Development Plan over the period 2020-2028.

## 7. Membership of the Steering Group

Membership of the Steering Group will be as follows:

**Chair:**

Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Assistant Secretary for the Early Years Division

**Members:**

Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Principal Officer, Early Years Quality

Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Principal Officer, Early Years Policy, Strategy and Research

Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Principal Officer, External Human Resources

Department of Education and Skills, Principal Officer, Early Years Education Policy Unit

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Early Childhood Ireland, CEO

HEA

Pobal

QQI

Solas

Tusla, National Service Director, Children's Services Regulation

Chair of Technical Advisory Group

External expert on workforce planning  
External expert on the ELC / SAC workforce, Professor Mathias Urban, DCU

**Secretariat:**

Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Early Years Quality Unit  
and Department of Education and Skills, Early Years Education Policy Unit

The Steering Group may co-opt additional members as required to provide relevant expertise.

Alternative members may be nominated to attend meetings, subject to the prior approval of the Chair.

**Stakeholder Group**

A Stakeholder Group to feed into the deliberations of the Steering Group will be convened at the request of the Steering Group. The professionalisation sub-group established under the auspices of the Early Learning and Care Forum chaired by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs will form part of this group. The Steering Group will decide whether additional stakeholders, e.g. representing children's and parents' interests, should also be invited to join the Stakeholder Group.

**Working Groups**

Membership and Chair of working groups to develop stage 2 action implementation plans will be identified during the course of stage 1, depending on the scope and terms of reference of each working group.

**Technical Advisory Group**

A Technical Advisory Group to advise the Steering Group on research/data matters will be convened as appropriate with representation from Departmental statisticians and researchers, Pobal, HEA, QQI and other relevant providers of data that may be identified during the course of stages 1 or 2.

**8. Schedule of meetings**

A schedule of meetings will be determined by the Chair of the Steering Group, in discussion with the Steering Group. It is expected that the Steering Group will meet approximately 8-10 times per year, with the first meeting to take place in May 2019.