



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Workforce Development Plan Phase 1 Progress Report

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1. Introduction

This report outlines the progress made on the Workforce Development Plan between its initiation in May 2019, to December 2020. This period constitutes phase 1 of the Workforce Development Plan, encompassing consideration of a number of policy areas by the Steering Group and the Stakeholder Group of the project, as well as a public consultation process on key policy questions, reports on which are contained in the appendices at the end of this report.

Phase 2 of the project began in early 2021 with the constitution of five working groups, each of which will explore the policy areas outlined in this report before reporting to the Steering Group in July 2021. The final report on the Workforce Development Plan is due for publication by the end of 2021.

A) First 5

First 5, the whole-of-Government strategy for babies, young children and their families, set out a transformative vision for early learning and care for the period 2019-2028. It included a range of workforce-related commitments, including the development of a new Workforce Development Plan. Other workforce-related commitments in First 5 include:

- Achieving a graduate-led workforce by 2028.
- All regulated childminders holding a minimum qualification by 2028.
- All regulated school-age childcare staff holding a minimum qualification by 2028.
- Publication of agreed criteria and guidelines for further and higher education early learning and care qualifications, and developing a structure to review and oversee compliance with the new standards and guidelines, moving over time towards a professional standards body.
- Introducing a redeveloped national subsidised fund for further and higher early learning and care.
- Developing a national programme of CPD opportunities.
- Alongside a new funding model, examining the possible introduction of further quality levers within funding schemes to incentivise the attraction and retention of staff.
- Reviewing favourable working conditions so that employers can attract and retain staff.

B) Terms of Reference for the Workforce Development Plan

First 5 commits to developing:

‘A Workforce Development Plan to ensure the appropriate number of early learning and care and school-age childcare staff at all levels in the sector. The Workforce Development Plan will support the achievement of the above targets [for a graduate-led workforce and for minimum qualifications for childminders and school-age childcare]. The Workforce Development Plan will also set out plans to raise the profile of careers in early learning and care and school-age childcare, 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 early learning and care and school-age childcare workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles and support for those who facilitate practice placements.’

In line with this commitment, a Steering Group was established in May 2019 to lead on this project. The key tasks of the Steering Group, as set out in its Terms of Reference, are to:

- Prepare a core report that sets out a high-level vision for the early learning and care and school-age childcare workforce for the period 2020-2028, and a pathway for achieving the

commitments set out in First 5 in relation to development of the early learning and care and school-age childcare workforce.

- Complete a skills forecast setting out the projected demand and supply of early learning and care/school-age childcare practitioners at different qualification levels over the period 2020-2028, to determine whether supply arrangements are adequate to meet demand.
- Make decisions in relation to occupational roles in the early learning and care/school-age childcare workforce, qualification requirements for those roles, and terminology to describe the roles.
- Set minimum qualification requirements for childminders and the school-age childcare workforce, to be introduced over the lifetime of the Workforce Development Plan.
- Develop associated implementation plans.

The Workforce Development Plan is being developed in parallel with development of a new funding model for the early learning and care and school-age childcare sector, and a number of the First 5 commitments related to the workforce relate to both the Workforce Development Plan and the new funding model. Additionally, a review of the operating system for the sector is under way. The National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028 was published in April 2021, and took into account proposals developed during Phase 1 of the Workforce Development Plan.¹

In scope, the Workforce Development Plan addresses the development of the early learning and care and school-age childcare workforce, including both registered centre-based and registered home-based provision, over the period to 2028. The Workforce Development Plan also gives consideration to the broader early learning and care and school-age childcare workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles and support for those who facilitate practice placements.

While the Workforce Development Plan takes 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 is outside the scope of the Workforce Development Plan.

C) Previous Workforce Development Plan

In 2010, the then Department of Education and Skills published a Workforce Development Plan for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland. 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.

The 2010 Workforce Development Plan included consideration of occupational profiles; national award standards; access to flexible, affordable and nationally accredited learning opportunities; and quality assurance of courses.

Both the policy context and the sector itself have changed significantly in the 10 years since the last Workforce Development Plan. Changes are seen in a major expansion of the sector and its workforce, particularly following the introduction of the ECCE pre-school programme in 2010 and its later extensions in 2016 and 2018, the formation of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2011 (now the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth), the introduction of a minimum qualification requirement to work in the sector in 2016, and the publication of First 5 in 2018.

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/df207-national-action-plan-for-childminding-2021-2028/>

D) Process of developing the Plan

The Workforce Development Plan is being developed in close collaboration between the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Education, and its development is overseen by a Steering Group and supported by a Stakeholder Group. The membership of the Steering Group and the Stakeholder Group are set out within the Terms of Reference in Appendix 3 and 4.

The Plan is being developed in two stages. Stage 1, which is completed with the publication of this progress report, has involved high-level planning in relation to the composition of the workforce, including occupational roles and career pathways, and consideration of means to promote retention and recruitment of the workforce. Work on Stage 1 began in mid-2019 and was due for completion by mid-2020, but the response to Covid-19 delayed completion of the progress report to end 2020. Stage 2, which began in January 2021 and will be completed by late 2021, involves development of more detailed planning for key policy measures identified in Phase 1.

The Stakeholder Group, consisting of a range of stakeholders relevant to the Workforce Development Plan, has been consulted on each piece of work to date and has provided valuable insights to inform the work of the Steering Group.

Key to the development of proposals has been a public consultation process that took place between August and October 2020. Detail of the consultation process is set out in section 3 and in Appendix 1 and 2.

2. Context

A) Recent Developments

In Ireland and across the globe, early learning and childcare systems have undergone a rapid evolution in the last two decades. In the last 10 years alone, the workforce in early learning and care and school-age childcare settings in Ireland has increased from less than 22,000 to 30,000, a minimum qualification requirement has been introduced, and the proportion of staff with a qualification at Level 7 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications has more than doubled.

Underpinning many of the changes in recent years has been a significant increase in public investment in the sector, which has increased more than 140% in the last 5 years alone. The introduction of the ECCE free pre-school programme in 2010, the Access and Inclusion Model in 2016, and the National Childcare Scheme in 2019 have been key milestones in the expansion of public investment.

At the same time, there has been a growing consensus nationally and internationally of what constitutes high quality early learning and care for children. This has been set out over the last decade in a number of key national and international reports and communications, including the EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Significant challenges remain, however, both in ensuring the workforce is appropriately qualified, skilled and supported for its important role in young children's early learning and care, and in ensuring the recruitment and retention of qualified staff, key to which are the pay and working conditions in the sector, which are low in comparison with the same sector in comparable countries.

B) Current context

The Workforce Development Plan is being developed in parallel with development of a new funding model for the early learning and care and school-age childcare sector, and a number of the *First 5* commitments related to the workforce relate to both the Workforce Development Plan and the new funding model. Additionally, a review of the operating system for the sector is under way. The National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028 was published in April 2021.

The Workforce Development Plan addresses the development of the early learning and care and school-age childcare workforce, including both registered centre-based and registered home-based provision, over the period to 2028. The Workforce Development Plan also gives consideration to the broader early learning and care and school-age childcare workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles and support for those who facilitate practice placements.

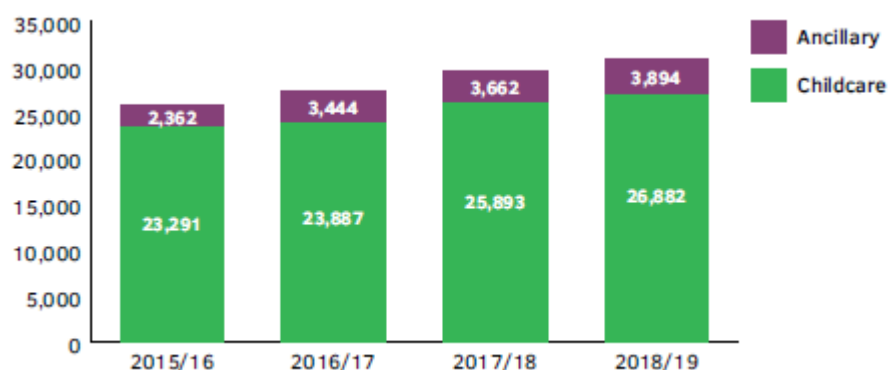
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C) The workforce today

According to Pobal's Annual Early Years Sector Profile, it is estimated that 30,775 staff were working in centre-based services in mid-2019. The figure below illustrates data from previous years and shows that despite challenges regarding recruitment and retention, the workforce has been growing steadily for several years. This follows increased investment and development of new and extended early learning and care and school-age childcare schemes. In addition, it is estimated that there are

approximately 15,000 childminders, providing home-based early learning and care and school-age childcare.

Estimated total number of staff in centre-based early learning and care and school-age childcare services broken down by qualified practitioners and ancillary staff.



The data in the Pobal Sector Profile relates to DCEDIY-funded services, which account for nearly all early learning and care-funded services but only a proportion of school-age childcare services. Regulations relating to school-age childcare services only came into force in 2019 and the 2019 Sector Profile only included a small number of ‘stand-alone’ school-age childcare services (i.e. services that provide school-age childcare and do not provide early learning and care).

D) Qualifications

With the introduction of a minimum qualifications requirement to practise in early learning and care as specified in the 2016 Regulations², almost all staff working directly with children in centre-based services currently have at least a Level 5 major award on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or equivalent, other than a small number who signed a “Grandfathering Declaration” in 2016.³

The proportion of staff in centre-based services with higher qualifications than the minimum has also been steadily increasing, with the proportion of the workforce holding a qualification at level 7 or above on the NFQ estimated at 25%⁴, up from 22% the previous year and 12% in 2012. Similarly the proportion of staff with at least a Level 6 qualification increased to 67%, up from 65% the previous year. The proportion of staff who have a Level 7 or higher qualification is higher among those working with children aged 3-5 (31%) than among those working with other age groups (e.g. 16% of those working with 1-3 year olds are graduates, as are 15% of those working with children less than 1).

The figure below shows the current distribution of qualifications among staff in centre-based services. The 6% of the workforce with qualifications “less than Level 5” includes those with no qualifications,

² The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 requires that all staff working directly with children must hold at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

³ As a means to ease the transition towards a regulated sector, practitioners working in the early learning and care sector were offered an exemption from the qualifications requirement of the 2016 Regulations provided they signed a “grandfathering declaration”, which allowed them to remain in the sector for a transitional period.

⁴ Figures taken from the Pobal 2018/19 Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report: <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2019/12/Annual-Early-Years-Sector-Profile-Report-AEYSPR-2018-19.pdf>

qualifications less than a level 5 major award, those who signed a ‘grandfather declaration’ and those who work solely with school-age children (for which there is no minimum qualification requirement yet).

Current (2019) qualification levels

Highest qualification level achieved (in early childhood care and education) on the NFQ	Proportion of staff working directly with children in centre-based services
Less than Level 5	6 %
Level 5	27 %
Level 6	42 %
Level 7	8 %
Level 8	16 %
Level 9 or 10	1 %

In addition to the minimum Level 5 requirement, to take part in the ECCE pre-school programme, all room leaders delivering the ECCE programme must have a major award at least at Level 6. Further financial support is provided to services delivering the ECCE programme where the room leader has a relevant degree.

More than 2,700 practitioners have graduated from the LINC programme⁵, and just over 2,000 settings now have a qualified Inclusion Coordinator. The LINC programme satisfies the room leader requirement for the ECCE programme.

There are currently no qualification or training requirements for those specifically in managerial or leadership roles, other than for room leaders in the ECCE programme. Similarly there are no qualification or training requirements for anyone who wishes to set up an early learning and care or school-age childcare setting, other than the Level 5 minimum requirement if that person is going to work directly with children of pre-school age.

E) Profile of practitioners

In terms of gender, the workforce is overwhelmingly female. Women make up over 98% of the workforce. Although the number of men working in the sector has grown in recent years, their overall percentage in the total workforce has remained under 2%.

Data was not available in the 2019 or earlier annual sector profiles on the ethnic background or nationality of those working in the sector. However, it is known that there is a significant number of non-Irish nationals working in the sector, some of whom only remain in Ireland temporarily. According to Pobal data, 14% of services reported that they had actively been advertising or recruiting practitioners living overseas in the 12 months to May 2019.

F) Wages

The average hourly wage of staff working in centre-based early learning and care and school-age childcare services as per the 2018/19 sector profile report was €12.55. However, this average covers variation according to role, length of service, region, and qualification level attained. The average wage for centre-managers was €15.56 per hour, compared to an average for assistants in non-ECCE

⁵ <https://lincprogramme.ie/>

rooms of €11.15 per hour. The average wage for staff with Level 5 qualifications was €11.42 per hour, compared to the average for staff with Level 8 qualifications of €13.45 per hour.

A significant proportion of practitioners work part-time or on short-term contracts. The most recent data available on hours of work (2018) suggests 57% of community-service practitioners and 40% of practitioners in private services work part-time. 28% of practitioners work in services open for 38 weeks or less in a year. 39% of practitioners who are working in services which are open for 39 weeks or more are employed under seasonal (e.g. term-time) contracts. A study by Frontier Economics on behalf of DCEDIY showed that a relatively high share of early learning and care staff in Ireland work part time, despite Ireland as a whole having a lower proportion of part-time workers than comparable countries.⁶

In comparison with other international contexts, the Irish early learning and care / school-age childcare workforce is less well remunerated than is the workforce in some comparable countries, both in absolute terms and when compared to average wages and the national minimum wage. In the study by Frontier Economics on behalf of the DCEDIY, the wages of Irish early learning and care staff were the second lowest of the eight countries studied. However, it was also noted by Frontier Economics that Ireland does not fare poorly in all aspects of wages and working conditions. For example, adult-child ratios are more favourable in Ireland than in comparable countries.⁷

Pay and working conditions are key factors explaining the staff turnover rate. High staff turnover impacts negatively on the consistency of care and on children's experiences and outcomes. It also presents a challenge to employers and makes it harder to achieve targets for increasing qualification levels in the workforce. As of mid-2019, the staff turnover rate stood at 23%, one-third of whom were known to have gone to another service within the sector.

G) International context

At European level, the EU Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care (2011)⁸ was followed by the draft "European Quality Framework for ECEC" (2014),⁹ which was endorsed by the Council of Ministers in the EU Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care in 2019¹⁰. All of these documents reaffirm the importance of structural quality to ensure safe regulated environments for children, but also highlight a need for a growing focus on process quality.

The EU Quality Framework acknowledges that process quality (i.e. high quality interactions that support children's learning and development) in the setting will not occur unless all dimensions of a competent system (access, curriculum, workforce, governance and funding) support that outcome.

The EU Quality Framework includes two quality statements relating to the workforce, calling on Member States to achieve:

- "Well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enable them to fulfil their professional role"; and

⁶ Available at <https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Frontier-WP3-Working-Conditions.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Communication from The Commission, *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow*, 2011

⁹ Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission, 2014

¹⁰ Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, 2019

- “Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.”

Building on the EU Quality Framework, over the period 2018-2020 an ET2020 EU working group on early childhood education and care, of which Ireland is a member, in December 2020 published a report on *Early Childhood Education and Care: How to Recruit, Train and Motivate Well-Qualified Staff*, which is informing the development of the Workforce Development Plan.

The Workforce Development Plan is also being informed by the ongoing work of the OECD, through its series of Starting Strong reports and the Early Childhood Education and Care Network. The OECD is currently part way through a project (“Quality Beyond Regulations”, 2018-2021) exploring the policy tools that are most effective in impacting on process quality. A literature review as part of the project highlighted the importance of workforce development in achieving process quality, in particular continuing professional development (CPD) and leadership.¹¹ As part of the Quality Beyond Regulations project, an OECD Country Policy Review of Ireland is taking place in 2020-2021, focusing particularly on the themes of workforce development, curriculum and pedagogy, and monitoring and inspections. The emerging findings of the Country Policy Review will inform the final report of the Workforce Development Plan.

¹¹ OECD (2018) *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*.

3. Consultation

A) Steering and Stakeholder Groups

Work on Phase 1 of the Workforce Development Plan began in mid-2019 and was due for completion by mid-2020, but the response to Covid-19 delayed completion of Phase 1 until the end of 2020. Phase 2, which began in January 2021 and will be completed by autumn 2021, involves more detailed planning for key policy measures identified in Phase 1.

The project has been led by Steering Group, which comprises officials from key Government Departments and Agencies as well as early learning and care and school-age childcare representatives. A Stakeholder Group, consisting of a range of stakeholders relevant to the Workforce Development Plan, has been consulted on each piece of work to date and has provided valuable insights to inform the work of the Steering Group. The membership of the Steering Group and Stakeholder Group are listed in Appendix 3 and 4, as part of the terms of reference for each group.

The Steering Group met 13 times between May 2019 and December 2020, while the Stakeholder Group met 10 times in the same period.

Policy proposals have been developed iteratively, with the Stakeholder Group examining areas of work before feeding its views to the Steering Group for consideration.

B) Elements of consultation

Consultation with stakeholders and the wider public has been a key component of the work to date. The Stakeholder Group has provided the primary means of ensuring that key stakeholders have had an opportunity to have their voices heard as policy proposals have been formulated. On a number of occasions, meetings of the Steering Group have been addressed directly by members of the Stakeholder Group and by practitioners working in the early learning and care and school-age childcare sector, including childminders. Additionally, members of the Workforce Development Plan Steering Group have met with members of the Expert Group on the New Funding Model to examine areas of interface between the two projects.¹²

Initial plans for a public consultation were scheduled to involve in-person consultation events, hosted by City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) in every county, in March and April 2020. Due to Covid-19, these events were cancelled, and work on the Workforce Development Plan was temporarily paused. In July 2020, when work restarted, both the Steering and Stakeholder Groups were involved in the formulation of a new consultation process which could take place entirely online.

Between August and October 2020, DCEDIY carried out an online public consultation process on the Workforce Development Plan, in parallel with a public consultation on a New Funding Model. This process involved two key elements: a call for submissions and focussed consultation events.

The online call for submissions was live between 19th August and 2nd October for both the Workforce Development Plan and New Funding Model. The call for submissions was launched simultaneously in English and Irish. The call for submissions allowed for written input from respondents, and also contained a range of specific questions and invited short responses from individuals.

There were a total of 602 valid responses to the Call for Submissions on the Workforce Development Plan, of whom the majority identified themselves as practitioners. Following an initial review of issues

¹² <https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/>

identified in the call for submissions, and to allow a more detailed discussions on these areas, focussed consultation discussions were dedicated to addressing three key themes:

1. Recruitment and retention
2. Qualifications and initial training
3. Ongoing training and CPD

In total, 130 people attended the focussed discussions across nine sessions, with each of the three themes above being discussed at three sessions each. All 602 respondents to the call for submissions were invited to participate in the focused consultation events. All those who indicated they were interested were invited to at least one session of the theme in which they were most interested. Some people who wished to contribute to more than one theme were able to do so.

The sessions were facilitated by *Change Exploratory*. An official from DECDIY attended each of the nine sessions. Participant feedback was collected by 'Mentimeter' (an interactive presentation software), through the chat function in Zoom, and verbally in discussions.

Reports on both the call for submissions and the focussed consultation sessions are presented in Appendix 1 and 2 of this report.

C) Phase 2 working groups

From the commencement of the Workforce Development Plan, it was identified that a series of working groups would be required in the second phase of the project. The role of these groups is to develop detailed proposals for consideration by the Workforce Development Plan Steering Group, examining in greater depth policy proposals considered during Phase 1. Five working groups were established in early 2021 and will continue to meet through until July 2021, to inform the final report of the Workforce Development Plan, which will be published in late 2021. The working groups cover the areas of:

- Career framework and career pathways
- Continuing professional development
- Promotion and regulation of the profession
- Qualifications and training for school-age childcare
- Training and supports for childminders

Sections 4 to 8 below summarise progress during Phase 1 of the Workforce Development Plan in relation to each of these five areas.

4. Career framework and career pathways

A) Context

First 5 commits to achieving a graduate-led early learning and care workforce by 2028. The commitment in *First 5* specifies that at least 50% of staff (i.e. room leaders, assistant managers and managers) working directly with children in centre-based early learning and care settings and coordinators supporting the work of childminders should hold an appropriate degree-level qualification by 2028. Achieving this commitment requires clarity on the different roles in settings and the qualifications required for those roles, as well as supportive pathways to enable the upskilling of the workforce in the sector.

The European Commission (2020) report *How to Recruit, Train and Motivate Well-Qualified Staff* notes that:

“Alongside the establishment of a set of core competences for ECEC staff, it is important to consider how their initial and continuing education and training prepares them for their role. For most people the journey to professional competence takes time - and skills are acquired through initial training, a period of induction into the profession, and during ongoing professional development, as well as through everyday practice. All staff (assistants, core practitioners and ECEC leaders) need access to, and support, for all aspects of their initial and subsequent education and training.”

In 2002, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform published a set of occupational role profiles for the early learning and care sector. At that time, a set of five profiles was developed with generic titles which incorporated the knowledge areas, key tasks and responsibilities that had been agreed through a rigorous process of research and consultation. These profiles ranged from basic practitioner through to expert practitioner. In 2010, in the previous Workforce Development Plan, those profiles were mapped onto the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), from Levels 4 through to Levels 8 and 9. This work was used as the basis for the review of occupational role profiles commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills in 2016 and carried out by Professor Urban and his team in Roehampton University.

That research as well as the principles of the CoRe report, published by the European Commission in 2011,¹³ formed the basis for the development of new professional qualifications at Levels 7 and 8 on the NFQ, to support a graduate role in the early learning and care sector and to ensure professional leadership in all centre-based rooms. It also formed the basis for a review by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) which resulted in the development of professional award type descriptors for new major awards in early learning and care at Levels 5 and 6 on the NFQ. A consortium of Education and Training Boards is currently developing a shared national curriculum for the new awards.

While considerable progress has already been made in the development of a career framework and enhancement of programmes of initial professional education for early learning and care practitioners, there has been less progress so far in articulating and supporting leadership roles (with the exception of the Leadership for Inclusion programme to support Inclusion Coordinator roles, within AIM).

¹³ Urban, M. et al. (2011) CoRe – Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care: A Study for the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture.

It is recognised internationally that leaders in early learning and care settings benefit from specialised leadership training. According to a recent OECD literature review on leadership for quality in early learning and care:

‘Only a few studies have rigorously evaluated the impact of leadership on ECEC quality and/or outcomes for children. These studies suggest that leadership influences a set of practices that may have a positive impact on children’s learning, development and well-being. These practices include supporting staff professional development and learning, engaging staff in decision-making and leading change, and creating structures to enable teachers to collaborate and plan for improvement. They also include establishing a positive work climate, collegial relationships, and providing a range of supports for staff leadership. It is through these actions that leaders may have an impact on process quality. This research points to the importance as well as the complexity of ECEC leadership and the need for leadership preparation and development policies and systems to recruit, train, support and sustain effective leadership.’¹⁴

B) Progress in Phase 1

Based on the commitment in *First 5* to build a graduate-led workforce by 2028, during Phase 1 the Steering and Stakeholder Groups re-examined the career framework within early learning and care and its application in different types and size of early learning and care setting, as well as the pathways for individual practitioners to progress within the profession. Consideration was given to the definition of core practitioner (or room leader) roles, assistant roles, and leadership roles within settings.

In addition to identifying roles within the profession and pathways between them, consideration was also given to the titles to be used for different roles. In the past, there has been a proliferation of disparate terms used when describing the profession and different roles within the sector. Questions on role titles formed a significant part of the public consultation process carried out in Phase 1. However, while there was tentative support for some aspects of terminology, there was considerable disagreement on other aspects of terminology. Details of the findings of the consultation process on terminology are outlined later in this report.

Detailed role profiles and career pathways will be examined by a phase 2 working group. While new entrants into the sector will continue to be important in supporting an increase in the proportion of staff with third-level qualifications, a major focus of the Workforce Development Plan will be upskilling existing practitioners. This might, for example, include supporting participation in part-time degree programmes, which are currently unfunded except through a contribution provided by the Learner Fund, to enable practitioners to remain working while studying. Further consideration of the design of an expanded Learner Fund to support participation in part-time Level 7/8 degree programmes will take place during phase 2 of the Workforce Development Plan.

Since the introduction of the ECCE programme in 2010, a higher rate of capitation has been applicable to services that meet higher qualification requirements. The primary requirement is that room leaders in the ECCE programme should have a relevant Bachelor’s degree. The Focused Policy Assessment of the ECCE Higher Capitation Payment in 2020 will help inform the design of future funding mechanisms being considered by the Expert Group on the New Funding Model to support the employment of graduates in the sector working with young children from birth to 5.

¹⁴ OECD (2019) *Leadership for Quality Early Childhood Education and Care*
<http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=EDU/WKP%282019%2919&docLanguage=En>

C) Phase 2 Working Group

Building on initial work carried out during Phase 1, a working group has been established in Phase 2 to develop detailed proposals on:

- A framework of career grades and role profiles for those career grades.
- Working titles for the proposed career grades, pending the establishment of a professional association or professional standards body.
- Other roles in a setting.
- Supports that may be required for services and practitioners to enable the upskilling of current and future practitioners with Level 5 and 6 qualifications to achieve Level 7 and 8 qualifications, to support achievement of a graduate-led workforce by 2028.
- Induction processes.
- Leadership training.
- Application of the proposed career framework to different sizes and types of setting in the current diverse, private market system of provision.
- Implications of the proposed career framework to the broader early learning and care/school-age childcare workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles.
- A timeline for the introduction of different elements of the career framework, and initial actions to support its introduction during 2022-2024.

5. Continuing professional development

A) Context

The literature review underpinning the OECD international study “Quality beyond Regulation”, in which Ireland is currently participating, concludes that:

“Participation in in-service training (or professional development) is the most consistent predictor of quality staff-child interactions, and also has direct links to child development and learning.”¹⁵

The OECD’s 2018 TALIS Starting Strong survey of practitioners in 9 countries noted that barriers to participation in CPD often include: conflicts with work schedules, the cost of the activity, and lack of incentives for ongoing professional development.¹⁶

First 5 commits to:

“Develop a national programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for the early learning and care (and school-age childcare) workforce to be delivered through Better Start Quality Development Service. Over time, this will develop links with the national structure for CPD of primary school teachers. Opportunities for joint delivery of CPD programmes where appropriate will be considered.”

Current CPD requirements in Ireland are at a service level, and there are currently no CPD requirements in Ireland at the level of the individual practitioner. The Early Years Regulations 2016 require early learning and care services to have a “staff training policy” “specifying the manner in which the registered provider shall identify and address the training needs of employees and unpaid workers”.

There is a wide variety of courses and training offers available to service providers across the country. Training is offered by a range of organisations including City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) and Voluntary Childcare Organisations on behalf of the DCEDIY or in the case of the membership organisation as a support to their members. Third Level colleges, Post Leaving Cert colleges and other providers offer ongoing vocational training at all levels. There are a number of national initiatives targeted at the sector, including Children First training and the AIM equality, inclusion and diversity initiative through the City and County Childcare Committees and the LINC course through AIM, Hanen, Lámh, SPEL, the National Síolta/Aistear Initiative and the Healthy Ireland Smart Start programme. DCEDIY-funded organisations (both National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and the City/County Childcare Committees) also develop relevant publications on current topics and offer seminars and conferences on a regular basis. Training and resources that are provided by or on behalf of DCEDIY are made available free of charge.

In response to the challenge of delivering CPD supports during the Covid-19 pandemic, the DCEDIY in April 2020 developed a new CPD page for early learning and care/school-age childcare practitioners on the *First 5* website (<https://first5.gov.ie/practitioners/continuing-professional-development>), and encouraged practitioners to engage in online professional development opportunities during the period of service closures. The page drew together in one place online CPD offers from funded agencies, webinars, resources, and training especially developed in response to Covid-19.

¹⁵ OECD (2018) Engaging with Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care, p.79

¹⁶ OECD (2019) TALIS - Providing Quality Early Childhood Education and Care – Results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018.

Engagement in CPD was – temporarily – a condition of ongoing funding for services during the Covid closure period. Levels of engagement with CPD during this time was very high, especially in the shutdown period. Since March 2020, there have been 200,000 visits to the CPD webpage published by DCEDIY.

B) Progress in Phase 1

During Phase 1, consideration was given to the national infrastructure for CPD. While a wide range of organisations have had a role in delivery of CPD opportunities, including the VCOs and the CCCs, a degree of coordination in the infrastructure for delivery has been achieved through the establishment of Better Start in 2014 and more recently (in 2018/19) the formation of a Learning and Development Unit within Better Start.

The Review of the Operating System that is under way will shape final decisions on the future infrastructure for delivery of CPD for early learning and care and school-age childcare services and the practitioners who work in them. While it is too early to say what the outcome of this review will be, the Programme for Government commits to establishment of a *Childcare Ireland* agency to:

“assist in the expansion of high quality childcare, spearheading leadership, best practice and innovation and professional development in community and private settings. It will also be tasked with developing career paths for childcare staff. Childcare Ireland will be responsible for expanding *Síolta*.”

During Phase 1 consideration was given to elements of a national CPD infrastructure that may be needed, such as mechanisms for services and/or individuals to track their participation in CPD as well as a space for hosting online CPD materials, building on the online CPD resource page on the First 5 website. Further development of the infrastructure for CPD is also likely to require consideration of quality assurance mechanisms for CPD. While quality assurance of the content of CPD will rely upon a range of structures depending on the focus of the particular CPD course/resource (e.g. the NSAI is responsible for quality assurance of CPD related to *Síolta* and *Aistear*, while the AIM Training Working Group oversees training related to inclusion), there will be a need to review the oversight of quality assurance processes for CPD for the early learning and care/school-age childcare sector, to ensure that only quality-assured CPD resources are included within the resources made available through the national CPD infrastructure.

Consideration was also given during Phase 1 to the need to balance responsibility and support for CPD between the individual practitioner and the service. Responsibility for CPD is shared between:

- the individual, who is pursuing their own professional journey,
- the service, which is responsible for its staff and its overall quality of service, and
- the State, which oversees and supports system quality.

The individual’s responsibility for their own professional development means that any framework introduced ought to involve a level of self-direction and commitment from trusted individual personnel. At the same time, service managers/pedagogical leaders are responsible for supporting the development of the people working with them to meet the requirements of national quality objectives within their setting based on the needs of their particular setting.

Up to now, regulatory requirements in relation to CPD in early learning and care have focused on the service. With movement towards regulation of the profession still at an early stage, regulatory requirements will remain at the service level in the short-to-medium term. During Phase 2, consideration will be given to the evolution of CPD requirements and supports for individual practitioners, possibly linked to the development of a professional association or a professional regulator (see section 6).

C) Phase 2 Working Group

Building on initial work carried out during Phase 1, a working group has been established in Phase 2 to develop detailed proposals on:

- Features of a national infrastructure to support services and individuals to engage in effective CPD, and next steps in the development of such an infrastructure, including development of new CPD resources, learner management systems, and mechanisms for recording participation in CPD.
- Mechanisms for the quality assurance of CPD supports, including guidelines on online delivery.
- Means to support the further development of professional learning communities, both within early learning and care/school-age childcare services and across services, including through pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership.
- Recommendations on an appropriate amount of time over the course of a year for participation in different types of CPD activity (both individual and team-based).
- Features of a programme of supports for services to offer high quality practice placements for students and high quality induction processes for new entrants to the profession.
- Priority focuses for CPD for services and staff working in the sector in the period 2022-2024, taking into account research evidence on effective CPD in early learning and care.¹⁷
- A timeline for the introduction of different elements of a national infrastructure and supports for CPD, and initial actions to support their introduction during 2022-2024.

¹⁷ Including emerging evidence from the OECD Quality Beyond Regulations and TALIS Starting Strong projects.

6. Promotion and regulation of the workforce

A) Context

Promotion and regulation of the profession, while two distinct topics, are linked, both concerned with the status and recognition of the workforce. They are also both linked to questions of recruitment and retention, which will be critical to the success of many aspects of the Workforce Development Plan.

According to the Pobal Annual Early Years Sector Profile, 53% of services reported having experienced recruitment challenges in the year to May 2019, down slightly from 57% in 2017/18. In mid-2019, 23% of services reported having at least one staff vacancy. Many services also report significant challenges in retaining staff. In 2019, while 59% of services reported no staff turnover, 20% of services lost one staff member during the previous 12 months, 14% lost 2 or 3 staff members, and 7% lost more than 3 staff members. In aggregate, the staff turnover rate for the sector was 23% over a 12-month period.

While OECD reports (see box below) and research undertaken for the Expert Group on a New Funding Model indicate that high rates of staff turnover are not uncommon in the sector internationally, the 2019 data indicates that the rate in Ireland is unacceptably high, especially given the negative impact that inconsistency in care can have on young children's well-being and development.

Good Practice for Good Jobs in Early Childhood Education and Care

A recent (2019) OECD report on *Good Practice for Good Jobs in Early Childhood Education and Care* notes that Ireland is not alone in the difficulties it faces, concluding that "many countries are struggling to attract and keep skilled staff in the ECEC sector. Low wages, a lack of status and public recognition, poor working conditions, and limited opportunities for professional development all mean that careers in ECEC are too often seen as unattractive". The report identifies a number of recommendations on key measures Governments can take to support recruitment and retention of staff in early learning and care. These include:

- Increasing qualification requirements for staff in at least some roles, running information campaigns, and improving wages.
- Designing accessible pre-service education and training systems with alternative entry pathways for those unwilling or unable to undergo lengthy pre-service training.
- Expanding the role of practical experience and workplace-based learning in pre-service training programmes.
- Promoting the transition to a more gender-balanced workforce.
- Revising wage structures and/or engaging in measures that reward performance and development through improved pay.
- Enhancing working conditions by reducing minimum child-to-staff ratios and class sizes which can reduce stress among staff.
- Promoting in-service training and professional development opportunities. This can enhance professional identity and improve career satisfaction.

As the State is not the employer, the State has no direct control over levels of pay and contractual conditions in the sector, other than through legal requirements such as the national minimum wage. Wages in the sector are determined through the operation of market forces, i.e. the interaction of supply and demand. While market forces could potentially drive wages up, e.g. as a result of recruitment challenges in the sector, wages in the sector are currently low and staffing shortages – even if temporary – could negatively impact on both children and parents, affecting the quality of provision and access to services.

The Programme for Government commits to supporting the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) for the early learning and care and school-age childcare sector and the drawing up of an Employment Regulation Order. In December 2020, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth initiated a process with a range of stakeholders to examine the possibility of regulating the pay and conditions of employment of practitioners in early learning and care and school-age childcare, and to examine the suitability of establishing a JLC. The process, which was independently chaired by Dr Kevin Duffy, former Chair of the Labour Court, concluded that a JLC is the best mechanism to improve wages in the sector. The Labour Court has initiated a public consultation on a Draft Order for the Establishment of a JLC for the sector which was published in April 2021. This could result in the Labour Court making a recommendation for the establishment of a JLC covering practitioners. Any such JLC would have the capacity to recommend mandatory minimum rates of pay and terms and conditions of employment for certain workers employed in the sector.

First 5 makes a commitment to moving incrementally over time towards regulation of the profession, building on the establishment of the Qualifications Advisory Board and future creation of a register of the workforce:

“Develop proposals for a structure to review and oversee compliance with new standards and guidelines for further and higher early learning and care (and school-age childcare) education programmes and create a register of the early learning and care (and school-age childcare) workforce. This structure would, over time, move towards a professional standards body to promote and regulate the early learning and care (and school-age childcare) profession.”

The functions and form of professional associations and professional regulators vary between sectors and across countries. However, broad distinctions can be drawn between a professional association (sometimes termed a ‘professional body’) of members of a profession, which is a voluntary association that seeks to represent the profession and support standards within it, and a professional regulator (sometimes termed a ‘professional standards body’), which is a statutory body charged with regulating a profession. Currently in Ireland there is neither a single professional association for the early learning and care and school-age childcare workforce, nor is there a professional regulator, though some of the functions of a regulator are carried out by other bodies.

B) Progress in Phase 1

While determination of wages is outside the scope of the Workforce Development Plan, consideration was given during Phase 1 to other means by which recruitment and retention of staff can be supported, including:

- Marketing the sector (e.g. through public awareness and advertising campaigns aimed at raising the profile of careers in the sector).
- Strengthening job-matching mechanisms, to connect services seeking new staff with practitioners seeking employment.
- Facilitating alternative entry routes into the sector, suited to practitioners from different backgrounds.
- Strengthening career pathways (see section 4 also).

Further consideration will be given in Phase 2 to how to promote careers in the sector, including for the purpose of increasing diversity and gender-balance within the workforce.

In relation to regulation of the profession, it was noted during Phase 1 that both the benefits and costs of regulation of the profession need to be examined.

The potential benefits of statutory regulation include protecting the public and giving confidence to employers, through setting and monitoring adherence to minimum standards for entry into a profession. Whereas a professional association may seek to provide for self-regulation of a profession, a professional regulator provides external regulation of the profession (though members of the profession may form part its governance) with the force of law. In the absence of external regulation and legal control of entry to the profession, it may remain open for individuals who are not members of a professional association to practise.

In weighing up the costs and benefits of regulation of a profession, it is important to consider whether the public risks that would be mitigated through regulation could equally be mitigated through regulation of services. Regulation of services may involve placing responsibility for recruitment of appropriately qualified staff on service providers and inspecting service providers for compliance with regulations, as is done in early learning and care in Ireland at present.

Regulation of a profession may also be seen as a hallmark of a fully fledged profession, and therefore as something that may help achieve other features of a profession, including public recognition / prestige and improvement in pay and working conditions. However, these features may be equally achievable without statutory regulation. Furthermore, regulation does not itself create a profession; rather, it validates an existing profession, and is only possible at a relatively late stage in the process of professionalisation. However, regulation is in itself a process, and steps can be taken along the journey towards regulation.

The costs of regulation must also be considered, including:

- Regulation of a profession increases the administrative burden on practitioners.
- Regulation brings a significant financial cost, especially through fitness-to-practise procedures. Professional regulators typically charge practitioners registration fees, and professional regulators are often expected to be self-financing through the fees they charge.

During Phase 2, further consideration will be given to examining these costs and benefits as well as the process of movement towards regulation of the profession, including possible next steps.

C) Phase 2 Working Group

Building on initial work carried out during Phase 1, a working group has been established in Phase 2 to develop detailed proposals on:

- A plan for promoting the profession and careers in the sector, including measures to support recruitment from a range of different age groups, including school leavers, students, those who have left the sector and might return, and adults considering returning to the labour force.
- Ways to enhance diversity in the workforce, including ethnic diversity and gender balance, and potential alternative entry routes suited to individuals from a range of backgrounds.
- Features of a public information campaign aimed at raising the profile of careers in the sector and public awareness of the value and appeal of the work carried out by early learning and care/school-age childcare professionals.
- Consideration of the appropriate role for the State in facilitating the development of a professional association.
- Next steps in the process of movement towards establishment of a statutory professional standards body / professional regulator, drawing on comparisons with other jurisdictions and other professions.
- Regulatory requirements for working in the sector (other than qualification requirements), including language proficiency requirements.
- A timeline for actions to support the promotion and regulation of the profession, including initial actions during 2022-2024.

7. School-age childcare

A) Context

School-age childcare (school-age childcare) provides for a wide age-range of children. At the younger end, it overlaps with the age-range for early learning and care, i.e. 4 and 5 year olds. At the older end, while in practice largely limited to primary school children, school-age services may include some post-primary children and may include teenagers up to and including 14 year olds.

The primary purposes of school-age childcare are rest, relaxation and recreation. While some school-age providers may (during term-times, though not during school holidays) include time for homework, and while a feature of quality provision may be that it supports children's holistic development and itself provides a broad learning experience, there is no requirement that school-age childcare should support children's education. Children's educational needs are expected to be met through the curriculum and their time in school.

Two different data sources provide information on current qualification levels among those working in the school-age childcare sector:

- Pobal's Sector Profile (2019) suggested that as many as 75% of those working in school-age childcare, based on a sample of 2,269 staff, have a Level 5 major award. This data is mainly reflective of 1,500 combined early learning and care and school-age childcare services but may include a small percentage of standalone school-age childcare. This data does not differentiate qualification type but it may be assumed that most have an early learning and care qualification due to the fact that most Pobal-reported school-age childcare was delivered in early learning and care settings.
- A 2020 survey of standalone school-age childcare conducted on behalf of the Workforce Development Plan Steering Group by City and County Childcare Committees and by two school-age childcare providers, each of which operates a number of services, found that 74% of those working in standalone school-age childcare services, based on a sample of 1,103 staff, have a Level 5 major award. 60% have a qualification in early learning and care. The remaining 14% have qualifications within a variety of disciplines such as youth work, social work, teaching, arts/drama etc, a proportion of which might be recognised as meeting a school-age childcare qualification requirement.

First 5 contains a commitment to: "Introduce a range of measures so that, by 2028:

- All regulated school-age childcare staff will hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by end 2019). An appropriate period of time will be provided to meet this requirement."

A public consultation on school-age childcare was carried out during the course of 2019, which included questions on appropriate qualification and training requirements.

Other jurisdictions have varied in the approach they have taken to qualification requirements for school-age childcare. While some countries have developed qualifications that relate to both early learning and care and school-age childcare, some countries have developed qualifications that are specific to school-age childcare services or have wider relevance (e.g. playwork qualifications in the UK). In many countries (including the UK) there are no minimum qualification requirements for school-age childcare.

B) Progress in Phase 1

Following consideration of the findings of the public consultation on school-age childcare, during Phase 1 work was undertaken on defining minimum qualifications for school-age childcare and determining how they might be introduced incrementally over the period between now and 2028. This will form the basis of further work to be carried out in Phase 2.

Given the importance of facilitating full-time, full-year contracts for pre-school staff – and the benefits that this may bring for working conditions, staff retention and child development – it is a policy priority to ensure that staff who provide early learning and care may also provide school-age childcare, with minimal additional barriers. At the same time, it was noted during Phase 1 that there are distinctive features of school-age childcare that imply differences in role profiles.

It was agreed that the minimum qualification should be a major level 5 award. However, it was also noted that school-age childcare services may benefit from having staff drawn from a range of different backgrounds and with a range of qualifications. This diversity of qualifications is already seen in the sector, and there was considerable support in the public consultation process on school-age childcare for a range of qualifications to be recognised. What qualifications should be accepted will be considered further during Phase 2.

In considering the timeframe within which to introduce minimum qualification requirements for school-age childcare, the current situation will be taken into account. Currently the proportion of unqualified staff within school-age childcare services is at least 25% and possibly up to 35%, which is at least double the proportion of early learning and care staff who were unqualified in 2013 (at most 12%) when the Level 5 minimum qualification for early learning and care was announced and who had 3 years to qualify.¹⁸

In addition, it is recognised that there are recruitment challenges in the sector at present. An incremental and supportive approach, with significant lead-in times, will therefore be needed to bring in new requirements, and parallel actions will be needed to support recruitment and retention of staff.

C) Phase 2 Working Group

Building on initial work carried out during Phase 1, a working group has been established in Phase 2 to develop detailed proposals on:

- Role profiles of school-age childcare practitioners, and working titles for these roles.
- Professional award type descriptors for a Level 5 award in school-age childcare, based on the proposed role profile.
- Recommendations on what range of qualifications – in addition to a specific Level 5 award in school-age childcare – should be accepted as appropriate for recognition in comprehensive school-age childcare regulations (or that might be accepted in combination with supplementary training specific to school-age childcare).
- Features of an “add-on” training programme on school-age childcare aimed at practitioners who have a qualification in early learning and care.
- Features of a leadership training programme for school-age childcare, in line with the proposed role profile for a school-age childcare leader.

¹⁸ The Pobal Sector Profile for 2013 found 88% of staff to have a Level 5 or equivalent or higher qualification. However, the services surveyed included some standalone school-age childcare services. Excluding the latter group would probably have resulted in a higher proportion of staff being identified as Level 5 or greater.

- Priorities and a timeline for further development of Continuing Professional Development supports for school-age childcare services and staff, including initial actions during 2022-2024.

8. Childminding

A) Context

First 5 contains a commitment to: “Introduce a range of measures so that, by 2028:

“All regulated childminders will hold a minimum qualification (level to be determined by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by end 2019 in follow-up to the Expert Group Report). An appropriate period of time will be provided to meet this requirement.”

There are estimated to be as many as 15,000 childminders in Ireland caring for children in the childminder’s home. Those caring for four or more pre-school children, or seven or more children of any age, in the childminder’s home must register with the Early Years Inspectorate of Tusla but fewer than 80 are currently registered. Other childminders who do not meet this threshold are not currently required to register with Tusla. Because of this, the majority of parents who avail of childminding services are not able to access public subsidies and many children are in unregulated settings that are not quality-assured.

The home and family setting in which childminders work differs in significant ways from centre-based provision. Although – like centre-based services – childminders are offering early learning and care and school-age childcare, their role profiles may therefore be different. At the same time, there are many similarities in roles.

It is important to set requirements that are achievable and that will encourage childminders to join a regulated sector rather than result in childminders leaving the sector or entering the informal economy, as both access to, and quality of, childminding services are in the best interests of children and families.

While current qualification levels among childminders are largely unknown, it is assumed that most childminders do not have specific early learning and care qualifications.¹⁹ However, some childminders have related qualifications, e.g. individuals who previously worked in centre-based services.

Childminders work on their own as sole traders, with little support, no relief staff, and limited opportunity to engage in formal education or in training during the working day.

Both a 2018 Working Group report and the Draft Childminding Action Plan left open the question of what the minimum qualification requirement for childminders should be, given lack of agreement across the sector on the issue. The public consultation on the Draft Childminding Action Plan similarly indicated mixed views, with some calling for the same qualification requirement that centre-based practitioners face, while others said there should be no qualification requirement for childminders.

There are only 12 European countries in which there are training requirements for childminders; in other EU countries either childminding is unregulated or there are no training requirements. In 1/3 of European countries where childminding is regulated, there are no requirements related to training or qualifications. Where there are training requirements for childminders, these typically involve between 100 and 300 hours of initial training.

¹⁹ According to QQI, fewer than 50 people per year complete the minor Level 5 award in childminding practice.

B) Progress in Phase 1

While work on developing a National Action Plan for Childminding has been under way for some years, the task of developing a recommendation on minimum qualification / training requirements for childminders was given to the Steering Group of the Workforce Development Plan, to ensure that any qualification requirement for childminders makes sense in the context of proposals for qualifications and training for centre-based practitioners.

The Workforce Development Plan Steering Group examined the issue of training / qualification requirements for childminders and took into account the views set out in the 2018 Working Group report and the Draft Childminding Action Plan, as well as the recommendations of the Workforce Development Plan Stakeholder Group and a focus group of childminders specially convened for a meeting of the Workforce Development Plan Steering Group.

Introducing foundation level training as a condition of registration with Tusla was seen as important to ensure a child-centred approach to quality and to ensure accountability for public funding (e.g. the National Childcare Scheme), while an incremental approach is warranted to ensure that childminders are supported to engage in quality development and are not driven out of the sector in the short-term.

The Workforce Development Plan Steering Group recommended a balanced approach, reflecting both the opportunity created by the National Childcare Scheme to incentivise childminders to register with Tusla and the need for a phased, supportive approach that encourages and supports childminders to remain working in the sector. The Workforce Development Plan Steering Group proposed the introduction of a minimum training requirement for childminders to register with Tusla, but proposed that the requirement should be less onerous than the full Level 5 NFQ requirement for centre-based practitioners and should be introduced over time. The Workforce Development Plan Steering Group recommended an initial pre-registration requirement of completing a foundation training course, with the full qualification/training requirement to be met over a period of years following registration.

This approach has now been reflected in the National Action Plan for Childminding, which was published in April 2021.

In advance of establishing a training programme for childminders, an initial action will be to identify a role profile (or role profiles) for a childminder, to form the basis for development of training programmes. This work will be carried out during Phase 2 of the Workforce Development Plan and Phase 1 of the National Action Plan for Childminding.

On the basis of this role profile(s), a Foundation Training Programme will be developed, with a view to completion of this foundation training programme being a pre-requirement for registration with Tusla. This will be specific to childminders.

A Quality Development Programme that is specific to childminding will also be developed. This training programme will offer childminders a supported pathway to quality development and recognition of their skills and experience. Tusla-registered childminders will be required to complete this Quality Development Programme over a period of years. In order to remain registered, a childminder will be supported to demonstrate progression through the training and mentoring programme. The Quality Development Programme will result in a special purpose award at Level 5 on the NFQ, significantly smaller in scale than a major Level 5 award.

Participation in the Quality Development Programme will be supported through the development and progressive rollout of staffed local childminding networks across the country, which will provide local support for childminders.

Every effort will be made by DCEDIY to cover a significant amount of training costs or course fees. Training will be delivered in formats that are suited to childminders, e.g. evenings and weekends, remote and face-to-face. Recognition of prior learning will be built into the assessment of both the Foundation and Quality Development training programmes. Assessment will be competency-based, and will involve a strong emphasis on portfolios.

While training will be developed for the purpose of supporting childminders working in a home environment, it will be modular and structured in such a way as also to facilitate a two-way transferability of training between centre-based provision and home-based provision.

C) Phase 2 Working Group

Building on initial work carried out during Phase 1, a working group has been established in Phase 2 to develop detailed proposals on:

- A role profile (or role profiles) for a childminder, to form the basis for development of training programmes for quality childminding.
- Features of a Foundation Training Programme for childminders, including its delivery format and rollout.
- Features (including recognition of prior learning, competency-based assessment, and a strong emphasis on portfolios) of a modular Quality Development Programme for childminders who have completed the Foundation Training Programme, including its delivery format and rollout.
- Other training that may be needed by childminders, e.g. first aid and child safeguarding training.
- Other supports that may be needed to help childminders undertake and complete the proposed training programmes.
- Options for the design and rollout of staffed local childminding networks, on the basis of research into effective childminder network models in other jurisdictions.
- A role profile for the leader of a local childminding network, and features of a training programme for leaders of local childminding networks.

9. Next steps

The publication of this report represents the conclusion of Phase 1 of the Workforce Development Plan. Phase 2, which began in early 2021, involves the preparation of detailed policy proposals to be prepared by five working groups during the first half of 2021, for consideration by the Steering Group. These working groups are examining:

- Career Framework and Career Pathways
- Continuing Professional Development
- Promotion and Regulation of the Profession
- Qualifications and Training for School-Age Childcare
- Training and Supports for Childminders

The membership of each of the five working groups was drawn in the first instance from the Workforce Development Plan Steering and Stakeholder Groups, with additional expertise brought in where required, on the advice and recommendations of the Steering and Stakeholder Groups.

During the second half of 2021, the final Workforce Development Plan will be prepared, for publication by the end of the year.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Report on Call for Submissions

Report of a Call for Submissions on the Workforce Development Plan for the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Sector in Ireland

March 2021

Sandra Roe 
Research

Section 1: Response Rates and Demographics

1.1 Respondent Profiles

There were a total of 602 valid responses to the Call for Submissions on the Workforce Development Plan. As can be seen from table 1 below, the largest number of responses were from practitioners (60.3%), followed by private for-profit providers (26.1%), parents (16.3%), community not-for profit providers (14.1%), students (7.8%), academics/academic institution representatives (3.7%), employer representatives (3%), childminders (2.2%), Childcare Committee Representatives (1.3%), other (2.8%), advocacy organisation representatives (2.2%), employee representatives (1.8%), government department or agency representative (0.2%). There were no responses from nannies/au pairs.

Respondents who identified as 'other' included an assistant manager, a manager, members of managers networks, early childhood teachers, childcare professionals, private provider, former/retired practitioners, retired lecturer, early years consultant, community based coordinator, pre-school teacher, development worker from a County Childcare Committee and a babysitter.

Table 1: Type of respondents who responded to the Call for Submissions

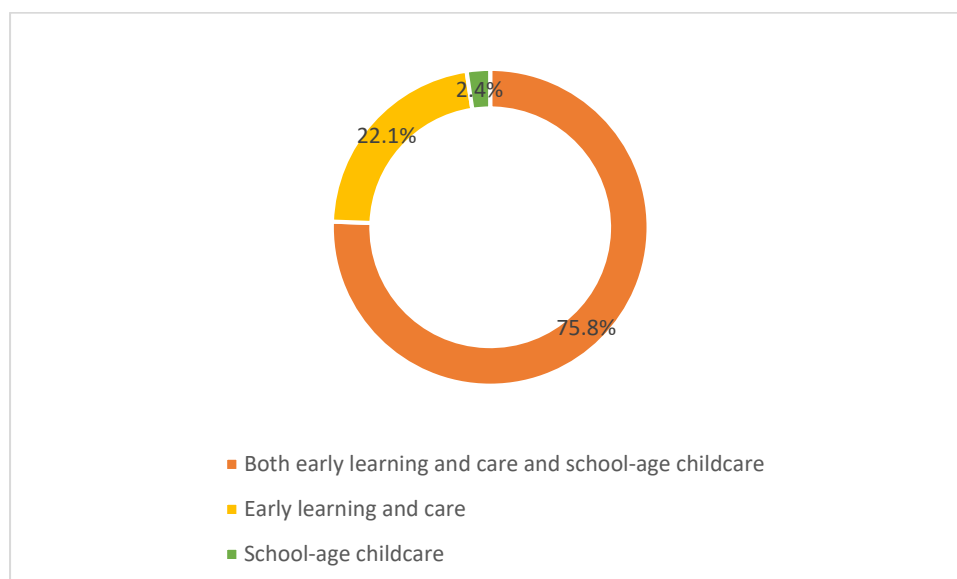
Type of Respondent	Number of responses	%
Practitioner	363	60.3%
Private for-profit provider	157	26.1%
Parent	98	16.3%
Community not-for-profit provider	85	14.1%
Student	47	7.8%
Academic/ Academic Institution Representative	22	3.7%
Employer Representative	18	3%
Childminder	13	2.2%
Childcare Committee Representative	8	1.3%
Other	17	2.8%
Advocacy Organisation Representative	13	2.2%
Employee Representative	11	1.8%
Government Department or Agency Representative	1	0.2%
Nanny / Au Pair	0	0%

It should be noted that many respondents identified as more than one type of respondent. For example, 82 (13.6%) respondents identified as both parents and practitioners. 54 (9%) respondents identified as practitioners and private for-profit providers, 29 (4.8%) identified as practitioners and community not-for-profit providers and 22 (3.7%) identified as parents, practitioners and private not-for-profit providers. Only 6 (1%) respondents identified as a parent only in their response.

1.2 Services provided by respondents

Of the 331 respondents who answered this question, three quarters (75.8%) of respondents provide both early learning and care and school-age childcare. A further 22.1% of respondents provide early learning and care alone and 2.4% provide school-age childcare alone (see figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Type of services provided by respondents



Section 2: Vision for the Workforce

2.1 Introduction

This section outlines the vision for the workforce for early learning and care and school-age childcare by 2028. Table 2 below details the key themes related to a vision for the workforce and the frequency in which these themes were identified.

Table 2: Key themes related to a vision for the workforce and frequency of identification of themes

Theme	Frequency of theme
Better pay and working conditions	1079
Recognition and respect for workforce	1000
Qualified and graduate led-workforce	451
More supports and less regulations	353
More training, continuing professional development and career progression opportunities	214
Practitioners to be recognised as teachers	164

2.2. Better pay and working conditions

The most commonly identified vision for the workforce for early learning and care and school-age childcare by 2028 was better, fairer and more professional pay and working conditions. It was suggested that workforce pay should be reflective of qualifications and experience and a pay scale should be introduced in the sector.

- *“Fair pay and good quality working conditions for all staff.”*

2.3. Recognition and respect for the workforce

The next most commonly identified vision was recognition and respect of the workforce as childcare professionals. According to respondents, their vision is to ensure that practitioners in the sector are

valued, acknowledged and appreciated in terms of their important educational and caring role in society. Recognition of practitioners' qualifications was also emphasised.

- *"My vision is of a sector that values, appreciates and supports early years practitioners in their quest to provide quality, child based education and play."*

2.4 Qualified and graduate-led workforce

The next most commonly identified vision was one where the workforce would be suitably qualified and ideally graduate-led. The importance of the qualifications of practitioners being recognised in pay, working conditions and job titles was also highlighted.

- *"A higher standard of qualification where every centre offering the ECCE scheme has at least one Bachelor qualified staff member."*

2.5 More support and less regulation

More support and less regulation was the next most frequently cited vision for the workforce. Respondents suggested there should be more financial support for the sector from the government to enable better pay and working conditions, training, relief staff etc. The introduction of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) type support for practitioners was also discussed. A reduction in paperwork, inspections and regulations as well as streamlining of these areas to alleviate stress for practitioners was suggested. The establishment of a professional body to support practitioners in the sector was also recommended.

- *"That we are valued as professional, hard-working educators with proper support from the government."*

2.6 More training, continuous professional development and career progression opportunities

More opportunities for training, continuous professional development and career progression was the next most mentioned vision for the workforce. Respondents suggested training and continuous professional development should be paid and more easily accessible and career pathways should be more clearly defined and communicated, e.g. through job titles and descriptions. Training and continuous professional development should also be rewarded by pay increases and the introduction of pay scales linked with career progression. The introduction of an apprenticeship model of training as well as specific training related to school-aged childcare was mentioned by some respondents.

- *"Our vision for the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce, by 2028, is that it is graduate led diverse, recognised, and respected by the State and society, with clearly defined roles, career pathways and professional pay scales."*

2.7 Practitioners to be recognised as teachers

The next most commonly identified vision was for practitioners in the sector to be recognised as teachers. Many respondents called for the status of practitioners in the sector to be put on par with primary school teachers. This included having the same pay and working conditions, benefits, holiday pay, pension etc. as primary school teachers. It was also suggested that early learning and care and school-age childcare should be moved under the remit of the Department of Education and practitioners should be recognised by the Teaching Council.

- *"A workforce that that feels valued as providers and educators within the state in line with the status of primary school teachers."*

Section 3: Naming of the Profession

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report details findings related to the naming of the profession. The Call for Submissions asked respondents to suggest job titles for the following roles:

- Qualified (NFQ Level 5) practitioner in an early learning and care service
- Graduate (NFQ Level 7 or 8) room-leader in an early learning and care service
- Pedagogical leader (NFQ Level 7 or 8, plus additional leadership training) for an early learning and care service

3.2 Job title for qualified practitioners in an early learning and care service

Respondents were asked what the job title should be for a qualified (NFQ Level 5) practitioner in an early learning and care service. There were a total of 582 responses to this question. Table 3 below details the most frequently mentioned key words linked to childcare settings and roles for a qualified practitioner while table 4 sets out the most commonly suggested job titles for this role.

Table 3: Setting/role key words for qualified (NFQ Level 5) practitioner in an early learning and care service

Setting key words	%	Role key words	%
Early years	52.6%	Practitioner	31.8%
Childcare	15.5%	Assistant	30.8%
Early childhood	6%	Educator	24.7%
Preschool	3.8%	Teacher	13.7%
Early learning	2.7%	Professional	3.1%
Early learning and care	2.1%	Worker	2.4%
-	-	Carer	1.7%

Table 4: Suggested job titles for qualified (NFQ Level 5) practitioner in an early learning and care service

Job Title	Number of responses	%
Early years educator	94	16.2%
Early years practitioner	85	14.6%
Early years assistant	58	10%
Childcare practitioner	42	7.2%
Early years teacher	28	4.8%
Childcare assistant	23	4%
Preschool teacher	14	2.4%
Childcare worker	11	1.9%
Early years professional	7	1.2%

Early years teaching assistant	5	0.9%
Early years carer	5	0.9%
Early learning and care practitioner	3	0.5%

As can be seen from table 2 above, 'early years' was the most commonly identified key word related to settings, which was suggested by over half (52.6%) of respondents, and 'practitioner', 'educator', 'assistant' and 'teacher' were the most commonly identified key words related to roles. This is reflected in table 3 above where the job titles of 'Early years educator', 'Early years practitioner', 'Early years assistant' and 'Early years teacher' are suggested by a total of 45.6% of respondents.

3.3 Job Title for Graduate Room-leaders in an Early Learning and Care Service

Respondents were also asked what the job title should be for a graduate (NFQ Level 7 or 8) room-leader in an early learning and care service. In total, there were 582 responses to this question. The most frequently mentioned key words related to settings and roles for a graduate room-leader in an early learning and care service are set out in table 5 below and the most commonly suggested job titles for the role are outlined in table 6.

Table 5: Setting/role key words for a graduate room-leader in an early learning and care service

Setting	Percentage	Role	Percentage
Early years	56.3%	Teacher	49.6%
Early childhood	7.6%	Educator	31.2%
Childcare	6.5%	Room leader	9.1%
Preschool	6.4%	Practitioner	7.9%
Early learning and care	2.1%	Professional	4.5%
Early learning	1.9%	Supervisor	2.8%

Table 6: Suggested job titles for a graduate room-leader in an early learning and care service

Job Title	Number of responses	%
Early years teacher	139	23.9%
Early years educator	117	20.1%
Preschool teacher	30	5.2%
Early years practitioner	19	3.3%
Early childhood teacher	17	2.9%
Early childhood educator	16	2.8%
Early years professional	11	1.9%
Childcare practitioner	11	1.9%

Early years leader	10	1.7%
Childcare educator	6	1%

As can be seen from table 4 above, 'early years' was the most frequently identified key word related to setting (56.3%) and 'teacher' and 'educator' were the most frequently identified key word related to roles. This connects with the findings of table 5 which shows 44% of respondents suggested the title of either 'Early years teacher' or 'Early years educator' for a graduate room-leader in an early learning and care service.

3.4 Job Title for Pedagogical Leaders for a Whole Early Learning and Care Service

Finally, the Call for Submissions asked respondents what the job title should be for the role of pedagogical leader for an early learning and care service. There were a total of 553 responses to this question. The most commonly identified key words related to settings and roles for a pedagogical leader for a whole early learning and care service are set out in table 7 below and the most frequently suggested job titles related for the role are set out in table 8.

Table 7: Setting/role key words for Pedagogical Leaders for a Whole Early Learning and Care Service

Setting key words	%	Role key words	%
Early years	42.1%	Manager	26.9%
Early childhood	5.1%	Teacher	17.4%
Childcare	3.3%	Leader	16.6%
Preschool	2.4%	Pedagogue/pedagogist/pedagogical	16.1%
Early learning	2.4%	Educator	12.8%
Early learning and care	0.5%	Principal	9.2%
-	-	Professional	4.7%
-	-	Specialist	4.2%
-	-	Practitioner	4%

Table 8: Suggested job titles for Pedagogical Leaders for a Whole Early Learning and Care Service

Job Title	Number of responses	%
Pedagogical leader	40	7.2%
Manager	38	6.9%
Early years educator	37	6.7%
Early years teacher	35	6.3%
Early years manager	24	4.3%
Early years leader	16	2.9%
Early years principal	15	2.7%

Early years professional	14	2.5%
Principal	14	2.5%
Early years specialist	11	2%
Head teacher	7	1.3%
Team leader	7	1.3%
Early years practitioner	7	1.3%
Early childhood manager	6	1.1%
Preschool manager	5	0.9%
Childcare practitioner	5	0.9%
Pedagogical manager	4	0.7%
Supervisor	3	0.5%

Section 4: Barriers to Workforce Development

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report identifies the main barriers related to the following aspects of workforce development in early learning and care and school-aged childcare:

- Barriers to attracting and retaining more practitioners in the sector (both early learning and care and school-age childcare)
- Barriers to achieving a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services by 2028
- Barriers to practitioners' continuous professional development

4.2 Barriers to attracting and retaining more practitioners in the sector

Table 9 below sets out the key themes related to barriers to attracting and retaining more practitioners in the sector and the frequency in which these themes were identified.

Table 9: Themes related to barriers to attracting and retaining practitioners and frequency of themes

Theme	Frequency of theme
Low pay	861
Poor working conditions	500
Lack of respect and recognition	305
Paperwork, rules, regulations and lack of support	305
Lack of training, CPD and upskilling	156

4.2.1 Low pay

The most commonly identified barrier to attracting and retaining more practitioners in the sector was low pay. The majority of respondents highlighted low wages as being a barrier to attracting and

retaining practitioners. Overall, it was felt that pay does not reflect the qualifications and experience of most practitioners in the sector. The lack of a pay scale for practitioners in the sector was also identified as a barrier with practitioners being unable to increase their earnings incrementally. Many respondents felt it was unfair that practitioners who are required to have specific qualifications are paid close to a minimum wage and less than the living wage.

- *“Low wages which do not reflect a person’s experience and qualifications.”*

4.2.2 Poor working conditions

Poor working conditions were the next most commonly cited barrier to attracting and retaining more practitioners in the sector. Lack of sick pay, holiday pay and summer pay among practitioners were all identified as key barriers to attracting and retaining practitioners. The 38-week contract model was highlighted as a barrier as it forces practitioners to sign on to social welfare payments in the summer months which was deemed to be unfair. Short term contracts also impact on practitioners standard of living, e.g. ability to qualify for mortgages, which can lead to a lack of retention of practitioners. Lack of benefits for practitioners such as pension plans, health insurance and paid maternity leave were also highlighted.

- *“The job comes with no benefits, no pension, no sick pay, really no incentive to stay in the sector at all.”*

4.2.3 Lack of respect and recognition

The next more frequently identified barrier to attracting and retaining more practitioners in the sector was a lack of respect and recognition for practitioners in the sector. Overall, respondents felt there is a lack of respect and recognition of practitioners in the sector from government and policy makers which is reflected in the low pay, poor working conditions and general funding. It was also felt that there is a lack of respect and recognition for practitioners from parents and the general public. Some respondents suggested parents often view practitioners as “babysitters”. Many respondents felt practitioners should be respected more by being paid during summer holidays in the same way teachers are and have better pay and working conditions. It was suggested that childcare is generally not valued as a profession in society in Ireland which is often the reason why practitioners leave the sector.

- *“Lack of respect for the profession, from government to the general public.”*

4.2.4 Paperwork, rules, regulations and lack of support

The next most frequently cited barrier was the high volume of paperwork, rules and regulations associated with the sector. Many respondents stated that stress related to the high volume of paperwork, Tusla inspections and changing rules and regulations was off-putting for practitioners. The often stressful nature of childcare and the responsibility associated with the role was also highlighted. Overall, respondents felt there was a lack of support for practitioners in the sector in relation to these issues and some cited instances of staff burnout.

- *“So much paperwork and stress it is no wonder services are closing and so many are leaving this sector. After 15 years as a preschool leader I feel I will be leaving also.”*

4.2.5 Lack of training, CPD and upskilling

Lack of training, continuous professional development and opportunities for upskilling for practitioners was the next most commonly mentioned barrier, particularly in relation to retention of practitioners in the sector. Other problems related to staff training included lack of funding for training, training being completed out of work hours, training being unpaid and expensive.

- *“Training in our own time unpaid, i.e. first aid, manual handling, HACCP all these courses are mandatory, training is normally done on weekends eating in to family time and all unpaid, no other sector would accept this treatment.”*

4.3 Barriers to achieving a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services by 2028

Table 10 below details the key themes related to achieving a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care by 2028 and the frequency of identification of themes.

Table 10: Themes related to barriers to achieving a graduate-led workforce by 2028 & frequency of themes

Theme	Frequency of theme
Low pay	582
Barriers related to obtaining a third level qualification	245
Poor working conditions	206
Paperwork, stress and lack of support	160
Lack of respect and recognition	144
Training, upskilling and CPD issues	141
Experience of practitioners not taken into account	37
Graduates progressing on to other careers	31

4.3.1 Low pay

Low pay was the most frequently identified barrier to achieving a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services by 2028. Many respondents felt it would be difficult to attract graduates who have completed a four year degree into a workforce that is paid close to the minimum wage. Many respondents commented that practitioners could be paid more in other sectors such as the retail sector. The absence of a pay scale was also highlighted by respondents as a barrier.

- *“Four years of study and to go into a service for €10-11 an hour is shockingly low.”*

4.3.2 Barriers related to obtaining a third level qualification

The next most commonly identified barriers related to obtaining a third level qualification. According to respondents, the cost of paying for a degree is a significant barrier to achieving a graduate-led workforce as many practitioners cannot afford to pay for a degree due to their low wages. There are also no financial incentives such as an increase in pay for practitioners to obtain a degree. Practitioners

having time to study for a degree while working full-time is also a barrier. The quality of some degree courses in early years was questioned as well as accessibility to degree courses in some geographical areas.

- *“Main barriers of achieving a graduated lead workforce is due to the fact that it's so expensive to pay for the courses, yet the actual job itself is low paid and it's almost impossible to work full time and study full time.”*

4.3.3 Poor working conditions

Poor working conditions were the next most frequently identified barrier. Poor working conditions mentioned which included no sick pay or holiday pay, long working hours, short term contracts, lack of job security, signing on in the summer months and no benefits such as pensions and maternity benefits.

- *“Better working conditions are a factor too. For early years teachers working in an ECCE program, these same graduates and also those with post graduate qualifications have to seek social welfare payments during school holidays as government schemes do not pay services during school holidays”*

4.3.4 Paperwork, stress and lack of support

Paperwork, stress and lack of support for practitioners in the sector was the next barrier identified. The high volume of paperwork, inspections, rules and regulations, level of responsibility, pressure and stress associated with the sector alongside a lack of support were also mentioned as being barriers.

- *“There is more and more paper work being placed upon us, more and more regulations and more inspections. Educators are leaving as other jobs have less responsibility and greater pay.”*

4.3.5 Lack of respect and recognition

Lack of respect and recognition for practitioners in early learning and care services was the next most commonly highlighted barrier. Overall, respondents felt practitioners in the sector are not valued or appreciated by the government, parents and the general public which is off-putting to attracting graduates into the workforce.

- *“Graduates of the early years college programs spend the same amount of time, money and effort in achieving their qualifications but are not held in the same regard or treated with the same respect as other chosen professions, so why choose it?”*

4.3.6 Training, upskilling and CPD issues

Issues related to training, upskilling and continuous professional development (CPD) were the next most identified barrier. Lack of funding for training, no remuneration in wages for training, lack of time to complete training, lack of good quality, diverse and specialist training were all mentioned. Lack of opportunities to progress in the workforce and career pathways was also mentioned.

- *“No childcare staff wants to extend their training due to low pay in the sector even at level 8. Why invest money into something they will not benefit from?”*

4.3.7 Experience of practitioners not taken into account

A number of respondents felt the experience of practitioners in the sector should be taken into account and practitioners with adequate experience should be exempt from obtaining a third level

qualification or start at different levels. It was also suggested that some practitioners who are skilled in the area of early years may not have the same skills to study for a degree which is an unfair disadvantage. It was suggested that degrees should be less academic and more practical.

- *“Experience not valued. People working in the sector are put starting at year one of courses e.g. level 7+8 despite huge experience and other training.”*

4.3.8 Graduates progressing on to other careers

Graduates who are using childcare qualifications to progress on to other careers, namely primary school teaching was another barrier identified by respondents.

- *“Graduates are using the Childcare qualification as a back door to Primary School Teaching degrees. I have had 3 college graduates leave my service after 12 months as they return to college to study for Primary Teaching.”*

4.3.9 Other barriers

Other barriers mentioned in relation to achieving a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services by 2028 included:

- The sector is viewed as being gender biased
- Multiple organisations having responsibility in the sector
- Lack of career pathways for practitioners
- Absence of a professional body to represent practitioners in the sector
- Barriers for students from minority groups to access work placements
- Graduates emigrating to take up better paid roles in other countries
- Dependence on graduates from other countries creates a transient workforce

4.4 Main barriers to practitioners' continuous professional development

The main themes related to barriers to practitioners' continuous professional development and the frequency of identification of these themes are highlighted in table 11 below.

Table 11: Themes related to barriers to continuous professional development and frequency of themes

Theme	Frequency of theme
Cost	638
Time	514
Lack of incentives	145
Accessibility	86
Lack of motivation and enthusiasm	73
Lack of recognition and respect	54
Impact on families	29
Lack of a professional representative body	7
Access to online training	7

4.4.1 Cost

The most commonly identified barrier to practitioners continuous professional development was cost. The high cost of professional development alongside the low pay of practitioners were highlighted as a barrier. In addition, the lack of funding and investment to enable practitioners to access continuous professional development in the sector acts as a barrier.

- *“Because there is no assistance with the cost of college fees many staff within the sector are unable to obtain higher qualifications as they are so low paid they simply can’t afford to attend college part time to obtain a degree, even when they are in full time employment.”*

4.4.2 Time

The next most frequently identified barrier to practitioners’ continuous professional development was time. According to respondents, practitioners do not have time to complete continuous professional development as they are generally working full-time and have heavy workloads including paperwork and inspections. As a result, continuous professional development is often completed in their time off which is generally at weekends and in the evenings which impacts on time with their families. Practitioners also cannot afford to take time off and there are not offered time off in lieu of professional development

- *“Time is a main barrier as practitioners are mainly required to uptake CPD in their own time and not given time back for hours committed.”*

4.4.3 Lack of incentives

Lack of incentives was the next most frequently identified barrier to practitioners’ continuous professional development. This primarily related to a professional development not being paid and resulting in no increase in salary, pay scale or benefits and generally having no reward.

- *“There is no incentive to do courses because you are not guaranteed an increase in wages after completion of a course that increases the subsidies for services. It is a very unfair situation.”*

4.4.4 Accessibility

Accessibility to continuous professional development was the next most discussed barrier. This included lack of availability of professional development as well opportunities to access professional development. Respondents discussed issues related to geographical and technological barriers to accessing training.

- *“For those engaging in continuous professional development there are barriers from a lack of digital access and equipment for adult online learning and a lack of funding support for degree courses.”*

4.4.5 Lack of motivation and enthusiasm

Lack of motivation to access continuous professional development was the next most commonly cited barrier. This included practitioners lacking motivation and enthusiasm to complete CPD due to lack of reward as well as stress, exhaustion and burnout from working in the sector.

- *“Practitioners are constantly engaging in CPD and I don’t believe there are any barriers apart from being burnt out from the workload that is expected of us for such low wages. We have had enough!”*

4.4.6 Lack of recognition and respect

Lack of recognition and respect for practitioners in the sector was the next most commonly highlighted barrier. Overall, respondents felt practitioners are not valued enough as educators which can impact on the uptake of continuous professional development. Also continuous professional development is not recognised or reflected in wages or pay scales.

- *“No professional recognition, having to pay from own wages for CPD. No recognition or incentive for ongoing training.”*

4.4.7 Other barriers

Other barrier identified related to practitioners continuous professional development included:

- The impact on families and children, e.g. childcare needed for practitioners with children to complete training in the evenings and weekends
- Lack of a professional representative body to drive professional development
- Access to online professional development, e.g. technology, cost
- Inconsistent quality of professional development

Section 5: Attracting and Retaining Practitioners

5.1 Introduction

This section examines how the sector could be made more attractive to practitioners and how retention of staff in the sector could be improved.

5.2 How could the sector be made more attractive?

Table 12 below sets out the key themes related to how working in the sector, both early learning and care and school-age childcare, could be made more attractive for those considering entering into it and the frequency in which themes were identified.

Table 12: Themes related to how the sector could be made more attractive and frequency of themes

Theme	Frequency of theme
Better pay	950
Better working conditions	415
Respect and recognition	275
Better training	114
More opportunities for career progression	94
Less and more streamlined inspections	40
A professional representative body	30
Professional job titles	23

Reduced ratios	14
Consultation and collaboration with practitioners	11

5.2.1 Better pay

The most commonly mentioned way in which working in the sector could be made more attractive was better pay. The current pay of practitioners is close to the minimum wage which is not attractive to encouraging more practitioners into the sector. The introduction of a pay scale linked to qualifications and training was also viewed as being an important factor in attracting more practitioners.

- *“Pay the staff the money they deserve according to what level they are at, we have done an Honours Degree and would still earn more working in Tesco or Lidl.”*

5.2.2 Better working conditions

Better working conditions were the next most frequently identified way to make working in the sector more attractive. This included sick pay, holiday pay, pensions, paid maternity leave, health insurance and other benefits. Increased job security through more secure long term work contracts, no short term contracts were also deemed to be important.

- *“An actual pay scale put into place. Sick pay. Pay for 52 weeks of the year. Increase the pay - obtaining a graduate degree and being on minimum wage is degrading.”*

5.2.3 Respect and recognition

More respect and recognition for practitioners in the sector was the next most commonly cited way of attracting more practitioners. This included valuing practitioners more through increased funding for the sector, better pay and conditions for practitioners as well as respect and recognition from the government and wider society for their important role.

- *“Being respected and seen as a professional.”*

5.2.4 Better training

Better training and more opportunities for practitioners to enter the sector and continuous professional development for practitioners in the sector was the next most cited way to make the sector more attractive to practitioners. According to respondents, training and continuous professional development should be better funded, free to practitioners and practitioners should be paid to participate. Overall, there should be more incentives for practitioners to train, study, upskill and stay in the sector.

- *“Provide more training courses to enable people to enter into the Early Years Sector.”*

5.2.5 More opportunities for career progression

More opportunities for career progression was the next most highlighted response. Respondents suggested there should be a clearer career progression path for practitioners in the sector to make it more attractive.

- *“There needs to be more coherent career progression and more advancement through appropriate ongoing CPD, initial and higher qualifications.”*

5.2.6 Other suggestions:

Other suggestions to make the sector more attractive to practitioners included:

- Less inspections and regulations and streamlining of inspections, e.g. less bodies inspecting
- A professional body or union to advocate the needs of practitioners
- Professional job titles for practitioners that reflect their skills
- Reduce worker to children ratios to reduce stress for practitioners and improve the service for children
- More consultations and collaboration between policy makers/funders and practitioners to identify and listen to the needs of practitioners in the sector
- Introduce an apprenticeship model for practitioners which is more practical and less academic than third level courses
- Run publicity campaigns to promote, educate and value childcare roles in society
- Promote gender diversity in the workforce
- Consider a not for profit model of early learning and care and school aged childcare

5.3 How can retention of staff be improved?

Themes related to how retention of staff in early learning and care and school aged childcare sector can be improved and the frequency of identification of themes are outlined in table 13 below.

Table 13: Themes related to how retention of staff can be improved and frequency of themes

Theme	Frequency of theme
Increase pay	594
Better work conditions	316
More training and career progression opportunities	192
Recognition and respect	174
More supports	61
Less paperwork	52
A professional representative body	21
A more positive and less stressful working environment	17
More non-contact hours	15
Clearly defined job titles and roles	7
More consultation with practitioners	7
Reduced ratios	7
Mentoring programmes	6

5.3.1 Increase pay

Increasing pay was the most common response in relation to how retention of staff can be improved in the sector. Raising the pay of practitioners above the minimum wage along with introducing a pay scale were among the most commonly highlighted suggestions.

- *“Pay scale...people need to see a future. Right now I work with 14 other people and they all have said they cannot see themselves working in the sector in the next 10 years.”*

5.3.2 Better work conditions

Better work conditions was the next most frequently mentioned suggestion to improve retention of staff. This included introduction of sick pay, holiday pay, pensions, maternity and health insurance benefits as well as more secure long-term contracts for practitioners.

- *“Better terms and conditions like contracts for longer than 38 weeks. It will be impossible to retain staff as they can get more money by working in Aldi for less stress and responsibility than this job has.”*

5.3.3 More training and career progression opportunities

The next most frequently identified way to retain staff was more training and career progression opportunities. According to respondents, there should be more training, better access to training, more funding for training, better quality training, better training times for practitioners and recognition of training completed in pay and time in lieu. Promotion of management and leadership training as well as human resources training for managers was highlighted as being particularly important to encourage retention.

- *“Leadership training for owner/managers.”*

5.3.4 Recognition and respect

More recognition and respect of practitioners in the sector from government and the general public was the next most discussed issue. Respondents suggested that more recognition and respect of staff in the sector through better pay and working conditions, recognition of qualifications and increased general funding would result in better retention of practitioners.

- *“Through respect and recognition of our role in the national education system.”*

5.3.5 More supports

More supports for staff including financial support, administration support, supports around inspections, supports for training and continuous professional development, supervision supports, replacement staff to cover sick leave and holidays, access to supports around how to assist children with additional needs and cleaning staff.

- *“Having support staff to cover holidays and illness (not having adequate cover makes it a very stressful work environment).”*

5.3.6 Less paperwork

Less paperwork, administrative duties, inspections and regulations and more time spent with children was the next mentioned was to increase retention of staff.

- *“Administrative tasks are unnecessarily tedious and the pedantic nature of reporting on attendance and staff allocation reinforces the patronising attitude towards those working in the sector. You have to know that - NCS will definitely break people.”*

5.3.7 Other ways retention of staff could be improved:

- An independent professional body or union to represent the needs of practitioners in the sector
- A more positive and less stressful working environment for practitioners, e.g. more breaks
- More mandatory, paid non-contact hours for staff to allow for planning, observations, meetings, supervision, training etc.
- Clearly defined professional job titles and roles
- More consultation with providers and practitioners in the sector, e.g. co-construction of policy initiatives
- Reduce the staff to children ratio
- Mentoring of junior staff by more senior staff, e.g. mentoring programmes and networks
- Staff having the option to work as a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) after completing a Level 5 qualification is leading to many practitioners leaving the sector
- Increased capitation grants for children

Section 6: Policies to support a graduate-led workforce

6.1 Introduction

This section identifies policies that would best support a graduate-led workforce in the early learning and care services by 2028.

6.2 Policies that best support achievement of a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services by 2028

Table 14 outlines the policies suggested by respondents that would best support achievement of a graduate-led workforce by 2028 and the frequency of identification of these themes.

Table 14: Policies to best support achievement of a graduate-led workforce by 2028 and frequency of themes

Theme	Frequency of theme
Policies related to pay	250
Policies related to training, CPD and career progression	126
Policies working conditions	123
Policies related to recognition and respect	113
Policies to support practitioners	85
Policies related to quality standards	38
Policies to increase capitation grants	26
Policies to align sector with primary school teaching model	25
Policies to reduce administration and inspections	24
Policies to establish a professional representative body	23
Policies to establish a single government department umbrella body	12

It should be noted that a number of respondents expressed concern about the introduction of additional policies into a sector which they believe is already highly regulated.

- *"Do we not have enough policies and hoops to jump through already? More policies = more confusion and stress for providers."*

6.3 Policies related to pay

The most commonly identified policies that would best support achievement of a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services by 2028 were pay related policies. Suggested policies included increasing wages above the minimum wage, introduction of pay scales and increments and pay to reflect practitioners qualifications and experience.

- *"A pay policy that gives a fair wage and recognition for qualifications achieved."*

6.4 Policies related to training, CPD and career progression

Policies that promote training, continuous professional development and career progression were the next most suggested policies. It was suggested that policies should be introduced that make training and upskilling in the sector mandatory. Policies that provide incentives to practitioners to train and upskill such as increases in pay were also suggested. Policies that promote better quality training and CPD were also mentioned.

- *"CPD training policy. Staff offered to achieve qualification during work hours, paid for by the service."*

6.5 Policies related to working conditions

Policies related to working conditions were the next most frequently mentioned policies to best achieve a graduate-led workforce. Policies suggested included those related to introducing sick pay, holiday pay, pensions, maternity benefits, health insurance and more secure long-term contracts.

- *"Policies around improved working conditions, policies around recognition of qualifications - level 7,8 and 9 and a pay scale reflecting this supported through a funding model."*

6.6 Policies related to recognition and respect

Policies that would lead to better recognition and respect for practitioners was the next most frequently mentioned policies that would support achievement of a graduate-led workforce in the sector. This included recognition and respect of practitioners through better pay and conditions and valuing role of practitioners more. It was suggested that all policies developed should be done so in a manner that recognises and respects the important role of the profession. Finally, promotional campaigns to encourage recognition and respect of the sector was also put forward, e.g. through social media.

- *"Any policy development in this sector needs to be worded and delivered in such a way that people will start to recognise the profession as a profession. There are far too many people who view early childhood education as 'babysitting' or 'childminding'".*

6.7 Policies to support practitioners

Policies to support the sector were the next most frequently mentioned policies. This included financial supports e.g. better pay and conditions, a funding model that would provide supports, supports related to graduate studies e.g. grants and paid time off study, training, continuous professional development, supports to help register childminders to gain minimum qualifications, mentoring supports, insurance, recruitment and management supports, supports linked to social and gender inclusion. It was also suggested that services should have a pedagogist on site for support and guidance.

- *“Provision of incentives and enhanced supports (such as high quality practice resources, professional mentoring and specialist library access) to improve reflective practice, gain higher qualifications and progress careers.”*

6.8 Other policy suggestions

Other policies that would best support achievement of a graduate-led workforce suggested included:

- Policies to increase quality standards in the sector, e.g. development of ‘quality officer’ roles to ensure the provision of good quality services
 - Policies to increase capitation grants
 - Policies that would align the sector to the primary school teaching model, e.g. similar pay and working conditions, holiday pay, relief worker panels
 - Policies to reduce paperwork, administration duties and inspections
 - Policies to support the establishment of a professional independent representative body
 - Policy to change responsibility for the sector to be under a single government department
 - Policies related to the recruitment of practitioners in the sector, e.g. recruitment into graduate courses
 - Policies to reduce staff to children ratios in the sector
 - Policies to be linked with Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People in Ireland and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- *“Policy derived from the UNCRC where children are listened to and are part of the process is essential.”*

Section 7: Continuous professional development

7.1 Introduction

This section details how practitioners' continuous professional development could be supported through defining occupational roles and establishing career pathways within the sector and how should practitioners' continuous professional development be supported through training.

7.2 How should practitioners' continuous professional development be supported through defining occupational roles and establishing career pathways within the sector?

Table 15 below details themes related to how practitioners' continuous professional development can be supported through defining occupational roles and establishing career pathways and frequency of identification of themes.

Table 15: Themes related to how practitioners’ continuous professional development can be supported through defining occupational roles and establishing career pathways and frequency of themes

Theme	Frequency of theme
Improved access to continuous professional development	319
Recognition of qualifications and continuous professional development in pay	228
Clearly defined roles and career progression pathways	172
More varied continuous professional development	96
More respect and recognition	67

7.2.1 Improved access to continuous professional development

The most cited response in relation to how practitioners continuous professional development could be better supported was improved access to continuous professional development. This primarily related to better access to continuous professional development through more funding. According to respondents, continuous professional development should be free, paid, more regular, easier to access in different geographical locations, delivered in-house where possible and at more convenient times such as during working hours.

- *“Providing more opportunities for professional development outside of Dublin.”*

7.2.2 Recognition of qualifications and continuous professional development in pay

The next most frequently cited response in relation to how practitioners continuous professional development could be supported was ensuring pay is reflective of their qualifications and continuous professional development. Introduction of a pay scale for practitioners and increments to reflect their qualifications and training was deemed to be essential to promoting continuous professional development, defining roles and establishing career pathways.

- *“The development of defined roles and job descriptions will help to focus professional development and enable the development of a career pathway as a number of clearly defined roles can be developed. This would include the setting of salary scales for professionals working within the sector.”*

7.2.3 Clearly defined roles and career progression pathways

More clearly defined roles and progression pathways was the next highlighted response. It was suggested that each role within the sector should have a distinctive professional development and career pathway to follow. It was also suggested that clearly defined job titles and job descriptions would make it easier for practitioners to establish career pathways.

- *“Each occupational role with the early years sector should have a pre-determined continual professional development path required by practitioners and childminders to be completed on an annual basis.”*

7.2.4 More varied continuous professional development

A wider variety of continuous professional development was the next most highlighted response. Respondents suggested that more varied and specialised continuous professional development would

result in more varied and specialised occupational roles and career pathways. Specialised areas mentioned included special education needs, behavioural issues and psychology. The importance of management and leadership training was emphasised in relation to producing more managers and leaders in the sector.

- *“Funding and a varied of CPD training in different areas being provided e.g. behaviour, special needs, management, leadership etc.”*

7.2.5 More respect and recognition

The next most cited way to support continuous professional development was to give more respect and recognition for practitioners as professionals. Respondents argued that more recognition should be given to practitioners in terms of their qualifications and continuous professional development which should be reflected in pay and working conditions.

7.3 How should practitioners' continuous professional development be supported through training?

Themes related to how practitioners' continuous professional development can be supported through training and frequency of identification of themes are highlighted in table 16 below.

Table 16: Themes related to practitioners' continuous professional development being supported through training and frequency of themes

Theme	Frequency of theme
Financial support	363
Time off	163
Better access to training	65
Better support structures	59
Relief staff to support practitioners who are training	33
Good quality training	23
Mentoring programmes	22

7.3.1 Financial support

The most commonly identified way to support the continuous professional development of practitioners was through financial support. According to respondents, training and continuous professional development should be free, paid for by the government or providers and rewarded through pay increases.

- *“Provide training at no cost to staff and ensure staff get paid for the time.”*

7.3.2 Time off

The next most frequently identified way of supporting continuous professional development of practitioners was to provide time off or time in lieu for training completed. Respondents also felt study time and exam leave was important to support practitioners engaged in continuous professional development. Finally, it was recommended that training should be accessible at appropriate times, e.g. in-house during working hours and not in the weekends or evenings.

- *“Time off or time in lieu should be given for training hours.”*

7.3.3 Better access to training

The next most frequently highlighted way to support practitioners continuous professional development was through better access to training. This included better access to face-to-face training geographically as well as improved access to online training opportunities. Many respondents a blend of both face-to-face and online training would work well.

- *“Courses should be flexible to facilitate those working full-time offering a blend of face to face and online learning.”*

7.3.4 Other supports

Other supports discussed which would support continuous professional development included:

- Relief staff to support practitioners who are training
 - Support structures such as County Childcare Committees to lead, support and promote the planning and development of CPD and create opportunities for shared learning
 - Ensuring good quality training is available
 - Development of mentoring programmes and systems to supports practitioners continuous professional development
- *“Mentor programmes led by educators with experience and degrees would also be brilliant, both as an inspiration and as a career opportunity. Also, County Childcare Committees could organise more regular meetings for 'communities of practice' where local educators can meet and share ideas, best practice, training etc.”*

Section 8: Key Messages for Policy and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This sections outlines the key messages for policy taken from the findings of the consultation process which are set out under a number of thematic headings below.

8.2 Pay and working conditions

- Pay for practitioners in early learning and care and school-aged childcare should be increased, pay scales should be introduced and pay should reflect qualifications and training.
- There is a need for better working conditions for practitioners in the sector, e.g. holiday pay, sick pay, pensions, maternity benefits, health insurance.
- A model of pay and working conditions similar to primary school teachers should be considered for practitioners in the sector.

8.3. Respect and recognition

- There is a need for greater recognition and respect for practitioners in the sector in relation to vision, pay and working conditions and the role as educators and carers in society.
- Campaigns should be developed to promote the sector and increase respect and recognition of the educational and caring role of practitioners.
- Titles should be developed for practitioners in the sector to recognise them as professional providers.

8.4 Graduate-led workforce

- A graduate-led workforce should be developed through funding, better pay and working conditions and recognition of qualifications in pay.

- Practitioners should have better access to good quality face-to-face and online graduate courses.

8.5 Continuous professional development

- Continuous professional development should be supported through financial supports, better access to training, a wider variety of training and other supports such as time off.
- An apprenticeship model of training practitioners in the sector should be explored.

8.6 Supports

- A professional representative body should be established to support practitioners in the sector in terms of pay and working conditions, training, continuous professional development etc.
- Mentoring programmes and systems should be developed to support practitioners and encourage continuous professional development and career progression.
- The introduction of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to support practitioners in the sector should be considered.
- Relief panels should be established to support practitioners, e.g. in relation to sick leave, training, study leave.

8.7 Paperwork and inspections

- The volume of paperwork and inspections should be decreased and streamlined.
- One governing body/government department should be responsible for the sector, inspections, paperwork etc.
- Practitioners should be paid for non-contact hours to help facilitate planning, meetings, training etc.

8.8 Conclusion

Overall, the Call for Submissions on the Workforce Development Plan for the early learning and care and school-age childcare sector in Ireland identified a number of common themes. The need for better pay and working conditions, better recognition and respect, more opportunities for training, continuous professional development and career progression, development of a graduate-led workforce and more supports and less regulations for practitioners in the sector were all commonly identified themes across the findings.

Many of the themes are interlinked, for example low pay and poor working conditions lead to a lack of recognition and respect among practitioners and act as a barrier to achieving a graduate-led workforce. Incentives such as recognition of qualifications and training in pay, a defined pay scale as well as clearer career progression pathways, funded continuous professional development and professional job titles would help support development and retention of the workforce. Other initiatives such as streamlining paperwork and inspections and establishing a professional representative body would also benefit practitioners in the sector.

It is clear from the findings that respondents to the Call for Submissions believe that significant changes, particularly in relation to improved pay and working conditions, are needed in order to develop and retain the workforce in the sector and support achievement of a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services by 2028.

Appendix 2 – Report on Focused Consultation Events

By Change Exploratory

Introduction

This consultation (working in parallel with a consultation in relation to a New Funding Model) was re-scheduled from March / April 2020, with the original plan for local events across the country being replaced by a series of online focussed discussion sessions, addressing three themes:

- A. Recruitment and Retention
- B. Qualifications and Initial Training
- C. Ongoing Training and CPD

Discussions followed on from a survey / call for submissions that had taken place between 19 August and 2 October (602 submissions made) and a webinar held on 22 September, that had attracted over 700 people. 130 people signed up to participate in the consultation process.

Nine discussions were held, using Zoom, with each of the three themes being repeated three times. All nine discussions also included questions in relation to Role Titles – a summary of feedback in relation to this is given at the end of this report.

Feedback from participants was collected, in sessions, by ‘Mentimeter’ (interactive presentation software), the chat function in Zoom and also verbally.

Session Dates

Date	Event	Number of Participants
Monday 12 th October	Recruitment and Retention – 1	25
Tuesday 13 th October	Qualifications and Initial Training – 1	21
Wednesday 14 th October	Ongoing Training and CPD – 1	24
Thursday 15 th October	Recruitment and Retention – 2	19
Friday 16 th October	Qualifications and Initial Training – 2	12
Monday 19 th October	Ongoing Training and CPD – 2	12
Tuesday 20 th October	Recruitment and Retention – 3	16
Wednesday 21 st October	Qualifications and Initial Training – 3	16
Thursday 22 nd October	Ongoing Training and CPD – 3	13
	TOTAL ATTENDANCES	158

(Participants were invited to attend events on all three themes, if they wished, but not to attend the same theme more than once)

Consistent Feedback Across All Three Topics

There was considerable overlap in the discussions on the three topics (A. Recruitment and Retention, B. Qualifications and Initial Training and C. Ongoing Training and CPD). This is not surprising, as many

of the same people attended sessions on different topics and people were keen to make clear their views of the fundamental challenges that the sector faces.

- Many participants in the consultation expressed that there was an immediate and urgent crisis in the sector and were concerned that any actions would not come soon enough to deal with current problems.
- Staff turnover was reported as high in many places, morale low and recruitment and retention very difficult.
- The core of the crisis was seen to be in low pay and poor terms and conditions for staff, as a direct consequence of funding levels.
- The situation was further undermined by a lack of recognition and respect for the sector, a lack of certainty about the future and the immediate challenges of the Covid-19 crisis.
- Critically, turnover of staff was clearly seen as directly linked to quality of service.
- There were many stories of graduates not staying in the sector and particular difficulties in attracting graduates to work with Under 3's.
- When discussions shifted to the longer-term, there was considerable support for the professionalising of the sector and the role of a professional body within that.
- Many participants identified the necessity for administration to be reduced and streamlined and expressed a wish for a reduction in the number of state bodies and inspections that providers had to deal with. There were also many comments regarding the need to improve HR practices.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the quality and relevance of some existing training.
- There was strong support for mentorship schemes (provided mentors themselves had quality experience) and Communities of Practice. Opinion in relation to the potential role of apprenticeships was more divided (there was much support for apprenticeships, but also possible quality concerns and concerns that it could turn into a cheap labour scheme).
- There was very strong support for the view that training should be properly funded and that workers should not be having to do it in their own time.

A: Recruitment and Retention

In general, each of the focused discussion sessions on 'Recruitment and Retention' followed broadly the same format.

Participants were invited to make any comments they wished to, at the beginning of the session and also in response to an introductory presentation. (These comments have generally been presented in the 'Summary Overview' below – N.B. not all views expressed are necessarily held by all people)

2 small group 'breakout room' conversations were held within each session, the first on **how to make careers in the sector more attractive** for a wider range of people and the second on the potential to **develop different entry routes into the sector** for people of different ages and backgrounds. Summaries of the feedback from those conversations are given below.

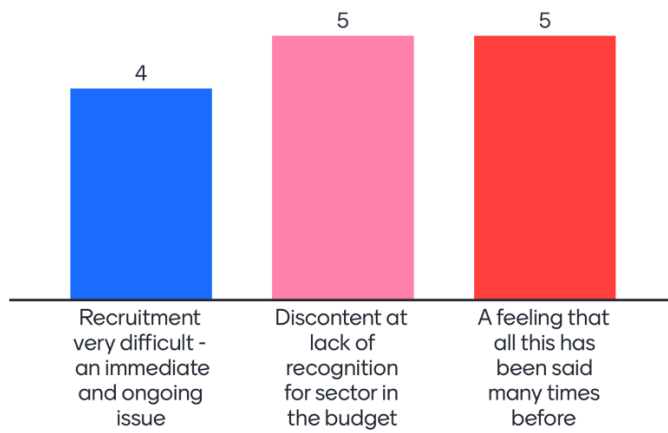
(N.B. there was some repetition / overlap between the different parts of the conversation).

The introductory presentation covered :

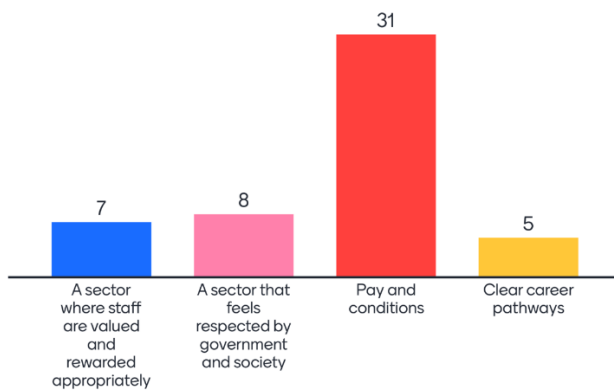
- The goals for the Workforce Development Plan (as outlined in First 5)
- An overview of the consultation process
- A summary of relevant issues that had been raised in the call for submissions process

Summary Overview of Participant Perspectives on 'Recruitment and Retention'

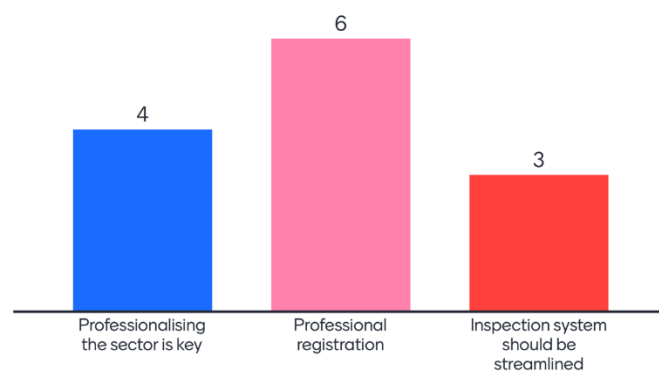
Current Reality – Most Frequent Comments



Desired Future – Most Frequent Comments



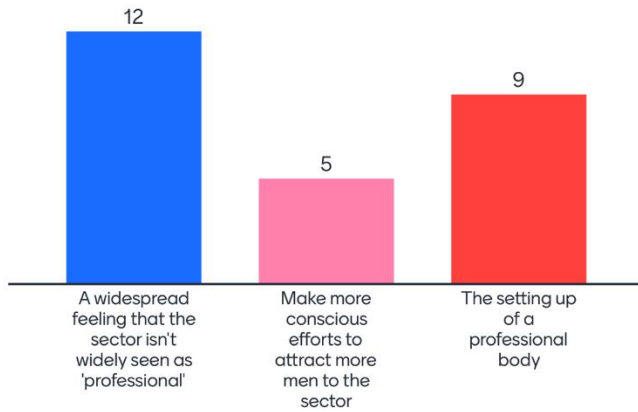
Ideas for How to Get from Here to There – Most Frequent Comments



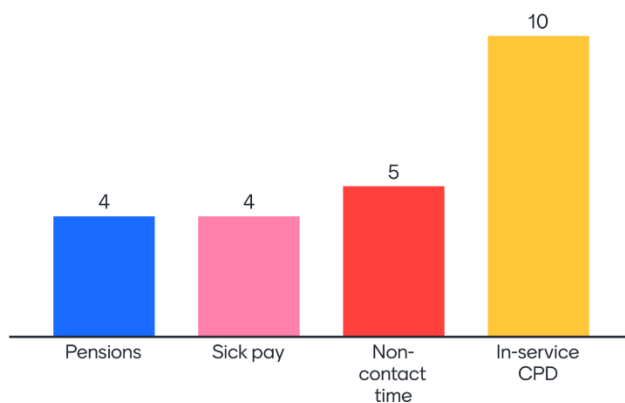
Feedback re 'How to make careers in the sector more attractive for a wider range of people'

Three areas for improvement were outlined:

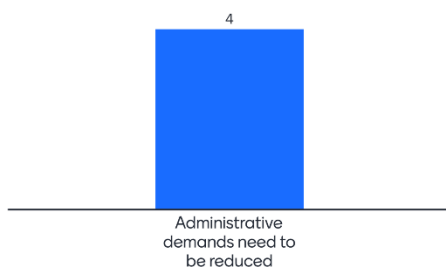
(i) Improving how the sector is seen by people outside the sector



(ii) Improving Terms and conditions for staff



(iii) Improving processes and systems within and for the sector



Feedback on 'How to develop different entry routes into the sector'

Across the three sessions on 'Recruitment and Retention', discussions addressed a variety of diverse elements :

- A **stepping stone process**, where people can find their own level (including people who are not interested in progressing to level 8)
- **Graduates** – There is concern from some people that they didn't all necessarily have sufficient understanding of the realities of working in the sector. There was a suggestion that a scheme should be created to facilitate part-time work for students. There remain different views on the 50% graduate target.
- The potential for a **bridging programme** for graduates of other caring professions.
- The potential for a **pre-level 5 course** to give people a real taste of the sector, without having to commit to a 3 year apprenticeship.
- The potential for **apprenticeships**. (This divided opinion. Some felt that such a scheme could 'drive the sector back 50 years' and be used as cheap labour and would suffer from an insufficient quality of mentors. Some felt it was definitely a constructive way forward and could be 'incredibly valuable', as long as apprentices weren't treated as core staff).
- The need for particular routes that valued **work with younger children** (0 to 3).
- The need for **SNA's** to be able to work as **AIM Support Workers** regardless of actual qualification,
- The need for a mechanism to support people coming into the sector with **qualifications from other countries**.
- The need for an overhaul of **BTEC routes** (concerns re quality and experience of some teaching). (N.B. BTEC is the Business and Technology Education Council)
- Alternative paths for **mature employees**, including accreditation of prior experience.
- The role of **Community Employment Schemes** (Concern was expressed about 'the dole office' referring on unsuitable people)
- It was recognised that developing approaches needed to respond to both the market-driven parts of the sector and the community-led parts of the sector.
- In all cases, it was emphasised that courses needed to keep up with 'the fast moving sector' and that a professional body would be a great help.

B. Qualifications and Initial Training

Each of the focused discussion sessions on 'Qualifications and Initial Training' followed broadly the same format.

Participants were invited to make any comments they wished to, at the beginning of the session and also in response to an introductory presentation. (These comments have generally been presented in the 'Summary Overview' below – n.b. not all views expressed are necessarily held by all people)

2 small group 'breakout room' conversations were held within each session. The first was on possible features of a **new programme to aide progression** for practitioners with Level 5 qualifications and the second was on possible features of an **induction programme** for newly qualified people entering the sector. Summaries of the feedback from those conversations are given below.

A further question was also asked regarding the potential role for a Level 6 qualification and, in one of the three sessions, there was time for a final opportunity for additional comments.

(N.B. there was some repetition / overlap between the different parts of the conversation).

The introductory presentation covered :

- The goals for the Workforce Development Plan (as outlined in First 5)

- An overview of the consultation process
- A summary of relevant issues that had been raised in the call for submissions process
- A summary of policies that had been proposed in the call for submissions that would support the achievement of a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care by 2028

In general in the session, participants were broadly supportive of moves towards an increasingly graduate-led workforce, but it was also felt to be important that practical experience was properly valued and that courses were relevant and of high quality.

The immediate priority concern for participants was keeping people in the workforce and whilst this obviously relates to pay and conditions, it was also recognised that the 'professionalising' of the sector and the provision of quality training were helpful.

It was felt important that, in any developments, due priority was given to work with children under three.

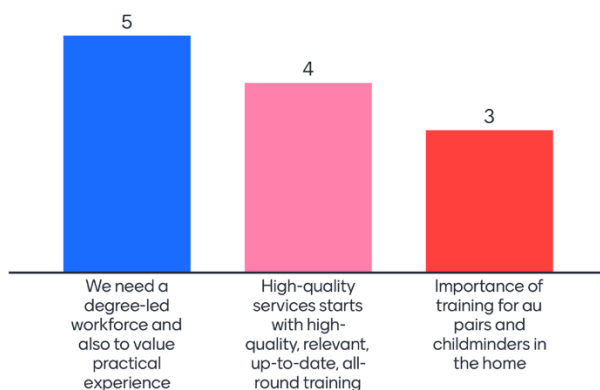
There was considerable support for mentorship schemes.

Summary Overview of Initial Comments on 'Qualifications and Initial Training'

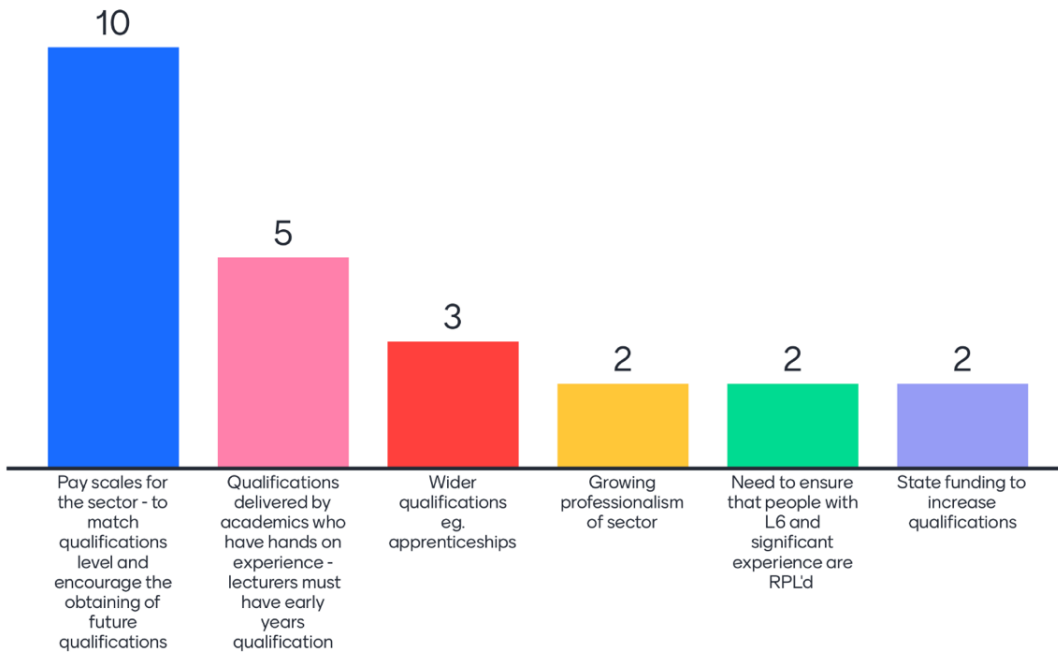
Comments in the tables that follow have been summarised into six sections:

- (i) Suggested principles to base discussions on
- (ii) Aspects of 'Current Reality'
- (iii) Identified elements of 'Desired Future'
- (iv) Views in relation to minimum qualifications
- (v) Questions raised
- (vi) Other comments made

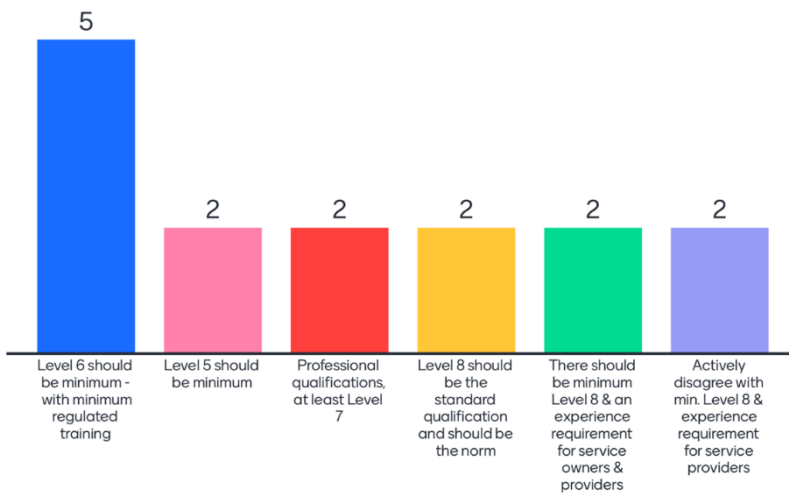
i) Suggested principles to base discussions on – Most Frequent Comments



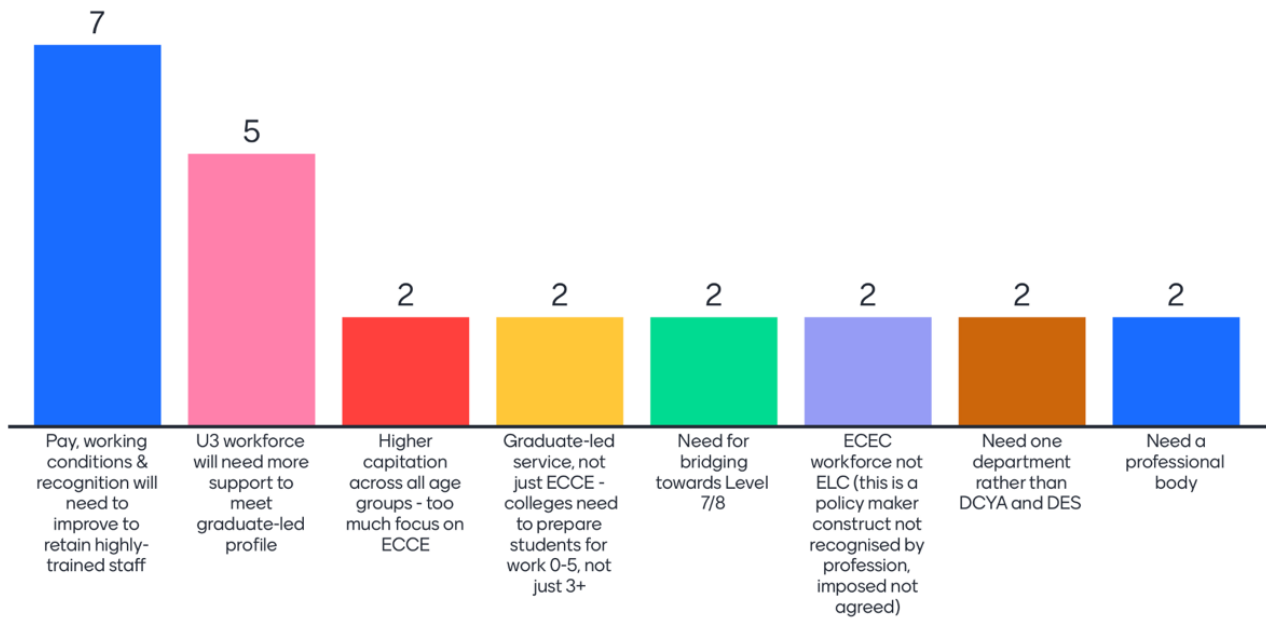
iii) Identified elements of 'Desired Future' – Most Frequent Comments



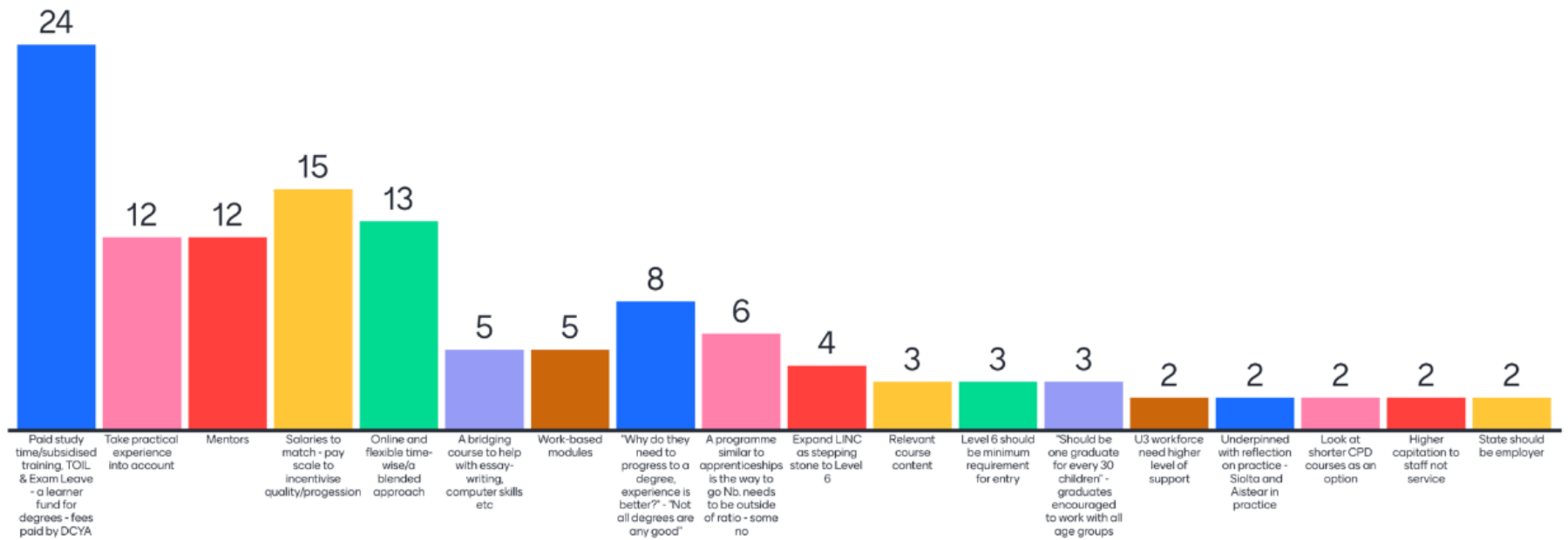
iv) Views in relation to minimum qualifications – Most Frequent Comments



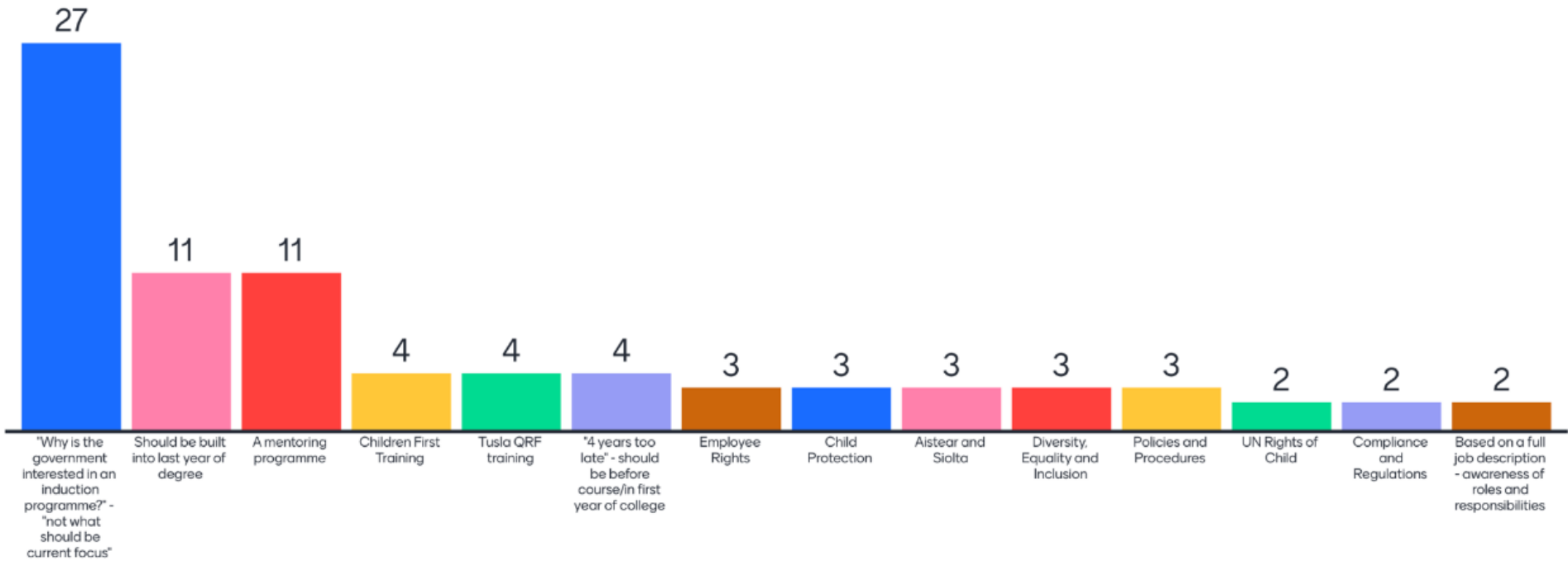
vi) Other comments made – Most Frequent Comments



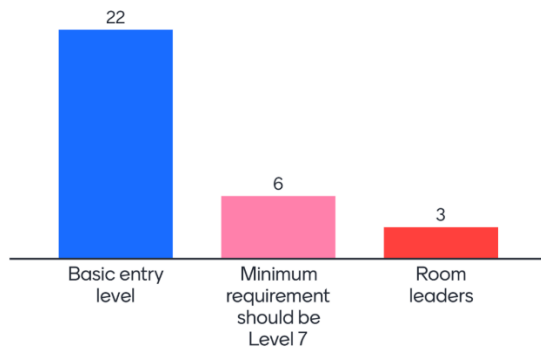
Possible features of a new programme to aid progression for practitioners with Level 5 qualifications (most frequent comments listed first)



Possible features of an induction programme for newly qualified people entering the sector



What should the role be for a Level 6 Qualification?



C. Ongoing Training and CPD

Each of the focused discussion sessions on 'Ongoing Training and CPD' followed broadly the same format. Participants were invited to make any comments they wished to, at the beginning of the session and also in response to an introductory presentation. (These comments have generally been presented in the 'Summary Overview' below – N.B. not all views expressed are necessarily held by all people)

2 small group 'breakout room' conversations were held within each session. The first focused on possible features of **a national system for CPD and Training**, with particular attention being paid to ensuring that such a system met the needs of a) individual practitioners, b) service providers and c) government policy. The second breakout group focused on the potential for **a national training programme for leadership** (and / or pedagogical leadership) within the sector.

A further question was asked regarding **additional roles that might be designated within the sector** and then a final opportunity given to make any additional comments

(N.B. there was some repetition / overlap between the different parts of the conversation).

The introductory presentation covered :

- The goals for the Workforce Development Plan (as outlined in First 5)
- An overview of the consultation process
- Issues identified in the call for submissions process in respect of barriers to ongoing professional development
- Solutions suggested in the call for submissions process that would support CPD with role profiles and career pathways

As with the other topics discussed, funding was again a central issue in the sessions on ongoing training and CPD. There was a clear view that a professional approach to ongoing training and CPD will require proper funding, including study leave, paid non-contact time and time built in for in-service days to enable training together for all staff in a setting.

Quality and relevance of training were once again emphasised and mentorship schemes supported.

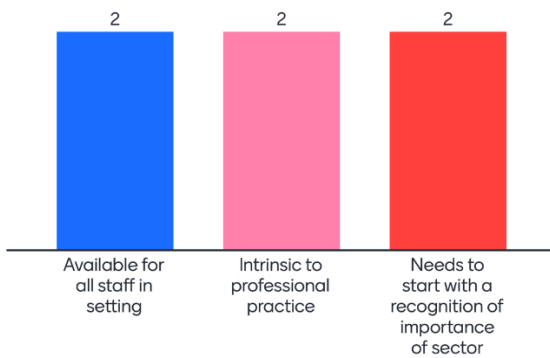
There was, additionally, considerable interest in the continuing development of a Community of Practice approach.

Summary Overview of Initial Comments on 'Ongoing Training and CP

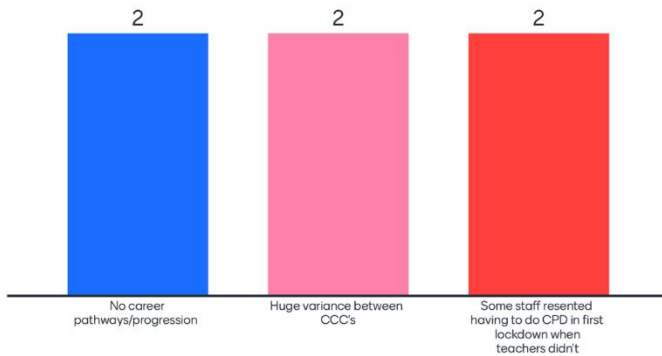
Comments in the table below have been summarised into five sections:

- (i) Suggested principles to base discussions on
- (ii) Aspects of 'Current Reality'
- (iii) Identified elements of 'Desired Future'
- (iv) Questions raised
- (v) Other comments made

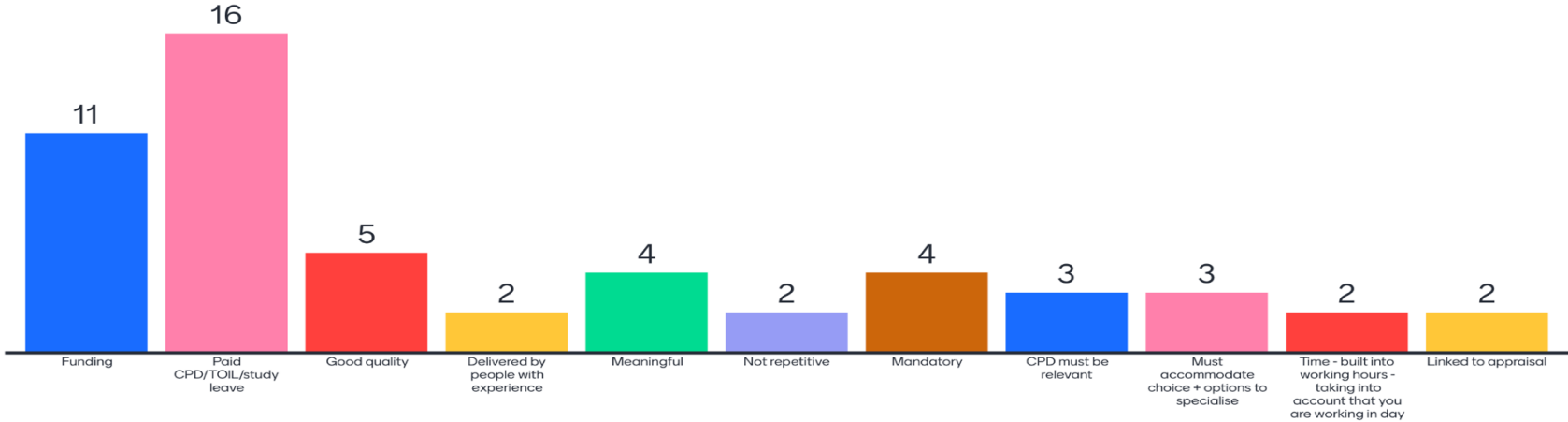
i) Suggested principles to base discussions on – Most Frequent Comments



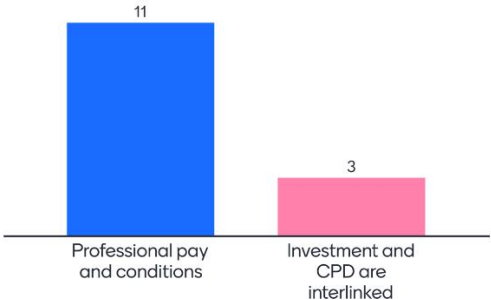
ii) Aspects of 'Current Reality' – Most Frequent Comments



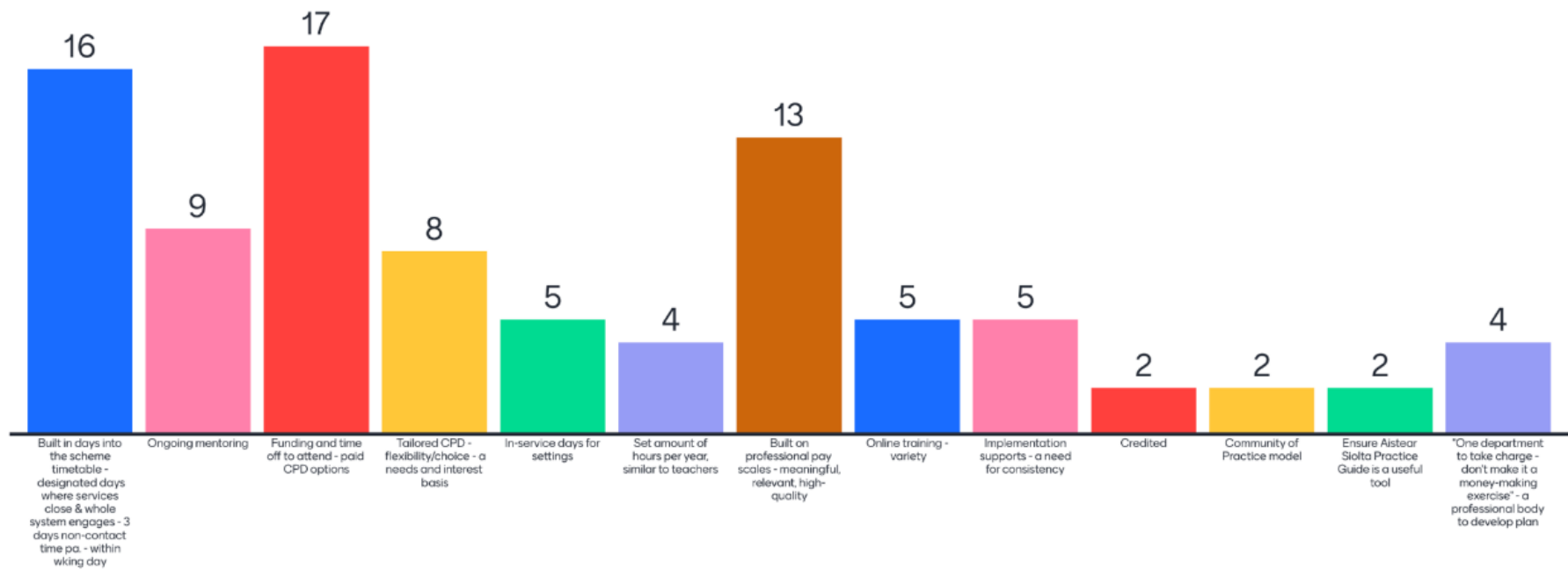
iii) Identified elements of 'Desired Future' – Most Frequent Comments



iii) Other comments made – Most Frequent Comments

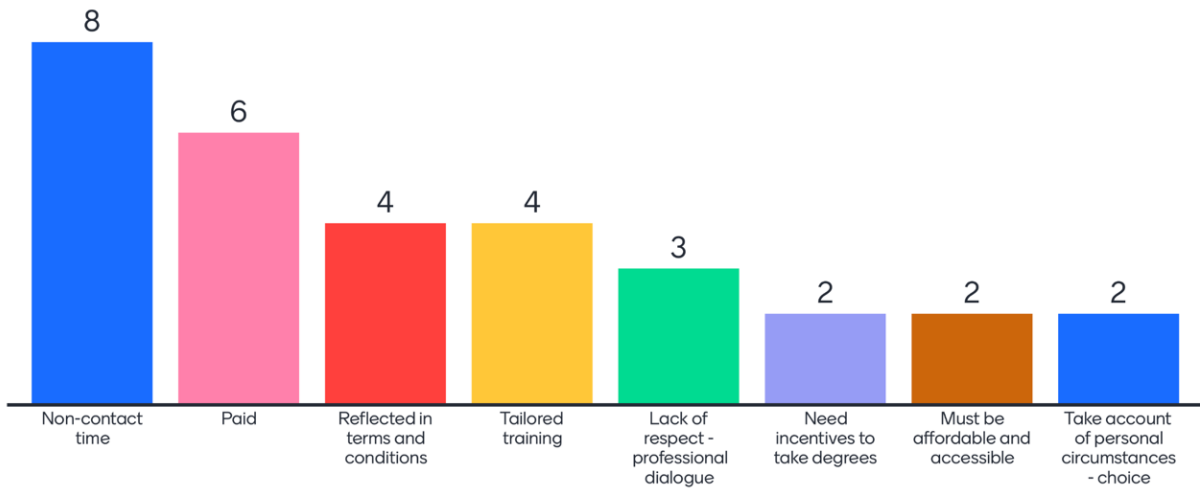


Possible features of a national system for CPD and Training

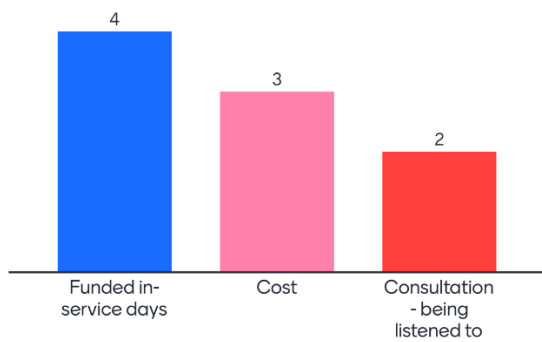


Ensuring that such a system met the needs of a) individual practitioners, b) service providers and c) government policy

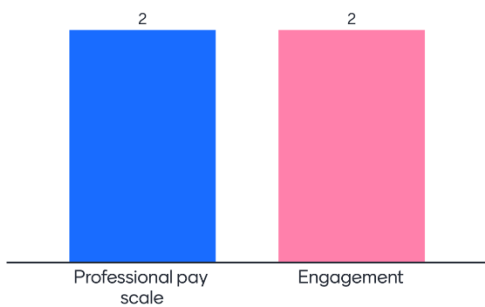
a) Ensuring the system meets the needs of practitioners



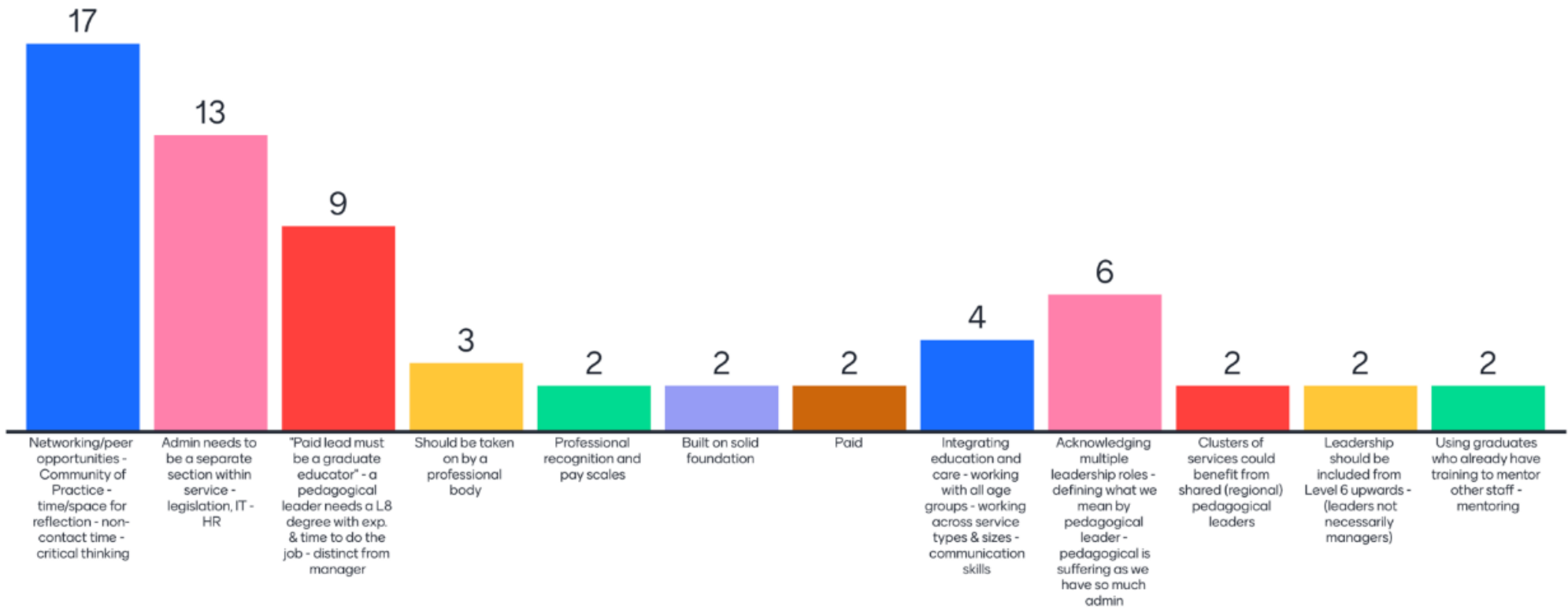
b) Ensuring the system meets the needs of providers



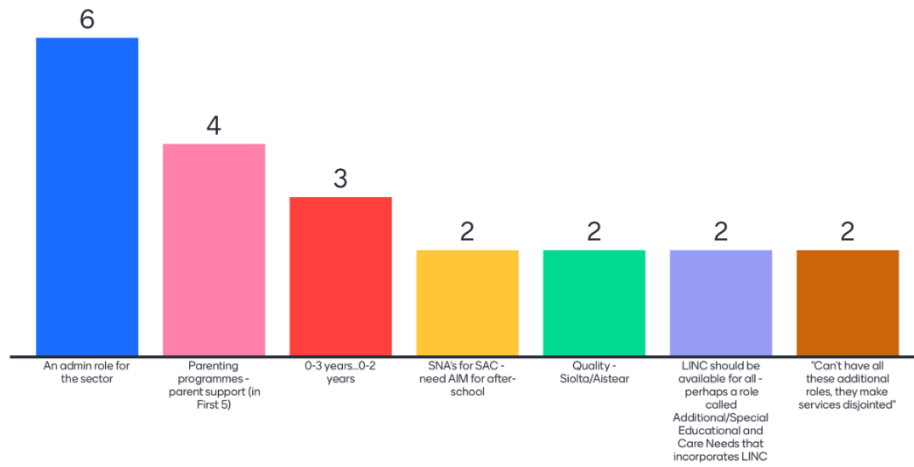
c) Ensuring Government Policy works



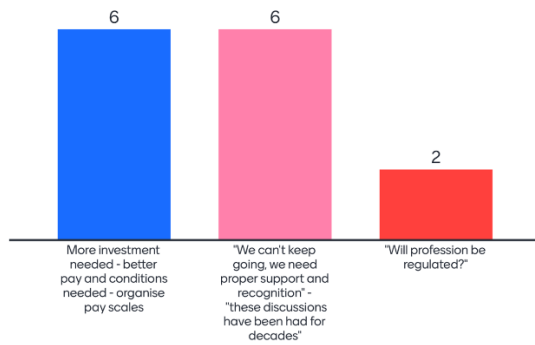
The potential for a national training programme for leadership (and / or pedagogical leadership) within the sector



What additional roles should be designated (for which special training should be developed?)



Additional comments



Role Titles

All nine focused discussions on the Workforce Development Plan included a section on role titles. The following survey results (from the survey undertaken as part of the prior Call for Submissions Process) were shared with participants:

Role titles – survey results



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthai Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

L5 assistant	L7/8 graduate room-leader	Pedagogical leader
Early years/childcare Practitioner – 26%	Early years teacher/ early childhood teacher – 35%	Manager – 22%
Early years/childcare Educator – 20%	Early years/childhood educator – 24%	Teacher – 13%
Early years/childcare Assistant – 19%	Room leader/supervisor – 13%	Pedagogical Leader – 12%
Early years/preschool teacher – 8%	Teacher – 7%	Principal – 10%
Assistant Teacher/Teaching Assistant – 6%	Practitioner – 6%	Educator – 10%
	'Educator/teacher' – 4%*	
	*These responses referenced both titles	

The intention of sharing these results and prompting further discussion was to build on the question asked in the call for submissions by asking participants to consider how titles for the different roles would fit together. In the call for submissions, separate questions were asked on the appropriate titles for the roles of (a) a Level 5 assistant, (b) a Level 7/8 room leader, and (c) an experienced and qualified pedagogical leader. In the consultation events, initial analysis of responses to those questions was presented, and participants were asked to consider how the different options preferred by respondents to the call for submissions might work when considered together, in light of a practitioner's potential career pathway through the three roles.

Participants were asked to express on a scale of 1 to 5 how much they agreed or disagreed that the following combinations of titles would be received positively (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). 115 people expressed views over the 9 discussions (N.B. there some people who attended more than one session who may have expressed their view more than once)

Combination	Average Rating
Early Years Practitioner / Early Years Teacher / Early Years Manager	3.2
Early Childhood Practitioner / Early Childhood Teacher / Early Childhood Manager	3.1
Early Years Practitioner / Early Years Teacher / Pedagogical Leader	2.8
Early Years Practitioner / Early Years Educator / Pedagogical Leader	2.7
Assistant Teacher / Early Years Teacher / Pedagogical Leader	2.0

Tentative Conclusions

- None of the combinations presented gained strong support
- There was a definite lack of support for the option including the title 'Assistant Teacher'
- There was a slight preference for the title 'Manager' over 'Pedagogical Leader'

- There was a very slight preference for the label 'Early Years' over 'Early Childhood'
- There was a very slight preference for the title 'Teacher' over 'Educator'

Additional feedback from Discussion

Opinions on role titles and possible combinations varied widely, not least on the potential appropriateness and usefulness of using **the title 'Teacher'**:

- On the one hand (approx. 60% of specific comments), some participants felt a desire to be seen as professionals alongside other teachers and that the designation of this title would help the sector to be seen in a more professional light and in its movement towards being increasingly graduate-led – “everyone knows what a teacher is” – “there is a reluctance to acknowledge us as teachers, as that would mean we would need to be recognised as such, paid as such, given holidays as such, RESPECTED as such” – “the term ‘teacher’ reflects good qualifications”
- On the other hand (approx. 40% of specific comments), some participants strongly disliked the title ‘teacher’, feeling it didn’t give sufficient recognition to the caring aspects of the role (one person specifically said “teaching reflects adult control and top down education”) and several people felt the title was particularly not right for younger children.

The titles ‘teacher and manager’ were favoured by some as being accessible terms actually used by children, with manager reflecting the work done that does not directly involve children

The title ‘pedagogical leader’ was seen by many as confusing and not generally well understood. Some preferred the title ‘educational leader’. (Several people saw positives in the notion of leadership being more prominent, but the distinction between ‘pedagogical leader’ and ‘service manager’ wasn’t seen as relevant in all settings).

The title ‘practitioner’ was actively disliked by some.

Another option put forward was **the title ‘Early Years Specialist’** – (some people definitely liked ‘Early Years being part of the title – others felt it ‘missed the child’, unlike ‘Early Childhood’ or alternatively another suggestion **‘Muinteoir Luath-óige’**

Some people were unhappy with the 3 tier model, and felt any model should explicitly include a Level 6 title.

Several people expressed continuing discontent with the sector title ‘Early Learning and Care’

There were many comments regarding people’s opinions on **what would be a good process** to help resolve these questions:

- Many felt the whole workforce should be consulted
- Some felt consultation should happen via various representative bodies (ACP, ECI and SIPTU were named)
- A Pobal survey via Hive was proposed, as was consultation via Universities and Training Centres
- Some felt these questions should be given to a new professional body (some feeling the discussion would only become meaningful, if career progression with appropriate salaries and terms and conditions was a reality)
- Consultation with children was also suggested.
- It was suggested that distinctions may be necessary between full day care and sessional part-time care and also that the conversations were taking insufficient account of the different

context of School Age Care. It was also put forward that the continuum with au pairs, childminders, nannies and home managers should be part of our thinking.

Glossary

ACP - Association for Childcare Professionals

AIM - Access and Inclusion Model

Aistear - The curriculum framework for children from birth to 6 years in Ireland

BTEC - Business and Technology Education Council (a qualification)

CCC - City / County Childcare Committee

CPD - Continuing Professional Development

DCYA - Department of Children and Youth Affairs (now renamed the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth or DCEDIY)

DES - Department of Education and Skills

ECCE - Early Childhood Care and Education

ECEC - Early Childhood Education and Care

ECI - Early Childhood Ireland

early learning and care - Early Learning and Care

Hive - The dedicated early years programme portal for service providers.

Home Ec - Home Economics

HR - Human Resources

LINC - Leadership for Inclusion Programme

Muinteoir Luath-óige - Early Childhood Teacher

OT - Occupational Therapist

PACG - Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines

PHECC FAR - Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council First Aid Responder

Pobal - Pobal administer and manage Government and EU funding to address disadvantage and support social inclusion

QRF - Quality and Regulatory Framework

RPL - Recognition of Prior Learning

school-age childcare - School Age Childcare

Siolta - The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education

SIPTU - Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union

SLT - Speech and Language Therapist

SNA - Special Needs Assistant

TOIL - Time Off In Lieu

Tusla - Child and Family Agency

UN - United Nations

Appendix 3 – 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.¹ 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,² the

¹ https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Early-Years/eye_workforce_dev_plan.pdf

² 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 2017,³ the publication of the Report of the Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector in 2018,⁴ 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*,⁵ 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.

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

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

⁵ 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 2018.⁶ 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 profiles⁷, the development of criteria and guidelines for relevant higher education qualifications⁸, 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;

⁶ https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/19112018_4966_DCYA_EarlyYears_Booklet_A4_v22_WEB.pdf

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

⁸ <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),⁹ 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,¹⁰ over the period to 2028. This workforce includes more than 30,000 staff working in centre-based services¹¹ and up to 35,000 childminders who will be subject to the phased introduction of regulations over the next decade.¹²

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/ecec/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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>

¹² 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,¹³ 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

¹³ 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, Gerry Verschoyle

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.

Appendix 4 – Terms of Reference for the Stakeholder Group

Background and Context

First 5, the recently launched whole of Government strategy for babies, young children and their families commits to developing a Workforce Development Plan to ensure the appropriate number of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) staff at all levels in the sector. A comprehensive workforce planning exercise will build on the professionalisation of the workforce to date, including the review and reform of qualifications for the ELC workforce led by the Department of Education and Skills.

The Plan will support the achievement of the targets set in *First 5* and will also set out plans to raise the profile of careers in ELC and SAC, establish a career framework and leadership development opportunities and work towards building a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce. Consideration will also be given to the broader ELC and school-age childcare workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles and support for those who facilitate practice placements. The Plan will address the development of the ELC and SAC workforce, including both registered centre-based and registered home-based provision, over the period to 2028. This workforce includes more than 30,000 staff working in centre-based services and up to 35,000 childminders who will be subject to the phased introduction of regulations over the next decade.

The Workforce Development Plan is being led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in close collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills, which has a complementary remit in supporting both the quality of education provided in the ELC sector and in assuring the quality and relevance of the education and training programmes available to the profession.

A National Steering Group has been established to oversee the two phases of the workforce planning process set out in their terms of reference. A Stakeholder Group is also being established to ensure that sectoral interests from the ELC and SAC sectors in addition to the education sector are consulted on key developments and facilitated to share their expertise and that of their members in the process as a whole.

Membership

The core membership of the Stakeholder Group is being formed by the members of the professionalisation subgroup established under the auspices of the Early Learning and Care Forum chaired by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Additional representation has been agreed by the National Steering Group.

CHOICE - Conference of Heads of Irish Colleges of Education

ACP - Association of Childhood Professionals

CRA – Children’s Rights Alliance

IUA - Irish Universities Association

NPC - National Parents Council

THEA - The Technological Higher Education Association:

Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC)

Barnardos

CCI - Childcare Committees Ireland

Childminding Ireland

CNNG - Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta
Community Forum - National Forum for Community Childcare Services
Early Childhood Ireland Members' panel
Gaelscoileanna Teo
High Scope
ISKA - Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association
NCN - National Childhood Network
PLÉ - Pedagogy, Learning and Education Association
Seas Suas
ETBI - Education and Training Boards Ireland
HECA - Higher Education Colleges Association (St Nicholas Montessori)
IBEC
ICTU – Irish Congress of Trade Unions
QDOSS (Quality Development of Out of School Services)

Purpose of the Group:

- To provide a forum for consultation by the Steering Group with stakeholder organisations at key development stages during the workforce planning process;
- To provide feedback on draft position papers to the Steering Group on request;
- To consult with their membership in the ELC and SAC sectors to support and inform the work of the group in accordance with protocols to be agreed with the secretariat;
- To provide a forum for sectoral discussion on challenges arising as part of the workforce development planning process.

Meetings

- The Group shall meet according to an agreed schedule to coordinate with the work of the Steering Group as set out by the Steering Group meeting secretariat.
- Meetings will be organised by the Secretariat to the Steering Group. Some meetings may be independently facilitated.
- One alternate representative may be nominated by each member.
- The Group will work within agreed protocols in respect of communications and confidentiality to be agreed at its first meeting.