Workforce Development Plan
Phase 2 Working Groups Progress Report
Career Framework & Pathways Working Group

29 July 2021
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Introduction

The Workforce Development Plan is being developed in close collaboration between the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIFY) and the Department of Education, and its development is overseen by a Steering Group and supported by a Stakeholder Group.

The Plan is being developed in two stages. Stage 1, 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.

Stage 2, involved the preparation of detailed policy proposals prepared by five working groups, 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.

For the purposes of this report the term “setting” will be used when referring to a single location to reflect that a business may operate a number of settings and that a single setting may provide both an ELC service and an SAC service, or just one of the two. Each setting will have a single person in charge, even if there are also business managers operating across multiple settings for a business.
Career Framework and Career Pathways

Purpose
To develop proposals for consideration by the WDP Steering Group – including rationale, approach to implementation (given the current workforce context), timelines for reform, initial actions and (where relevant) financial implications and trade-offs – on a career framework for early learning and care including identification of roles, role profiles and titles, pre-requisites for different roles, career pathways, and the application of the career framework to different types of setting.

Working group membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Carron, Eimear /Wolfe, Toby</th>
<th>DCEDIY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapporteur</td>
<td>Carter, Martina</td>
<td>DE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>Comerford, Jenny</td>
<td>DE</td>
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<tr>
<th>Group Members</th>
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<tr>
<td>Breakwell, Nicholas</td>
<td>The Higher Education Colleges Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bushell, Regina</td>
<td>Seas Suas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costello, Meadhbh</td>
<td>IBEC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forde, Stacy</td>
<td>Childcare Committees Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrity, Sheila</td>
<td>PLÉ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kelly, Barbara</td>
<td>QQI</td>
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<td>Kerrins, Liz</td>
<td>Early Childhood Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kilbane, Louise</td>
<td>Early Childhood Ireland - members panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>McDonnell, Caroline</td>
<td>National Childhood Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>McNally, Laura</td>
<td>Better Start</td>
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<tr>
<td>O’Sullivan, Lisha</td>
<td>CHOICE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn, Marian</td>
<td>Association of Childhood Professionals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silke, Aishling</td>
<td>SIPTU</td>
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Terms of Reference

1) Role profiles for the three proposed career grades, building on those drafted during Stage 1 of the WDP and the competence profiles set out in the EU 2020 report on professionalisation, considering the relationship between a pedagogical leader role and wider leadership/management roles. The three proposed career grades were temporarily named:-
   a) EY Practitioner/Assistant,
   b) EY Teacher/Educator and
   c) EY (Pedagogical) Leader

2) Working titles for the proposed career grades, pending the establishment of a professional standards body.

3) Other roles in a setting, which may include other aspects of leadership/management and specialist roles (e.g. Inclusion Coordinator), the training needs for such roles and whether they are tied to a proposed career grade.

4) 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, including the role of Level 6 qualifications as a stepping stone between Level 5 and 7/8 awards to support achievement of an early years graduate-led workforce by 2028.

5) A recommendation as to whether there should be requirements for EY Teacher/Educator status in terms of experience and/or completion of an induction process (in addition to the requirement of an approved Level 7 qualification).

6) Professional requirements (that might later become contractual requirements), for EY (Pedagogical) Leaders in terms of
   a) qualification level,
   b) experience,
   c) specialist leadership training
   d) key components of leadership training for the above purposes.

7) Application of the proposed career framework to different sizes and types of setting in the current diverse, private market system of provision.

8) Implications of the proposed career framework to the broader ELC/SAC workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles.

In the course of its work, the Working Group will take into account further guidance or changes to the Terms of Reference from the Steering Group in light of the ongoing work of the Expert Group on a new Funding Model for ELC and SAC and any other need that the Minister may identify.
Context, Challenges and Opportunities

In line with the European Commission (2020)\(^1\) report on ‘How to Recruit, Train and Motivate Well-Qualified Staff” in Early Childhood Education and Care and building on the commitment in First 5 to achieve a “graduate-led” workforce by 2028, a career framework together with leadership development opportunities will be put in place for the sector. Raising the profile of careers in Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Aged Childcare provision is a key commitment in First 5 to be realised through the Workforce Development plan. First 5 commits to a target of a graduate-led workforce in Early Learning and Care (ELC) by 2028, with 50% of staff to be graduates, including room leaders and managers working directly with children. First 5 also includes a commitment to introduce a minimum qualification for all staff in regulated school-age childcare (SAC). A further aim of First 5 is to build a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce.

Process of developing occupational roles

In 2002, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform published a set of occupational role profiles for the early learning and care sector.\(^2\) At that time, a set of five profiles was developed through consultation with all stakeholders in the ELC Sector. These were denoted with generic titles and described the core knowledge areas, key tasks and responsibilities for each occupational role profile from entry level (basic) to expert practitioner.

In 2010, a previous Workforce Development Plan was developed and published by the Department of Education and Skills.\(^3\) In this document these generic occupational role profiles were mapped onto the National Framework of Qualifications, from Levels 4 through to Levels 8 and 9\(^4\).

In 2016 this work was used as the basis for a review of occupational role profiles commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills and carried out by Professor Urban and his team in Roehampton University\(^5\). That report found that:

- Early childhood professional identities may be multiple, and include those working in services for children under three and those for children over three, and those working in the early years in primary schools;
- Such fragmentation may challenge a coherent professional identity and ideas of professional practice;
- Irish cultural traditions may work against early childhood workers being seen as professionals (this may particularly affect childminders and those working with children under three). This may lead to them feeling both excluded and ambivalent about their professional identity;
- A sense of feeling undervalued impacts on early childhood workers’ sense of identity, leading to feelings of disempowerment;
- Poor levels of pay may be equated with a sense of early childhood as not a profession;
- The Occupational Role profiles were seen as potentially (and positively) influential on professional practice and professional identity;

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\(^3\) Department of Education and Skills (2010) A Workforce Development Plan for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland
\(^4\) National Framework of Qualifications [https://nfq.qqi.ie/](https://nfq.qqi.ie/)
A growing number of qualified and experienced early childhood workers are recognising and valuing themselves as professionals, and are beginning to be more proactive in their advocacy for early childhood.

This research project also incorporated principles and findings of the ‘Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care’, CoRe report, published by the European Commission in 2011. A Working Group was established by the Department of Education and Skills, to take this research forward and develop a set of guidance for the review of initial professional qualifications at Bachelor degree and honours bachelor degree (Levels 7 & 8 on the Irish NFQ) to support graduate roles in the Early Learning and Care sector, and in particular to ensure professional leadership in all centre-based settings. The resulting published Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG) also formed the basis for a review by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) of further education awards for Early Childhood Education and Care which resulted in the development of professional award type descriptors for new major awards in early learning and care at NFQ Levels 5 and 6 on the NFQ. In 2021 a consortium of Education and Training Boards developed a shared national curriculum to be implemented nationally from 2021 onwards.

Professional roles, the role profiles for those roles and the career pathways between the roles constitute a career framework for early years’ professionals who work in centre-based ELC and SAC services. This career framework will underpin future planning of initial training and continuing professional development across ELC and SAC provision, and form the basis for the plans set out in later sections of this draft report.

Qualification requirements

Over the coming years, First 5 implies that rules of funding schemes will cease to differentiate qualification requirements for ECCE rooms and qualification requirements for non-ECCE rooms. A graduate-led sector implies a graduate leading the practice in every room, regardless of the age of the children in the room.

In April 2019, the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs approved publication of the Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG) for Early Learning and Care and a timeline for their introduction, including the establishment of a Qualifications Advisory Board (QAB) in 2020. The purpose of the Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG) is to underpin the quality assurance of professional degree programmes for ELC and to enable initial professional education course providers to design and deliver courses (including professional practice placement) that develop the necessary values, knowledge(s) and practices in their graduates to enable them to practise as core professionals in the sector. This process is fundamentally important to the Workforce Development Plan given its core objective of building a graduate-led workforce in ELC by 2028. As a result of the work of the QAB all Level 7 & Level 8 degrees being undertaken from September 2022 in the field of ECEC will have been deemed to have met the requirements of the PACG. From September 2022 onwards, only students entering QAB-approved degree programmes will be eligible for DCEDIY-funded schemes to support graduates working in ELC.

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9 QQI FET PATD: https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/FET-Awards-Standards.aspx
10 In this document the term ECEC refers to the field of learning, namely Early Childhood Education and Care and the term ELC refers to the Early Learning and Care sector, settings and staff therein.
In 2021 QQI have validated a number of ELC programmes. Similarly, to the PACG requirements for degree programmes at NFQ Level 7 and Level 8, these NFQ Level 5 and Level 6 programmes are mapped to a new set of standards, the Professional Award Type Descriptors (PATD) Annotated for Early Learning and Care. The coherence between these two sets of award standards provides for continuity across further and higher education awards and creates the foundation for professional qualification pathways for learners entering and seeking to progress their professional education in the ELC sector.

Induction into the profession

It is recognised internationally, and in many other professions, that induction can be an important stage in supporting new entrants into the profession to carry out their role. The EU working group report describes three stages in the journey to professionalism: initial training/education; induction; and ongoing education and training (i.e. CPD).

The EU working group report states that:

‘Induction can be seen as a process of confirming that an individual is suitable for the profession for which they have been trained. It can involve a formal process of registering with a professional organisation; a process of demonstrating a set of competences in an employment context; or it can be part of initial education and training as professional recognition is conferred after induction rather than after the award of a qualification’.

The European Commission Report, 2018, Monitoring the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care recommends ‘the percentage of staff who receive formal support for at least their first six months at work' as an indicator of quality in early years systems.

Terminology

No decision was made in First 5 on the term to be used to describe the profession or the titles to be given to specific roles within the profession. This issue needs to be determined because of: DCEDIY funding and contracts; future use by a regulator for the profession if introduced; and to give clarity for staff and employers on where staff and roles are positioned in relation to the planned career pathway within the profession. In the past, there has been a proliferation of disparate terms used when describing the profession and different roles within the sector.

Funding for participation in Level 7/8 degree programme

Achieving the objective of a graduate-led workforce for ELC will require that new entrants into the ELC sector have achieved specified professional awards and will require that the current workforce are supported to upskill to achieve these qualifications. However, given the importance of staff retention and of supporting career progression, and because funding is already available for pre-service degrees for new entrants to the sector (e.g. the Free Frees Initiative and SUSI grants), additional State support will focus on upskilling existing practitioners. This will involve a flexible funding approach: funding participation in part-time degrees, flexible full time degrees, and blended learning programmes, some of which are currently unfunded (except for the post-award Learner Fund bursary of €750 and Skillnet, which also provides pre-award subsidy funding in some areas), to enable practitioners to remain working while studying. It is recognised that room leaders with an NFQ Level 6 qualification should be encouraged to upskill to graduate level, thus allowing them to progress their own career, and minimise the number of individuals leaving the sector. It is recognised that supports will need to be tailored and be inclusive to support learners in the existing workforce to upskill while they remain in employment.

[22] https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/825252b4-3ec6-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1
Since 2017 the Learner Fund has shifted focus to support participation in Bachelor’s Degree programmes. The bursary of €750 is intended to provide only a partial contribution to the cost of a degree programme. In the initial funding round in 2017, 1,080 practitioners received a bursary for awards achieved between 2013 and 2017. In subsequent bursary rounds in 2018 and 2019, 550 and 496 practitioners respectively received post-award payments. Total spending on the graduate bursaries between 2017 and 2019 has amounted to €1.6m over the 3-year period. In total, 2,116 practitioners to date have received Learner Fund graduate bursaries, accounting for approximately 47% of the increase since 2012 in the number of higher education graduates in the sector. Concurrently, the proportion of graduates who were in substantial employment in the first year after graduation rose between 2013 and 2017 from 66% to 83.5%\(^\text{12}\).

In future it is envisaged that, rather than post-award funding, which, although reducing the overall cost to students, leaves in place a significant financial barrier to participation in higher education, it is proposed that financial support will be provided throughout a degree programme.

It is proposed that, through an expanded Learner Fund, the State will fund a number of places each year on degree programmes. Rather than providing funding to students, which requires significant administration and reduces the State’s oversight of selected degree programmes, it is proposed to draw on relevant models, such as the LINC model\(^\text{13}\) and the Springboard model\(^\text{14}\) (in which a certain number of places are procured in third-level institutions), with funding provided directly to the third-level institutions, and places available free or at low-cost to practitioners/students. Under this programme:

- Funded places would be limited to courses designed to support the upskilling of current practitioners to degree level; flexible delivery; Blended learning courses; part-time courses; those courses that are delivered in ways that enable practitioners to remain working while studying (e.g. evening / weekend participation; blended delivery).
- Funded places would be limited to degree programmes that the Qualifications Advisory Board has determined are in line with the new Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG).
- It is intended that a number of funded places will be available on a range of approved degree programmes, thereby providing choice and flexibility for current practitioners. Additional criteria may apply such as specific reporting requirements. A geographical spread of practitioner/students will need to be planned for.

Consideration of alternative routes into the sector is within the scope of the Workforce Development Plan but is outside the terms of reference of this Working Group.

Currently, Higher Capitation payments are only available within the ECCE programme, i.e. in relation to children aged between 2 years 8 months and 5 years 6 months.\(^\text{15}\) It is not available for younger children. It is likely that this limitation is a major factor in explaining why graduates are concentrated in provision of the ECCE programme (primarily for 3-5 year olds), with the proportion of graduates with 3-5 year olds (33%) double the proportion in rooms with children under 3 years old (15%). While the latter effect runs counter to the integrated approach to early learning and care that is at the heart of First 5, it does indicate that the policy mechanism offered by the Higher Capitation is effective in incentivizing the recruitment of graduates.

A constraint on the impact of Higher Capitation payments is that service providers are currently under no obligation to pass on the payments to their staff in higher wages. While the payments do seem to


\(^{13}\) LINC Model: [https://lincprogramme.ie/](https://lincprogramme.ie/)

\(^{14}\) Springboard: [https://springboardcourses.ie/](https://springboardcourses.ie/)

\(^{15}\) It is also available in a small number of CCSP-funded services, where children are of ECCE age.
be impacting positively on graduate recruitment in spite of this constraint, it may be that the scope for further increases in graduate recruitment will be limited by the low wage-premium for graduates working in the sector, particularly in the cost of full employment in the economy.

In 2020 the Focused Policy Assessment of the ECCE Higher Capitation Payment concluded that:

- The ECCE Higher Capitation payment has been an effective funding initiative which has incentivised ECCE programme services to recruit more graduate ECCE room leaders, given the year-on-year increases in the numbers of services availing of the payment, and in the proportion of staff with Level 7 and 8 qualifications employed in ECCE Room Leader roles.

- Only a small proportion of the Higher Capitation payment is reflected in graduate remuneration. Services have not been required to pass on a proportion of the Higher Capitation payment to graduate staff. Simultaneously, the sector has been characterised by relatively low graduate remuneration, high overall staff turnover rates, and perceptions among practitioners that the profession is undervalued. These factors have been cited in the policy literature as key drivers of staff attraction and retention. However, the Higher Capitation payment may act as a market signal to practitioners that graduates are in demand among service providers, and that there will be job opportunities for graduates in the sector.

Analysis was conducted of 1,500 DE education inspection reports for the purposes of this research. In inspections conducted during 2018, 72% of the settings that received a rating of ‘Excellent’ across all four areas of the DES inspection framework were in receipt of the Higher Capitation payment. However, some of the settings evaluated as ‘Fair’ or ‘Poor’ were also in receipt of Higher Capitation payments. The Focused Policy Assessment suggests that potential reasons for this may reflect variation in opportunities for graduates to take up leadership roles; variation in management supports; and variation in opportunities for reflection, self-evaluation and CPD within settings.

The Working Group note that the QAB approved degrees will ensure a future commonality of approach in the knowledge, skills and values being developed of graduates at NFQ Level 7 & Level 8.

Given that the Higher Capitation payment appears to show that incentive payments impact on providers’ employment decisions, it is proposed to reform incentive payments to services to support employment of graduates as room leaders for all pre-school children.

Developing leadership

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.'

The OECD research emphasises the importance of leadership for quality practice, but also the need for adequate support and transition arrangements before any leadership role could become a requirement. According to the OECD:

‘The absence of adequate leadership standards and credentialing may undermine the quality and sustainability of effective ECEC leadership. On the other hand, very stringent requirements for credentials, without sufficient access to professional preparation to meet those requirements, may constrain the supply of qualified leaders. Therefore, setting credentials may need to be implemented in conjunction with increased access to professional preparation for ECEC leaders.’

With *Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* currently in the process of being updated by the NCCA (2021) the developing of pedagogical leadership across the ELC sector is timely in providing optimal learning experiences for young children.

**Challenges for the employment and retention of staff in the ELC/SAC Workforce**

Whilst not within the Terms of Reference for this Group it is acknowledged that the issue of pay and conditions for the ELC/SAC workforce is central to delivering on the commitments of First 5. Actions to address this challenge are currently being explored as part of the review of funding models for the ELC/SAC Sectors. Additionally, a Joint Labour Committee was established on 1st July 2021 under the Industrial Relations Acts. A principle guiding the development of the new funding model is noted below for a professional and valued workforce:-

“Funding should recognise that the quality of ELC and SAC is centrally reliant on the quality of the workforce delivering these services. Accordingly, it should seek to promote the recruitment and retention of staff with the necessary qualifications. Ongoing staff training and development; fair pay and working conditions and a workforce which feels valued and is motivated to deliver the best possible service to children.”

Other challenges include:-

- Recruitment difficulties sourcing and retaining qualified and competent staff
- Limited hours and uncertainty about contracts for some staff.
- It is acknowledged that consideration needs to be given to the challenges facing providers in enabling staff cover to support other staff to upskill.
- Lack of diversity within the workforce
- Seasonal nature of the work for some educators

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


18 *Aistear*: [https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/](https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/)

Working Group Recommendations and Rationale

Overview of Working Group Recommendations

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<th>Qualifications</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Level 5 will remain the minimum requirement for an Early Years Educator under this Workforce Development Plan. This Working Group recommend that a target be set for 85% of Early Years Educators (in ELC) to have at least a Level 6 qualification by 2028 (up from 71% in 2020).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• It is proposed that it should be a target supported by financial support / incentives – but not a regulatory requirement – that by 2028 all Lead Educators (i.e. room leaders in ELC) will have a relevant Level 7 or higher qualification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• It is proposed that it should be a target (but not a requirement) that all ELC services will have a Pedagogical Leader in place by 2028. (It is noted that this is a change from the approach proposed in the Interim Report.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is recommended that it should be a target that all Pedagogical Leaders will have a relevant Level 8 minimum ECEC qualification, as well as at least 3 years’ experience working in ELC/SAC or equivalency and specialist training.</td>
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<td>• It is recommended that it should be a regulatory requirement that by 2028 all ‘Managers’ in the ‘Person in Charge’ role in each setting should hold a specific qualification in ELC or SAC. For ELC it is proposed that this should be a minimum Level 6 specific ECEC qualification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• It is recommended that it should be a target (but not a regulatory requirement) that by 2028 all ‘Managers’ in the ‘Person in Charge’ role will hold a relevant ECEC qualification of minimum Level 7.</td>
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<th>Terminology</th>
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<tr>
<td>• It is proposed that a single ‘working’ term of Early Years Educator be used for all staff qualified to work in an ELC setting for an interim period prior to the establishment of a future professional body to consider same further. Additional roles (e.g. room leader) would have “add-on” titles (e.g. Lead Educator) but all ELC staff would be termed Early Years Educator.</td>
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<th>Role Profiles</th>
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<td>• Role profiles have been developed for four key ELC roles:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• It is proposed that every ELC setting, regardless of size, will have all of the above four roles which it is acknowledged may be carried out by one person or more depending on setting size.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• In addition, it is proposed that role profiles be developed for other specialist roles.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Professional requirements for additional Specialist roles</th>
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<tr>
<td>• It is proposed that the following specialist roles be in place across settings by 2028.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Pedagogical Leader (as noted above) - with specific qualifications, experience and training completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator</td>
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<td>o Family and Community Partnership Coordinator</td>
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<td>o Induction and Placement Coordinator.</td>
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20 The relevant qualification will relate to the field of learning related to the role; namely Early Childhood Education and Care.
Those working in inspection, mentoring and training roles should have specific qualifications, expertise and experience.

**Upskilling Supports**

- It is proposed that funded flexible degree programmes be offered to current Early Years Educators to support upskilling.
- It is proposed that a suite of supports be offered to ELC Services to support this upskilling.
- It is proposed that specialist training be required for all specialist roles.
- It is proposed that specific requirements in terms of experience, qualifications and training be required for the Pedagogical Leader role.
- It is proposed that specific training be made available for ‘Managers’.
- It is proposed that further consideration be given to RPL to support upskilling.
- It is proposed that a framework be developed for funded non-contact time/professional development.

**Application of Career Frameworks to diverse setting types**

- It is proposed that a national quality support infrastructure be further developed to support diverse setting types and structures in peer learning, reflective practice and networking.
- It is recommended that funded non-contact time be considered in the context of diverse setting needs.

**Induction**

- It is proposed that it becomes a future requirement for all entrants into the profession (other than childminders) at all qualification levels to complete an induction period.
- It is proposed that this induction period should be aligned to professional recognition in the future.

**Table 1**

**Qualification requirements**

First 5 is committed to achieving a “graduate-led” ELC workforce by 2028. Currently, 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 of at least Level 6. Currently further financial support is provided to services delivering the ECCE programme where the room leader has a relevant degree. 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.

This working group propose that by 2028, the minimum qualification requirements for the different professional roles in ELC will be:

- All Early Years Educators/practitioners in centre-based services will hold an award at Level 5, 6, 7, & 8 upskilling as required and desired throughout their career
- It will be a target (though not a regulatory requirement) that all Lead Educators (i.e. room leaders) in ELC will have at least a relevant Level 7 qualification
- It is proposed that it should be a target (but not a requirement) that all ELC services will have a Pedagogical Leader. (It is noted that this is a change from the approach proposed in the Interim Report.) Pedagogical Leaders in ELC services will have a relevant Level 8 minimum

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21 Timelines and transitional arrangements will be considered in a later consultation process, as part of the development of the Workforce Development Plan.
award, and have undertaken bespoke specialist certified training/CPD of relevance to the role and will be required firstly to have three years’ experience directly working in a setting across a range of age groups where possible.

- It will be a target (though not a regulatory requirement) that the Manager of a setting, i.e. the “Person in Charge” who is directly responsible for the day to day operation of an individual setting, will hold a relevant qualification, at least at Level 7 in the case of ELC. It is recommended that it should be a regulatory requirement that by 2028 all ‘Managers’ in the ‘Person in Charge’ role in each setting should hold a specific qualification in ELC or SAC.
- For ELC it is proposed that this should be a minimum Level 6 specific ECEC qualification

It is further proposed to support transferability of qualifications across ELC and SAC that:-

- A new Level 5 qualification in SAC will be phased in over a number of years
- An “add on” training programme for individuals who have related but different qualifications, such as ELC will be developed, recognising that some competence requirements are shared across ELC and SAC while others are different.

Qualification requirements for SAC are being further considered by the SAC Working Group.

The Working Group propose that future consideration be given to making Level 6 the regulatory minimum qualification requirement for people working in ELC. The rationale for this is as follows:-

- In the wider context of professionalising of the sector it is important to consider raising the minimum qualification requirement to ensure equity of young children’s learning across settings and provide a clear message of the value of ELC.
- To ensure high quality provision it is important to consider raising the current minimum qualification.
- To acknowledge that the 2028 target is for a 50% graduate workforce of Early Years workers and the qualifications of the remaining 50% of the workforce needs to be considered in the context of 69% of the ELC workforce already holding a Level 6 qualification and above, (Pobal Sector Profile, 2019/20).

It was further acknowledged that this would not be possible to achieve in the short term due to the recruitment challenges that currently exist in the sector, but it was proposed that it could be signalled in the Workforce Development Plan as a future direction, and that a 2028 target could be included for an increase in the percentage of Early Years Educators with a Level 6 qualification. A target of 85% of Early Years Educators (ELC) with a Level 6 or higher qualification by 2028 is proposed.

Newly qualified Early Years Educators will be expected to have a 2021 Level 5 & 6 QQI Professional Awards aligned to the latest Professional Award Type Descriptors and from 2022 newly qualified Lead Educators will be expected to have a degree that is in line with the (2019) Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines. Staff who have existing qualifications prior to 2022 will continue to have their existing qualifications fully recognised.

Role Profiles

The Working Group propose that a single term of Early Years Educator be used for anyone qualified to work with children in an ELC setting similarly to the nursing and teaching profession where one term is used to describe the profession and additional titles used for particular specialisms and/or posts of responsibility such as Staff Nurse, Year Head etc., The Working Group notes that the SAC Working Group proposed that the term Practitioner be used for anyone qualified to work with children in an SAC setting. The Working Group further propose that distinctions be made, based on the qualification, duties and responsibilities in the working setting for additional specialisms, roles and duties.
The role profiles proposed build on those drafted during *Phase 1* of the Workforce Development Plan and the competence profiles set out in the EU 2020 Report on professionalisation. The Core Report (2011) recommends that professional development competence is generalised to all staff in a setting and not confined to specific roles, with page 35 noting “at the very core of professional competence lies the constant ability to connect the dimensions of knowledge, practice and values through critical reflection”.

In consideration of a whole setting approach and recognising that ELC and SAC roles may run in parallel across a setting, the following graph shows a proposed structure of provision. This supports a joined-up career / grade structure that appropriately reflects the similarities and differences between ELC and SAC and is based on the following:-.

- The Manager is the person in charge of the setting,\(^{22}\) regardless of whether the setting offers just ELC, just SAC, or both ELC and SAC:
- EY Educator / practitioner will be equivalent roles (with a Level 5 minimum)
- Whereas a Level 7 graduate Lead Educator role has been specified for ELC, no such role has yet been specified for SAC.
- Specialist roles, including the Pedagogical Leader role, may be taken on by an educator/practitioner or Lead Educator provided the person has had appropriate qualifications, training and experience.

\(^{22}\) It is proposed to use the following OECD definition for the broad role of Manager: “the management of operations including human resources and finance; strategic functions such as planning, goal setting and quality improvement; and may also include collaborating with community partners and systems”.


* Pending professional body consultation, ‘educator’ is used in the early learning and care structure and ‘practitioner’ is used in school age childcare structure.

It is proposed that by 2028, every ELC setting, regardless of size, will include the role of Pedagogical Leader; Lead Educator; Early Years Educator (in some settings these roles may be held by the same/one person, e.g. sole provider setting/small/medium setting).

In the Figure above it is noted that some coordination / mentoring responsibilities may be relevant to both ELC and SAC (e.g. Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator; Family and Community Partnership Coordinator; Induction and Practice Placement Coordinator).

It is acknowledged that the varied size and types of setting in Ireland with 58% of Early Years’ settings having two rooms or less that one person may hold all of the roles noted below. This Working group want to note this to the Steering Group so that this diversity can be reflected in the supports offered providing recognition for the unique position these Early Years Educators/Practitioners may find themselves in and the demands that may be placed on them.

Roles specific to SAC are being developed by the SAC Working Group

**Setting Diversity Issues for consideration**

1. Size of setting – small, medium and large. Currently 58% of services have one or two rooms*
2. Scope of settings – ELC Services only; SAC Services only; combined ELC and SAC Services; organisations that offer a range of other types of services e.g. Family Resource Centre
3. Delivery type - sessional, part time day care, school aged childcare and full time day care
4. Corporate Structure - Private, Community; Sole Traders; Companies

**Role Profiles proposed for ELC**

provides further information relating to four roles: the key tasks and responsibilities and the skills and knowledge required for the various roles. Other specialist roles (e.g. Family and Community
Partnership Coordinator) do not have a role profile developed yet, but these should be developed in future. These role profiles are not intended to create an absolute homogeneity across diverse systems. The Core Report (2011, p.5) notes that professional competence unfolds in interactions and relationships between practitioners carrying out different roles in the system, therefore professional profiles should be framed in general terms rather than in detailed lists or descriptions. The role profiles are not intended to be full job descriptions, and it is acknowledged that multiple roles can be carried out by one person.

Role 1 – Early Years Educator for ELC

The Working Group is of the view that the term ‘assistant’ proposed at Phase 1 should no longer be used to reflect and acknowledge that each practitioner irrelevant of grade or qualification is an early years’ educator in their own right. The term EY Educator (or Practitioner for SAC) is the overall term for all Early Years Educators in the setting pending a future consultation process with the sector through a professional body (see section below). The Early Years Educator will have responsibility for their own actions under direction and some responsibility for the quality of the service within established guidelines. All Early Years Educator (or SAC Practitioners) may be Key persons within the Key Person Approach that will be recommended or required in all settings.

Role 2 - Lead Educator

In line with First 5, it is proposed that the WDP should set a target that by 2018 within each ELC room there will be a leader role, carried out by a graduate (Level 7+), for all ages of children. This role will be responsible for leading pedagogical practice in a learning room with children from 0-6 and has a direct impact on process quality. The knowledge, practices and values base for the Lead Educator is set out in the Professional Awards Criteria and Guidelines for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree programmes published in 2019. An Early Years Educator may be a Key Person within the Key Person Approach that will be recommended or required in all settings.

‘Whole of Setting’ Leadership

“Leadership involves influencing change or action to achieve a shared purpose or goal for an organisation or system. Leadership in ECCE encompasses both administrative and pedagogical functions, (Figure 1). One individual may be responsible for all leadership functions, or these may be shared among two or more people. Leadership can be structured in various ways too. It can be exercised by a formal leader such as a Principal or ECEC Centre Leader and it can also be exercised by educators and parents. This is often referred to as distributive, shared, collective, or relational leadership, in contrast to a hierarchical structure.” Rather than being seen as alternative approaches, distributed leadership and hierarchical leadership can support each other. Good leadership from a head-of-centre may involve encouraging distributive leadership across the setting.

Figure 2: Early Childhood Education and Care Leadership Definition: Functions and Structures

Up to this point there has been no clearly stated policy position on leadership roles in Early Learning and Care or School Aged Childcare with State supports for leadership remaining underdeveloped. Though some initiatives have supported leadership (e.g. The LINC Leadership for Inclusion Programme), there has been no clear articulation of the leadership role expected in services and no specific training provided for it. There is already some excellent practice in leadership (both pedagogical and administrative) within Irish settings and several successful initiatives to promote leadership which can be built on designing and delivering leadership supports to build leadership capacity.

The OECD (2019) summarise the indirect effect on process quality of leadership at ‘whole-setting’ level in the conceptual framework below.

“Centre leaders may play a role in fostering positive workplace relationships, a culture of learning and improvement, shared decision-making, and staff professional development. These workplace supports may enable ECEC staff to excel in their work, translating into high levels of process quality. In this way, leadership may exert an indirect influence on process quality by creating positive and supportive working conditions for staff.” (p.8) In this conceptual model – as shown in Figure 2 – "influences on leadership" (including training for leadership) enable leaders to impact on process quality (and thereby child outcomes) through supporting leaders’ roles in shaping staff professional development, working conditions, and organisational culture and climate:
This Working Group note the importance of providing supported structures and guidance for the sector in relation to leadership both pedagogical and administrative.

**Role 3 - Pedagogical Leader**

The need for pedagogical leadership and for professional oversight of pedagogy practice is well recognised in research and in evaluation findings from EYEI inspections with pedagogical leadership part of the EYEI Framework.\(^\text{24}\) The importance of this role is further underpinned by the goals of First 5. One of the goals of First 5 is to “increase continuity in curriculum and pedagogy across ELC Settings and the early years of primary school”, (p. 149). A further action opined by First 5 is to “develop consistency and continuity in the evaluation of curriculum and pedagogy between ELC Settings and the early years of primary school, with due consideration for the structural differences in the two contexts”, p.149).

The OECD Leadership for Quality Early Childhood Education and Care, (2019) note that “**Pedagogical Leadership** is the leadership needed to support teaching and learning, and is sometimes referred to as instructional leadership. It includes supporting staff professional development and learning, creating trusting relationships with and among staff, facilitating peer learning, promoting the implementation of curriculum and assessment in line with national frameworks, and structuring the work environment to support all of these. It can also involve establishing positive family and community partnerships.” (OECD, 2019, P.12)\(^\text{25}\) This leadership role will also encompass mentoring and co-ordinating functions being responsible for both leading and supporting pedagogy across the whole ELC service.

A key finding from the OECD TALIS Starting Strong survey (2018), ch.4 is that “Centre leaders’ pedagogical leadership is positively associated with staff attitudes and practices linked to process


quality .... Staff sense of self-efficacy for adapting their work to individual child needs is strongest among staff who “strongly agree” that their centre leader ensures that staff feel responsible for the children's development, well-being and learning.”

Unlike in the Phase 1 Interim Report the working group proposes that there should be a target (but not a requirement) to have a ‘Pedagogical Leader’ in each ELC setting by 2028 to mentor, empower and lead practice with their co-professionals through a distributive leadership approach such as a Professional Learning Community. ‘Professional learning communities’ (PLCs) refers to ‘a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way’ (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 223)26. In considering each setting as a professional learning community (Sharmahd et al., 2017) as noted in NESET 201727 opine it is important that the vision, goals and values of a setting are clearly communicated to provide direction for learning and to support wellbeing. Kools and Stoll in NESET 2017 further note that leadership is the essential influence that is able to connect all of a PLC’s separate parts, such that ‘the whole’ becomes more than the sum of its parts, and which makes the process sustainable (Sharmahd, Peeters and Budginaitė, 2016)28.

It is envisaged that this leadership role will espouse a distributive leadership approach, also referred to as a shared, collective, or relationship approach (OECD, 2019) with role responsibility for mentoring, coaching, training of others to impact on the quality of teaching and learning at an ELC setting. A distributive leadership model is empowering of all educators and responsibility for quality practice is shared. Utilising capacity building the pedagogical mentor will promote empowerment of practitioners working in the Early Learning and Care setting through a co-professional approach. Mentoring as defined by Rolfe-Flett (2001) is ‘an alliance of people that creates a space for dialogue that results in definition, action and learning’ for all. They would also connect with external agencies keeping up to date with CPD both for themselves and for the educators in their setting. The co-construction of knowledge between setting professionals will be central to the mentoring approach and specific training will be required for this role. The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Care Authority (ACECQA) an independent national authority that assists with the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NFQ) proposes an educational leader role profile which notes this mentoring approach. This is available at:- https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-05/QA7_TheRoleOfTheEducationalLeader.pdf

Role 4 - Manager/Person In Charge Role

In describing the Manager role it is agreed to use the OECD definition of “administrative leadership”: “the management of operations including human resources and finance; strategic functions such as planning, goal setting and quality improvement; and may also include collaborating with community partners and systems”. This broad ranging dimension of leadership is central to the centre manager role and to quality provision in a setting. It is relevant to both ELC and SAC management. It is proposed that the principal requirements of a manager should relate to the “person in charge” of a setting in the language of the Regulations. This ‘Person in Charge’ role as defined by the Early Years’ Service Regulations (2016) and the School-Age Childcare Regulations (2018) is central to ensuring the quality

of practice and refers to the person named as having overall managerial responsibility of an ELC or SAC setting.

While it is acknowledged that the role of the manager need not be held by the same person who has the role of Pedagogical Leader, this working group note the importance of this role having an understanding of ELC and/or SAC, given their importance in determining the overall quality of provision in the setting. One of the proposed EU indicators for measuring quality is: "The percentage of ECEC leaders working in an ECEC setting who have completed leadership training or have a recognised, relevant leadership qualification."

This Working Group recommend that it should be a regulatory requirement that by 2028 all ‘Managers’ in the ‘Person in Charge’ role in each setting should hold a specific qualification in ELC or SAC. For ELC it is proposed that this should be a minimum Level 6 specific ECEC qualification. It is recommended that it should be a target (but not a regulatory requirement) that by 2028 all ‘Managers’ in the ‘Person in Charge’ role will hold a relevant ECEC qualification of minimum Level 7. The need for the Manager to have a strong understanding of ELC or SAC has parallels with the requirement for a school principal to be a qualified teacher. It is, for example, critical that the Manager has the knowledge and capacity to support the pedagogical leader (if that is a different person) and this cannot happen if the Manager does not have an understanding of the overall quality requirements for best practice. This is also important to create a balance between the prioritising of business needs and the needs of children and families. It is further acknowledged that the ‘Manager’ role is an evolving one, adapting to setting changes. The Pobal Sector Profile Report (2021, p.70) notes that currently 88% of managers have a qualification level of NFQ Level 6 or higher in ELC and 42% have a qualification level of NFQ Level 7 or higher in ELC, implying that a Level 6 requirement by 2028 is feasible, whereas the Level 7 target will be challenging to achieve. (The definition of managers in this Pobal Report may not be identical to the person in charge role.)

This Working Group recommend specialised management training be provided to “Managers”. This training should be linked to the ‘Manager’ role profile noted below and is for further consideration on inducting and mentoring into the role. While it is acknowledged that management training is covered on all degrees meeting the requirements of the PACG, it should be available to all those who feel they would benefit from it. This could take the form of micro credential training.

It is acknowledged that all of the above roles may be carried out by the one person depending on setting size and type. While it is proposed that each setting will have these four roles, it is also acknowledged that there may be additional roles dependent on setting diversity; setting size, type, scope and structure. The challenge of creating one ‘manager’ role is acknowledged due to the significantly different and range of duties that this role may encompass dependent on type, size and structure of setting with roles configured in diverse ways depending on setting type, the differences between private and community services a case in point.

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Supports that will be required for services and practitioners to enable upskilling of current and future practitioners with Level 5 and Level 6 qualifications to achieve Level 7 and Level 8 qualifications, to support the achievement of a graduate led workforce by 2028. All qualifications can be considered stepping stones to the next qualification on the continuum to Level 8 where desired or required.

There is an established consensus among researchers, organizations and policy makers that the quality of ELC – and also of SAC - and ultimately the outcomes for children and families, depends on well-educated and competent staff. The importance of a qualified workforce is acknowledged in the revised priorities for the strategic cooperation in the field of education and training (European Commission, 2015a); which identifies professionalisation of staff as one of the key issues for further work in ELC. (UNESCO, 2010; European Commission, 2011; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014) note that quality in ELC is dependent upon competent staff who are capable of working within a holistic framework, that understand the concepts of ‘care’ and ‘education’ to be interdependent and on equal footing. The European Quality Framework for ECEC (2019) highlights that there is a need for “well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.”

In May 2019 the Council of the European Union issued a Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems. Included is a recommendation to support the professionalisation of early childhood education and care staff, including leaders by,

“improving initial education and continuous professional development to take full account of children’s well-being, learning and developmental needs, relevant societal developments, gender equality and a full understanding of the rights of the child.”

It is acknowledged in providing a progression pathway recognition of RPL will be important so that the work experience that has been gained in the sector will be recognised and valued in degree programmes in terms of credits for learning. RPL is further discussed later in this document. Career pathways will be further supported by flexible funded degree programmes which will be discussed presently.

The following Professional Career Pathways diagram represents the different levels of qualifications amongst staff and shows a possible career pathway for staff working in ELC settings. It is noted that Figure 4 does not include a manager role. Further future diagrams can note this.

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The importance of funded flexible degrees to support upskilling is noted by this working group. This funding needs to be tailored to support the needs of individual groups of learners. The working group note that the following are key considerations for the Steering Group to consider to support learners:

- Supported study leave for the learner to be able to combine work and study
- Time Off in Lieu for the learner
- Flexible delivery modes of learning
- Recognition of certified and professional experiential learning (RPL)
- Tailored funding to include upfront funding and funding throughout the course for all learners
- Opportunities for students to undergo professional placement experiences in quality settings which are verified as meeting certain standards of quality. These professional placement requirements are being further addressed by the CPD Working Group.

It is acknowledged that a suite of supports for ELC settings for the Steering Group to consider are:

- Funding for service providers for to provide staffing cover while upskilling staff complete practice placements in other services while studying.
- Careful consideration so that the rights, best interests of and impact on children where continuity of care, of experiences, of relationships is interrupted while upskilling of staff is being supported. Staff cover considerations need to be cognisant of best practice provisions and consider children’s needs. The requirements of a staff member temporarily replacing another staff member who is out e.g. on practice placement will vary dependent on the person they are replacing. Further consideration needs to be given on maximum times particular staff may be replaced and on retaining parity of qualification, experience and capacity in replacing upskilling staff.
• Support for services that provide student practice placements (time, training and funding). Additional, non-contact time will be required to support staff to take on these roles together with funding for additional staff, above the minimum ratios, to support these services.

• Of note provision of staff cover may not necessarily mean the employment of new staff. Staff may be deployed from within the setting, e.g. with extended contract hours. This Working Group further propose that principles be developed to build a solid framework around non-contact time for occasions when someone is deputising into the role of another.

• This working group note that Level 6 qualifications will remain an important and valuable qualification in themselves. It is recognised that people may not be interested or in a position to upskill. These staff will be supported through CPD to keep up to date with evidence based practices, values and theory across their work with young children.

Recognition of Prior Learning

The Working Group recommend that further consideration will need to be given to:

- The policies and processes already in place at HEI’s which allow exemptions and access to programmes. All providers are required to have RPL policies. The Institutional policy may be wide-ranging— including that RPL is not operational, applies only for access, does not include accreditation etc., or that RPL provides for access, advanced entry, exemptions with credit, and awards.
  - Consideration of who will undertake this, how and what resources can be put in place to facilitate.
  - Further development and testing of RPL is needed to ensure a robust RPL process for this sector which is reliable and valid. This is likely to vary from one HEI to another depending on specific programme and award requirements.
  - Learner information and guidance and facilitator / assessor guidance and tools are all needed to put a process/processes in place. High level guidelines are available and some excellent practice is in place in various sectors but is not widespread. A nationwide approach is recommended
  - Acknowledgement for the varied prior learning experience both formal (certified) and informal (non-certified/other) which has to be proven to meet the relevant standards.
  - Consideration also needs to be given to RPL mechanisms to enable SAC qualified practitioners obtain ELC qualifications in cognisance of their current studies.

This Working Group propose that further discussions with HEI’s need to take place to examine the possibilities for RPL in the context of this report. The published information from QQI on RPL may be beneficial to support this process (Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (qqi.ie)).

Recommendations as to whether there should be requirements for EY Teacher/Educator Status in terms of experience and/or completion of an induction process (in addition to the requirement of an approved Level 7 qualification).

Induction requirements

To date, there is no requirement for an induction process into the profession, and no national approach to supporting induction unlike the regulatory requirement for a probation period.
The EU working group report states that:

‘Induction can be seen as a process of confirming that an individual is suitable for the profession for which they have been trained. It can involve a formal process of registering with a professional organisation; a process of demonstrating a set of competences in an employment context; or it can be part of initial education and training as professional recognition is conferred after induction rather than after the award of a qualification’.

The EU working group report describes three stages in the journey to professionalism: initial training/education; induction; and ongoing education and training (CPD). Professional Induction is an initial element of the career pathway journey. The model below illustrate how this journey sits with career progression.

**Figure 5**

This Working group note the critical importance of an induction period for all ELC/SAC staff, noting the importance of a formal and incremental induction process upon entry into the profession. This currently happens for all qualified primary school Level 8 Educators through the Droichead\(^{32}\) induction Model. While an individual would only go through the induction process once (following completion of initial pre-service qualification), it is acknowledged that individuals may undergo a probation process a number of times during their career, depending on the role requirements of a new position.

The Working Group propose the following:-

- It is proposed that it becomes a requirement for all entrants to the profession from NFQ Level 5 upwards with the exception of childminders\(^{33}\), in both early learning and care and school-age childcare irrelevant of the point of entry to complete an induction period. This should include processes for demonstrating relevant competencies to perform the role. These should be recorded to support progression forming part of the career pathway for the entrant.
- It is envisaged that completion of an induction process will at some future date be required for full professional recognition, but this is longer-term ambition, following development and national roll-out of an induction programme.
- It is further noted that a working group be set up to progress this further in terms of induction model, induction processes, piloting programme, timeframe and oversight.
- It is noted that a national model of induction would be beneficial to new entrants and to ELC / SAC Settings.

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\(^{33}\) A form of induction process for childminders is already built into the National Action Plan for Childminding, in the form of the planned Quality Development Programme for newly registered childminders
• It is noted that a specific supported induction process will support staff retention.

The European Commission Report, 2018, Monitoring the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care recommends that “the percentage of staff who receive formal support for at least their first six months at work”\(^{34}\) is used as an indicator of quality in early years system.

It is noted that the CPD Working Group have put forward proposals for a national approach to supporting the induction process. They note that the induction process would apply to:

- Those taking up their first job in the sector having completed a relevant Level 5 or 6 award. (In the case of ELC, these will be the new QQI awards coming in from 2021/22. In the case of SAC, initial training will – by the time the induction process is in place – be one of the Level 5 awards to be recognised for the purpose of future SAC regulations.)
- Those taking up their first job in the sector having completed a relevant Level 7 or 8 award. (This applies to ELC, and will – by the time the induction process is in place – involve QAB-approved degrees only.)
- Those professionals who have just moved to work in Ireland even if they previously completed an induction process in another country.

Professional requirements for EY Pedagogical Leaders (that might later become contractual requirements), in terms of qualification level, experience, and specialist leadership training, and key components of leadership training.

To transform ELC services into professional learning communities the importance of the creation of specific training paths for educational leaders in ELC and SAC Settings is outlined in the NESET (2017) report. This working group propose that the Pedagogical Leadership role in an Early Learning and Care Setting be held by a Level 8 qualified person with a bespoke CPD/Micro-credential award to perform the role. Progression to this role will require initial qualifications, experience and specialised training. The Working Group propose the following professional requirements in terms of qualification level, experience, specialist leadership training and key training components for this role:-

a) Qualification Level
   The Working Group propose that a minimum Level 8 qualification is the prerequisite qualification for starting a specialist professional development course to support this role.

b) Experience
   The Pedagogical Leader must have minimum 3 years’ room leader/lead educator experience, as a prerequisite for starting a specialist professional development course for this role. This requirement is similarly a feature of senior roles in other albeit different professions; e.g. school principal; advance nurse practitioner.

c) Specialist Pedagogical leadership training
   Complete a specialist professional development course (LINC-style); (QQI micro credential)

Key components of pedagogical leadership training will be dependent on further consideration of initial training within degrees which adhere to the PACG. Components may include specialist elements of Mentoring, Coaching, Facilitating professional learning communities adult learning, pedagogical leadership models.

\(^{34}\) [https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/825252b4-3ec6-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/825252b4-3ec6-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1)
As noted previously additional non-contact time to enable ‘specialist’ personnel to carry out their role is required. See further information under Considerations For Implementation.

Application of the proposed career framework to different sizes and setting types in the current diverse system of provision.

In applying the proposed career framework to different setting types and sizes the Working Group acknowledge that currently 58% of early years’ settings have 2 rooms or less.

To support process quality the further development of the national quality support infrastructure is proposed by this working group with the creation of structured provision of ‘setting clusters’ or ‘communities of practice’ supported by outside agencies. This is considered as important for all setting types and sizes to support peer learning, reflective practice and networking. The Working Group recommend that consideration be given to ensure this is practical for early years/SAC educators/practitioners with work commitments and time issues to access. This is detailed further by the CPD Working Group.

The Working Group further propose that:-

- By 2028, every lead educator in a centre-based ELC setting should be a graduate (Level 7+) for children of all ages
- Every centre-based ELC service should by 2028 have a pedagogical leader, an inclusion coordinator, a family liaison coordinator, and a student practice placement coordinator / professional coordinator. It is acknowledged that any one staff member may have more than one specialist role.

It is important that all settings encompass these roles to provide a similar quality service and equity of experience to all children. The working group note that this recommendation differs from the approach set out in the Phase 1 draft interim report.

Implications of the proposed career framework to broader ELC/SAC workforce, including those in inspection, mentoring and training roles

SIPTU note that 30% of new graduates intend to leave the sector, (SIPTU Student Study, 2020). In acknowledging that retention of staff is a key consideration for the sector and to ensure that career pathways within settings allow for genuine career advancement, so that early years’ educators do not feel they have to work outside the setting progressive opportunities need to be in place within settings. This Working Group note that the specialist roles proposed at Level 8 can support this retention of staff in settings if they are resourced and supported. In further supporting retention of staff in the ELC Sector the working group further propose that those working in inspection, mentoring and training roles should have:

- Significant and varied experience of working in a range of roles within ELC / SAC settings.
- In the case of Inspectors and mentoring staff [e.g. Better Start], to also have a minimum qualification at least Level 8.
- In the case of staff delivering training programmes, be qualified to at least one level above that which the participant on the programme is expected to attain.
The PACG require that HEI programme staff (Lecturers and Placement Supervisors) will have suitable qualifications with expertise and experience in ELC in delivering Level 7 and Level 8 programmes.

The QQI 2021 validation of ELC Further Education programmes at Level 5 & 6 welcomes the strategy to support existing staff with targeted relevant CPD in ELC expertise where required and the commitment going forward is that all FE staff will be qualified with a minimum Level 7 relevant qualification.

Additional Considerations

Non-contact time requirements to support career frameworks and pathways

- Funded non-contact time/professional development time is proposed for all members of the ELC/SAC workforce that is appropriate to the various roles and responsibilities they hold within all settings. To meet First 5 requirements and the National Quality Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services, all practitioners will need time to meet together and plan for the experiences of children in their settings. Specialist roles, such as lead educator, pedagogical leader, placement and induction co-ordinator, will require additional non-contact time. DCU note that the non-contact time for a Student Placement Coordinator is one hour per week for nine weeks per student with an additional two hours to complete progress reports. To support a comprehensive quality key person system to operate regular non-contact time will be required for all key persons.

- The inclusion of the non-contact time will ensure supportive working conditions and meet the EU Quality Framework request for “well qualified staff and supportive working conditions” as noted in the Draft Interim Report.

- The Working Group acknowledge that requirements and considerations for non-contact time will vary depending on size, structure and setting type. The management of non-contact time in a full day care setting and in larger settings will vary from sessional and smaller settings. Ultimately, all Early Years Educators/Practitioners should be enabled to meet as a team during working hours. It is critical to support learning and development that time is allocated to team meetings.

- In ECCE programmes currently, early years educators carry out many duties after the three-hour ECCE session has ended and acknowledgement of these additional duties is critical.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Rationale * List not exhaustive or prescriptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Educators</td>
<td>Key Persons duties: planning, assessment, evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family partnership and engagement practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection on practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Educator</td>
<td>Key Persons duties: planning, assessment, evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family partnership and engagement practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical reflection on practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Leader</td>
<td>Provide pedagogical support to others,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning, facilitating, coaching, mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical reflection on practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared professional development time including team meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Proposals

- All educators should be allocated a percentage of time relating to hours worked to support non-contact duties.
• It is acknowledged that in small settings all roles may be one person roles and further consideration needs to be given to supporting non-contact time for this cohort.
• To ensure a whole setting approach additional non-contact time is suggested to allow for full team planning days (or half-days).
• Additional consideration should be given on how to support varied services types to best manage non-contact time requirements to support their staff.
• The development of principles in building a Framework for funded non-contact time/professional development be considered.
• Of note the CPD Working Group has made recommendations for funded non-contact time for CPD.

Considerations for Implementation

• That the Steering Group acknowledge that ongoing monitoring and review during the lifetime of the Workforce Development Plan will be necessary where commitments might need adjusting depending on progress.
• In considering contractual, regulatory requirements or incentives, further consideration needs to be given to practical issues for the sector and flexibility afforded, e.g. to ensure that qualification requirements are achievable in light of recruitment challenges in the sector.

Proposed Timelines to 2028
Initial actions
A timeline for the introduction of different elements of the career framework, and initial actions to support its introduction during 2022-2024.

Proposed approach for discussion:

• Initial actions (2022-2024) should include:
  o Identification of degree programmes which supports upskilling of existing workforce while continuing to work in the sector
  o Introduction and initial roll-out of funding scheme to support existing ELC educators to progress Level 5/6 to Level 7/8 through flexible degree programmes designed to support those study while they work.
  o Introduction of funding to enable staff cover while educator-students are on practice placements, and non-contact time for student practice placement coordinators.
  o Development and initial roll-out of specialist training programmes for pedagogical leadership, mentoring, family and community partnership coordinator and student practice placement coordinator. One mentoring input for all mentoring requirements may suffice.
  o Development and initial roll-out of a management training / support programme.

• Later actions (2025-2028) should include:
  o Continued roll out of funded training programmes and supports so that:
  o Target by 2028 that all room leaders with children of all ages should have at least a relevant Level 7 qualification.
  o Target that specialist roles in place in all ELC settings at Level 8
  o By 2025 all ELC settings should have (though not as a regulatory requirement) a Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator in place.
  o By 2028 all ELC settings should have (though not as regulatory requirement) a Pedagogical Leader and Family & Community Partnership Coordinator in place.
Target by 2028 that all managers in every setting will be expected to have a qualification relevant to the quality of provision in whichever of ELC or SAC the service provides.

**Implications for funding model**
- The need to embed adequate non-contact time.
- To ensure retention of staff who have engaged in upskilling significantly improved terms and conditions—either through higher qualifications or other levels of CPD is required.