



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

Workforce Development Plan Phase 2 Working Groups Report Continuing Professional Development Working Group

22 July 2021

Contents

Introduction	3
Continuing Professional Development	4
Purpose	4
Working group membership	4
TOR key outputs	4
Context, Challenges and Opportunities	5
International.....	5
European	6
National.....	6
CPD in Ireland today.....	7
Working Group Recommendations and Rationale	8
Statement of intent.....	8
Definition of CPD for the ELC and the SAC sector	8
Summary overview of the working groups proposals	9
Vision for a National Infrastructure for CPD	11
A national approach to CPD	12
An overarching quality framework	14
An IT system	17
Quality Assurance of CPD.....	19
Professional Learning Communities.....	21
Structuring, Planning and Recording Time Allocated to CPD.....	23
Movement towards regulatory requirements for CPD	23
Planning for types of CPD engagement	23
Recognition and recording of CPD engagement	25
Special considerations.....	26
Professional Practice Placements and Induction	27
Principles underpinning provision of quality professional practice placements	27
A national, universal approach to student professional practice placement.....	28
Supports needed to establish a national, universal approach to quality professional practice placements.....	28
Special considerations.....	28
Induction	29
Mapping of Existing CPD Supports.....	31
Priority Focus for CPD	32
Proposed Timelines to 2028.....	33

Introduction

The Workforce Development Plan¹ 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 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.²

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.

¹ <https://assets.gov.ie/26650/a384c2888749488d8e93badc501507b3.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/26122f-workforce-development-plan-for-the-elcsac-sector/>

Continuing Professional Development

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 the development of a national infrastructure for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC), and supports required for services to enable engagement in effective CPD activities by their staff.

Working group membership

Chair	O’Riordan, Kathryn / Wolfe, Toby	DCEDIY
Rapporteur	Duffy, Mel	DE
Administration	Comerford, Jenny	DE

Group Members	Organisation
Atanackovic, Milica	Early Childhood Ireland
Breakwell, Nicholas	The Higher Education Colleges Association
Byrne, Sharon	Barnardos
Cox Griffin, Dearbhla	Seas Suas
Donohue, Paula	Association of Childhood Professionals
Farnleitner, Ulrike	Blathu
French, Geraldine	Irish Universities Association
Hart, Michelle	National Childhood Network
Murphy, Rose	Childcare Committees Ireland
O’Sullivan, Lisha	CHOICE
Rogers, Margaret	Better Start

TOR key outputs

- 1) 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;
 - a) development of new CPD resources,
 - b) learner management systems,
 - c) and mechanisms for recording participation in CPD.
- 2) Mechanisms for the quality assurance of CPD supports, including guidelines on online delivery.
- 3) Means to support the further development of professional learning communities, both within ELC/SAC services and across services, including through
 - a) pedagogical leadership
 - b) distributed leadership.
- 4) 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).

- 5) 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.
- 6) Priority focuses for Continuing Professional Development 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.
- 7) 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.

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

There has been considerable focus on continuing professional development in the ELC and SAC sector. The following section details international, European, and national developments and provides excerpts from key policy documents.

International

Ireland is currently participating in the OECD international study Quality beyond Regulations³. This project is supporting countries to understand better the different dimensions of process quality in early learning and care, with a particular focus on the dimensions that can be addressed through policy and that are likely to improve child outcomes. A major focus of the study is CPD, in recognition of the international research evidence demonstrated in the project's literature review:

“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.”⁴

The OECD Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS Starting Strong)⁵ is the first international survey of the ECEC workforce. It states a clear rationale for the investment in initial training, induction and CPD:

“Early childhood education and care (ECEC) professionals are the major driver of the quality of an ECEC system. A growing body of evidence links investments in high-quality ECEC to personal, social and economic returns, thereby providing a strong case for developing the skills of ECEC staff, improving their working conditions and well-being, and strengthening leadership and managerial practices in ECEC settings.”⁶

³ <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/earlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm>

⁴ [OECD \(2018\) Engaging with Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care, p.79](#)

⁵ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b90bba3d-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/b90bba3d-en>

⁶ [Turani, D., & Bloem, S. \(2019\). The TALIS Starting Strong Survey: Implications for the leadership discourse in early childhood education and care. In Strehmel P., Heikka J., Hujala E., Rodd J., & Waniganayake M. \(Eds.\), Leadership in Early Education in Times of Change: Research from five Continents \(pp. 277-290\). Opladen; Berlin; Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich. doi:10.2307/j.ctvmd84fc.22](#)

European

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.”

Also by,

“providing time for staff for the purpose of professional activities such as reflection, planning, engaging with parents and collaborating with other professionals and colleagues.”⁷

A recent European systematic literature review concluded,

“Whilst a broad consensus exists among researchers and policy-makers on the importance of investing in staff professionalisation in order to increase the quality of educational and care practices in early childhood services, the processes and tools whereby practitioners’ development can be promoted remain unexplored in international literature and there is too little investment in strong systems of continuous professional development in the European Member States.”⁸

The European Quality Framework for ECEC highlights that there is a need for “well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.”⁹

National

The case for introducing a national system of CPD for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-age Childcare (SAC) in Ireland has been long argued for. The Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector (2002) reflected that,

“Professional development is central to good practice. Education and training is valued as a means to ensure quality practice and as a mechanism and measure of ongoing professional development. ECCE practitioners need to seek out and keep up to date with new approaches, theories and thinking, as the profession continually develops both nationally and internationally.”¹⁰

Síolta, the National Quality Framework (2006), states that,

“Practising in a professional manner requires that individuals have skills, knowledge, values and attitudes appropriate to their role and responsibility within the setting. In addition, it requires regular reflection upon practice and engagement in supported, ongoing professional development. A practitioner’s capacity to engage in reflective practice can be

⁷ [Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems ST/9014/2019/INIT OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4–14.](#)

⁸ [Peleman, Brecht & Lazzari, Arianna & Budginaite, Irma & Siarova, Hanna & Hauari, Hanan & Peeters, Jan & Cameron, Claire. \(2018\). Continuous professional development and ECEC quality: Findings from a European systematic literature review. European Journal of Education. 53. 10.1111/ejed.12257.](#)

⁹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CONSIL:ST_9014_2019_INIT&from=EN

¹⁰ <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Early-Years/Model-Framework-for-Education-Training-and-Professional-Development-in-the-Early-Childhood-Care-and-Education-Sector.pdf>

supported and enhanced by regular and ongoing professional development activities. These can take a variety of forms including attendance at conferences, observation of practice in other ECCE settings and formal in-service courses.”¹¹

First 5 the whole-of-Government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families, includes the following commitment under Building Block 3: Skilled and sustainable workforce,

“Develop a national programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for the ELC (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.”¹²

For childminders, a separate process of training and CPD is set out in the National Action Plan for Childminding, including:

- Development and roll-out of a bespoke foundation training programme for childminders, and development of a quality development programme.
- Development of quality supports and training for childminders, including piloting and introduction of staffed local childminding networks led by trained network leaders.¹³

CPD in Ireland today

There are a number of national CPD initiatives, including Children First training¹⁴ and the AIM equality and diversity initiative through the City and County Childcare Committees¹⁵, the LINC course through AIM¹⁶, Hanen ‘Teacher Talk’, Lámh Module 1 training and Sensory Processing in Early Learning (SPEL) through Better Start¹⁷, the National Síolta Aistear Initiative¹⁸ and the Healthy Ireland Smart Start programme¹⁹. A system of on-site mentoring support is the Quality Development Service (QDS)²⁰ through Better Start. The QDS offers up to 6 months’ on-site and on-line support and mentoring with an Early Years Specialist at a service level. A service opts in to receive skilled, service-specific support from an Early Years Specialist working with the service’s staff on targeted elements of quality such as play, interactions, curriculum or environments. Voluntary Childcare Organisations and CCCs also offer training and onsite coaching, supporting individual pedagogical or practice goals related for example to Síolta or the Equality and Diversity Initiative.

Current CPD requirements in Ireland are at a service level. The Early Years Regulations 2016 require early learning and care services to have a staff training policy and a support and supervision policy.²¹ There are currently no CPD requirements in Ireland at the level of the individual professional.

¹¹ <https://www.siolta.ie/>

¹² [Government of Ireland \(2018\) First Five: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families. Stationery Office: Dublin](#)

¹³ <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/132300/5d403d61-a868-488c-9766-5b1e42f1e408.pdf#page=null>

¹⁴ <https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/children-first-e-learning-programme/>

¹⁵ <https://myccc.ie/>

¹⁶ <https://lincprogramme.ie/>

¹⁷ <https://www.betterstart.ie/training-events/>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/c09af4-national-siolta-aistear-initiative/>

¹⁹ <https://www.ncn.ie/index.php/healthy-ireland-smart-start>

²⁰ <https://www.betterstart.ie/the-quality-development-service/>

²¹ <https://assets.gov.ie/34528/d51d93d029bc44f7883d41b25d98e890.pdf>

Working Group Recommendations and Rationale

Statement of intent

The Working Group proposes the following as a statement of intent to guide recommendations for CPD in the Workforce Development Plan:

By 2028 Ireland will have firmly established a robust, comprehensive system of CPD for ELC and SAC professionals which promotes excellence and supports high-quality practice in all settings. Embedded in children’s rights and a culture of continuous learning, the CPD system will be responsive to the needs of children, families, professionals, services, communities and national policy. This CPD system will be an essential component of a competent system that attracts, develops, and retains a highly skilled, confident and professional workforce.

Definition of CPD for the ELC and the SAC sector

The development of a national system for CPD should be based on a clear and shared understanding and definition of CPD which encompasses development at individual, team and service levels, resulting in both personal and professional growth which impacts on quality of provision and outcomes for children.

The working group seeks to build on the Eurydice²² definition used in the WDP Phase 1 report,

“... the formal in-service training undertaken that allows ECEC staff members to broaden, develop and update their knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout their career. It includes both subject-based and pedagogical training. Different formats may be offered such as courses, seminars, peer observation and support from practitioner networks. In certain

²² Eurydice is a network of 40 national units based in 37 countries of the Erasmus+ programme whose key role is to explain how education systems are organised in Europe and how they work.

cases, continuing professional development activities may lead to supplementary qualifications.”²³

When the purpose of a training course is to meet a business requirement (e.g. GDPR training) rather than develop an individual’s professional skills or knowledge, it is not regarded as CPD. Nevertheless, training to meet business requirements is important, and some aspects of the CPD infrastructure (e.g. IT systems) may also support delivery of such training.

The Teaching Council defines teachers’ professional learning as,

“Continuing professional development (CPD) refers to life-long teacher learning and comprises the full range of educational experiences designed to enrich teachers’ professional knowledge, understanding and capabilities throughout their careers.”²⁴

The working group proposes a definition of CPD for ELC / SAC in the Irish context as follows,

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) refers to life-long learning undertaken by professionals to develop, maintain, broaden, enrich and update their knowledge, practice and values, throughout their career. CPD may be accessed in various formats such as courses, seminars, peer observation, mentoring, coaching, support from professional networks, individual and team reflection, evaluation and planning for quality development. In certain cases, CPD activities may lead to supplementary qualifications. Engagement in CPD is a responsibility shared between the professional, the service provider and the Government.

It should be noted that the working group views CPD as a component part of a competent system. In a competent system ELC and SAC professionals, including childminders, have appropriate pay levels and working conditions, clear professional and career pathways, and may be supported by a professional association. These are outside the scope of this Working Group.

Summary overview of the working groups proposals

A national infrastructure for CPD

- It is proposed that a ‘whole system’ model of CPD, coordinated by one agency, is developed to integrate and align current structures and any newly developed structures.
- It is proposed that a national structure is developed which will serve as a central gateway to facilitate access to CPD resources and supports. The central agency responsible for CPD coordination will have an increasing role in overseeing quality assurance processes for CPD and that only quality-assured CPD resources will be included within the resources made available through the gateway.
- It is proposed that Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education is updated and clearly integrated with other established national frameworks (Aistear the National Curriculum Framework) and guidance documents (the Equality and Diversity Guidelines) for ELC and SAC to provide one overarching quality framework, building on the

²³ [Eurydice \(2019\) Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe, p.144.](#)

²⁴ [The Teaching Council. \(2011\). Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education. Kildare: The Teaching Council. p. 19.](#)

Aistear Síolta Practice Guide, which will support service self-evaluation and external evaluation and inspection.

- It is proposed that a working group is established to develop this framework.
- It is proposed that a suite of resources is developed to support professionals in all ELC and SAC services to develop their capacities to engage in effective and meaningful self-evaluation.
- It is proposed that support for in-service mentoring and external on-site mentoring is provided.
- It is proposed that a customer relationship management system (CRM) is developed which enables the recording, tracking and viewing of CPD engagement at ELC and SAC service level and at individual professional level.
- It is proposed that a learner management system (LMS) is developed which provides a central hub to access most or all quality assured ELC and SAC CPD activities.

Quality assurance of CPD

- It is proposed that an advisory approach is adapted and that structures and processes for the quality assurance of CPD resources, activities and supports, are established and overseen by a central agency at a national level.
- It is proposed that quality assurance guidance on the development of formal, non-formal and informal CPD is developed building on existing European and National guidance and the expertise within the sector.
- It is proposed that quality assurance guidance in relation to online and blended CPD resources, activities and training is developed.

Professional learning communities

- It is proposed that a national system of establishing, supporting and funding professional learning communities is developed.

Structuring, planning and recording time allocated to CPD

- It is proposed that regulatory requirements for CPD should remain at service level in the short-to-medium term.
- It is proposed that clear definitions and exemplars of each form of CPD, formal, non-formal and informal, are developed.
- It is proposed that guidance on the proportion of time allocated to CPD engagement, based on the definitions of CPD is developed
- It is proposed that ELC and SAC services are funded to complete a minimum of two days (12 hours) formal and non-formal CPD, for all staff, annually.
- It is proposed that ELC and SAC services are funded to engage in non-formal and informal CPD.
- It is proposed that a system, and guidance, are developed to support ELC and SAC services and professionals to record their formal, non-formal and informal CPD engagements.

Professional practice placements and induction

- It is proposed that national, universal supports and resources for student professional practice placement, at all qualification levels, are developed.
- It is proposed that guidance and a system of support in evidencing an ELC or SAC service's capacity to provide quality professional practice placements is developed.
- It is proposed that an induction process is developed and incrementally introduced for all new entrants to the profession (other than childminders) at all qualification levels.

Mapping of existing CPD supports

- It is proposed that a mapping of existing CPD supports is conducted as an initial action to inform further actions.
- It is proposed that a survey of ELC and SAC professionals' and services' engagement in CPD activity is conducted.

Vision for a National Infrastructure for CPD

Building on the European Union Quality Framework, over the period 2018-2020, an ET2020 EU working group on early childhood education and care, of which Ireland is a member, published a report on Early Childhood Education and Care: How to Recruit, Train and Motivate Well-Qualified Staff. This report recommends that,

“Policy-makers therefore need to develop a lifelong learning strategy for the ECEC sector, which needs to be supported by investment and developed in partnership with social partners and other key stakeholders.”²⁵

The Review of the Operating System that recently began, and the creation of the ‘*Childcare Ireland*’ agency as set out in the Programme for Government, will shape final decisions on the future infrastructure for delivery of CPD for early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) services. While it is too early to say what the precise outcome of these developments will be, the Programme for Government notes that ‘*Childcare Ireland*’ will,

“... 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*.”²⁶

Existing CPD systems and structures in Ireland are varied, disparate and quite fragmented.

It is proposed that a ‘whole system’ model of CPD, coordinated by one agency, is developed to integrate and align current structures and any newly developed structures.

²⁵ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/47ba3c3a-6789-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1>

²⁶ [Government of Ireland \(2018\) First Five: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families. Stationery Office: Dublin](#)

Features of an integrated national infrastructure to support services and individuals to engage in effective CPD, to identify priority areas of focus for CPD and to record CPD engagement should include:

- Formation and agreement of shared understanding and definition of CPD which encompasses development at individual, team and service levels resulting in both personal and professional growth which impacts positively on the quality of provision and outcomes for children.
- The development of an overarching quality framework, building on existing frameworks and the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide, to support service self-evaluation to guide quality development and directly inform the development of CPD plans.
- The development of a national structure which will serve as a central connection point and hub to facilitate access to quality assured CPD resources and supports.

It is acknowledged that an effective and competent CPD system for one profession cannot be simply replicated or transferred to another profession. However, examples of effective CPD systems and structures, across varying professions, have been explored by the working group. It is felt that some aspects of these innovative systems could be included, or modified for inclusion, in a bespoke ELC and SAC CPD system. A coordinated national approach to embed and support self-evaluation will be central to this system.

It is proposed that a national structure is developed which will serve as a central gateway to facilitate access to CPD resources and supports. The central agency responsible for CPD coordination will have an increasing role in overseeing quality assurance processes for CPD and that only quality-assured CPD resources will be included within the resources made available through the gateway.

At an overarching, macro level the CPD infrastructure should be:

- State funded (either wholly or largely)
- Centrally co-ordinated
- Centrally administered
- Aiming to incorporate and integrate existing structures and systems
- Based on, and aligned to, national ELC and SAC policies, strategies and frameworks
- Grounded in a system of self-evaluation and planning for quality improvement
- Responsive to multi-level needs
- Cognisant of diversity, equality and inclusion

The national infrastructure for CPD will incorporate a comprehensive CPD strategy which will be implemented through an overarching and unifying IT system.

[A national approach to CPD](#)

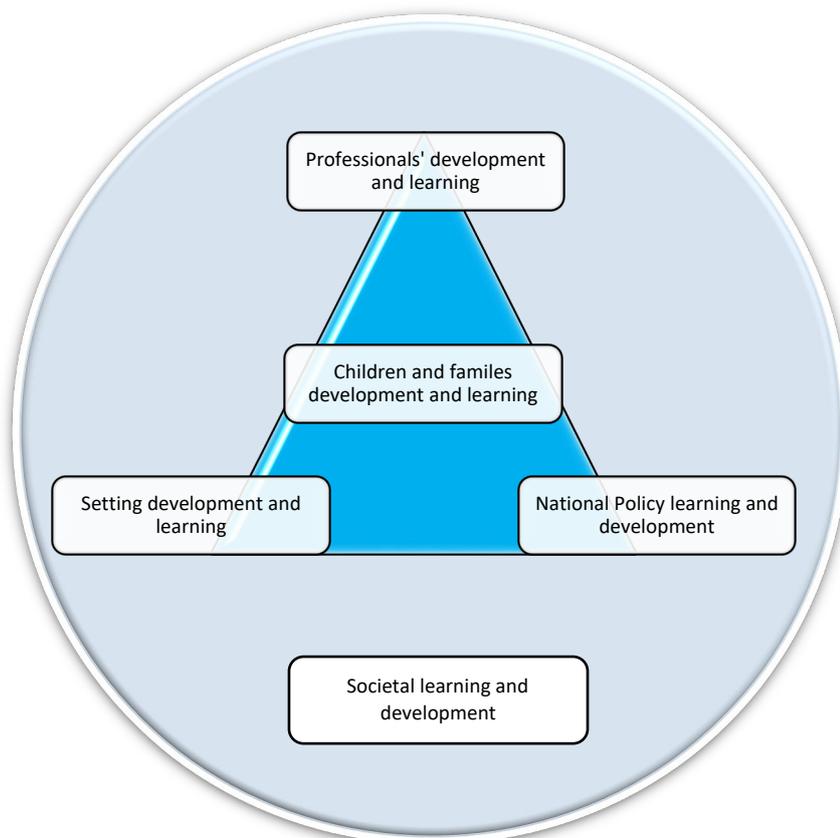
A national approach to CPD should be evidence-based, with strong links to research on what is best practice and what is most impactful in terms of practice development, programme quality improvement and improved outcomes for children. It should incorporate reflective practices throughout.

The national approach to CPD should be constructed to provide for CPD needs at many levels:

- Child and family level

- Individual professional level
- Service level
- Sectorial and national policy level
- Societal level

A conceptual model of CPD strategy is presented on the following page. It illustrates how CPD should at the same time: aim to support children and families; respond to development and learning priorities of individual professionals, the services they work for, and Government policy; and be situated in a wider context of societal change.



A national approach to CPD should also provide for CPD needs, for each of these levels, at many and varying service and professional development stages:

- New service/novice professional

- Developing service /competent professional
- Established service /expert professional

It should support the development, implementation and review of a service CPD plan based on the setting's self-evaluation of the evolving needs and interests of the children and families, the ELC and SAC professionals, the setting programme and national policy and informed by external evaluations and advisory services.

It should foster a culture of professional learning and engagement while also recognising the importance of engaging in rich and varied informal learning opportunities.

It should clearly define broad and varied types of CPD activities – informal, non-formal, and formal.

It should recognise the value of both individual and collaborative learning.

It should be delivered and provided in a flexible manner with appropriate recognition and compensation, such as time off in lieu and financial incentives, when completed outside of working hours.

It should contribute to development of new practice skills, enrich current practices, build programme quality and deliver improved outcomes for children and families.

It should provide opportunities for career development and progression, such as gaining specialist skills, knowledge and qualifications.

It should recognise the importance of induction in professional development.

It should offer a catalogue of a broad variety of formal, non-formal and informal CPD resources, activities and engagements that support professional learning and development.

It should, insofar as possible, offer some form of recognition for ALL learning undertaken, ranging from Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI) accreditation, micro credentials, digital badges, confirmation of completion, and attendance.

At this stage in the development of the profession, a mandated number of CPD hours for individual professionals should not yet be a requirement.

It should recommend a minimum amount of annual CPD engagement for ELC and SAC professionals and provide funding to support services to meet that recommendation.

It should recognise and respect professionals as autonomous and responsible and hold an expectation that as such they should identify and prioritise the learning which they feel benefits them and the children they work with, while acknowledging the service's needs and the need for individuals and services to work within Government policy guidelines and priorities.

An overarching quality framework

As stated previously, it is proposed that engagement in CPD activity is determined and guided through an ongoing process of ELC and SAC service self-evaluation in conjunction with external support, evaluation and inspection. Since the development of Síolta²⁷ and Aistear²⁸, a wider range of frameworks and guidance documents, such as the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and

²⁷ <https://www.aistearsiolta.ie/en/>

²⁸ <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/>

Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education²⁹, the Tusla EY Inspectorate’s Quality and Regulatory Framework³⁰, the Department of Education Inspectorate’s Guide to Early Years Education Inspection³¹, the Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings³², the National Action Plan for Childminding (2021 – 2028)³³ and the National Quality Guidelines for School-aged Childcare³⁴ have been developed to support quality practice. While these guidance materials to support quality improvement are welcomed by the sector the increasing number of frameworks and guidance documents is felt to be cumbersome and may be confusing.

OECD Start Strong IV states clearly that there is a case for a close link between self-evaluation and external evaluation framework stating,

“Monitoring can be external when led by an external institution or internal when conducted by the ECEC setting or staff themselves. While these two types of monitoring might have different purposes and general methods, they can also share common tools, as internal monitoring tools are often used for external monitoring procedures. For instance, staff self-assessment practices can be part of a larger monitoring procedure conducted by an external institution.”³⁵

First 5 clearly outlines the building blocks necessary to create an effective early childhood system. Building block 2 is,

“a robust regulation, inspection and quality assurance regime to enforce and raise standards with a specific strategic action to progressively reform the ELC and SAC regulatory and inspection systems and strengthen quality assurance, with a renewed emphasis on self-evaluation”.³⁶

The intention underpinning the action is to reduce the burden on services whilst supporting quality improvement.

It is proposed that Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education is updated and clearly integrated with other established national frameworks (Aistear the National Curriculum Framework) and guidance documents (the Equality and Diversity Guidelines) for ELC and SAC to provide one overarching quality framework, building on the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide, which will support service self-evaluation and external evaluation and inspection.

The purpose of undertaking regular review of practice is to make informed judgements about the quality and effectiveness of the whole service, with a view to enhancing the care and education of the children within the setting.³⁷

The overarching national quality framework will articulate a path from compliance to excellence for ELC and SAC services, with a clear focus on impact and outcomes for children. The primary purpose of the framework will be to support ELC and SAC services to become effective evaluators of their

²⁹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b1a475-diversity-equality-and-inclusion-charter-and-guidelines-for-early-ch/>

³⁰ <https://www.tusla.ie/services/preschool-services/early-years-quality-and-regulatory-framework/>

³¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/guide-to-early-years-education-inspections.pdf>

³² <https://aim.gov.ie/aim-supports/universal-design-guidelines/>

³³ <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/df207-national-action-plan-for-childminding-2021-2028/>

³⁴ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b66c5-national-quality-guidelines-for-school-age-childcare-services-guidelines-components-and-elements-september-2020/>

³⁵ OECD (2015), *Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264233515-en>

³⁶ https://first5.gov.ie/userfiles/pdf/5223_4966_DCYA_EarlyYears_INTERACTIVE_Booklet_280x215_v1.pdf#view=fit

³⁷ French, G. (2003). *Supporting Quality: Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Services* (2nd Ed.). Dublin: Barnardos’ National Children’s Resource Centre.

own performance. Self-evaluation should lead clearly to improvements in the educational and care experiences and outcomes for children. An integral element of the self-evaluation process is the identification of improvement and development needs, and areas of priority for CPD activity. These areas may relate to child and family needs, professional development needs, service needs, national policy needs or indeed a response to changes in understanding of professional practice as it develops over time.

It is proposed that a working group is established to develop this framework.

The working group recommends that:

- Membership of the working group should include key stakeholders and independent experts.
- The working group should explore and determine how existing frameworks and guidance can be presented to best support services to engage in reflective self-evaluation for improvement. It is envisaged that clear intuitive connections will be developed between the existing curriculum framework and guidelines and the revised Síolta framework to highlight connectivity, coherence, clarity and support ease of use and produce a unified framework.
- The overarching quality framework should cover both ELC and SAC, given the importance of self-evaluation and reflective practice to both ELC and SAC, with areas of commonality and separate areas relating to specific areas of ELC and SAC provision. Consideration should also be given to the inclusion of Childminding.
- In recognition of the critical importance of early childhood education in ELC, Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, which is currently being updated, should continue to be defined as a distinct curriculum document.
- The quality framework should be underpinned by current research and best practice and aligned to the EU Quality Framework for ECEC.³⁸
- The framework should view quality as context-based and define the development of quality as a dynamic, continuous and democratic process.
- The framework should be designed to support engagement across the variety of services in a fair and proportionate way. It should support services at all levels and stages of quality improvement from compliance to excellence.
- A robust consultation with the sector, throughout the development phase, is essential.

The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide³⁹ explains the two frameworks that are relevant to ELC and provides supporting materials, which are available on line, including self-evaluation tools, examples of pedagogical strategies and ideas for planning, documenting, assessing and action planning. While this valuable resource is well used by the sector, and is effectively promoted and utilised by the Better Start Quality Development Service, there is a need for an expanded roll-out of supports for the skills and competences needed for all services to engage in effective and meaningful self-reflection and quality improvement processes, and there would also be significant benefits in providing a single self-evaluation framework that also encompasses SAC.

It is proposed that a suite of resources is developed to support professionals in all ELC and SAC services to develop their capacities to engage in effective and meaningful self-evaluation.

These supports would include:

- Information and online resources to support self-evaluation engagement with the quality framework.

³⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0271>

³⁹ <https://www.aistearsiolta.ie/en/>

- A CPD programme to support all ELC and SAC professionals to develop skills and competencies in self-evaluation, action planning for improvement and reflection and review.
- An accredited CPD training for self-evaluation mentors. This could carry a micro-credential and could form part of a special purpose award or qualification in leadership. The leadership roles expected to provide self-evaluation mentoring within settings will be in line with the work undertaken by the Career Framework and Career Pathways and the SAC Working Groups, e.g. a pedagogical coordination / mentoring role.
- A nationally coordinated system of external mentors, utilising existing mentoring supports, to support ELC and SAC services. It is envisaged that the role of external mentoring support will evolve over time as services develop competences in self-evaluation.
- Funding to provide for regular non-contact time for self-evaluation, action planning for improvement and reflection and review.

The Síolta Quality Assurance Programme (QAP)⁴⁰ was designed to promote quality improvement in ELC services by fostering the development of an organisational culture which empowers both the service and the staff to take ownership of and drive quality improvement as a continuous feature of everyday practice. The mentoring model employed by the QAP was recently reviewed.⁴¹ The Síolta QAP experienced mentors, validators and its resources, systems and processes could positively direct and inform the development of new system of service-embedded and external, on-site mentoring.

It is proposed that support for in-service mentoring and external on-site mentoring is provided.

- External mentoring supports should support the establishment of effective self-evaluation practices in the service and later provide external support for the service's quality development journey.
- Where possible, each service should have someone, possibly a pedagogical leader in relation to ELC and a practice leader in relation to SAC, to fill the role of in-service mentor to advance and guide the service's self-evaluation for quality improvement.
- The establishment of self-evaluation clusters, guided by an external mentor, to support sole operators or small services should be considered.

An IT system

The IT systems to support the delivery of the national CPD strategy must be integrated and linked, easy to use and flexible. They must be secure systems which can ensure high levels of data protection and privacy for users, both services and individual professionals.

It is proposed that a customer relationship management system (CRM)⁴² is developed which enables the recording, tracking and viewing of CPD engagement at ELC and SAC service level and at individual professional level.

This CRM system would support:

- The operation of a funding system in conjunction with work under way on the new funding model.
- The national monitoring and planning for CPD provision and delivery at national sectorial level, setting level, and individual level.
- The creation and maintenance of service and professional development e-portfolios.

⁴⁰ https://siolta.ie/quality_assurance_program.php

⁴¹ <https://assets.gov.ie/41228/ff6a0ec8b76c4de9af5b6ae40e6471b5.pdf>

⁴² A customer relationship management (CRM) system provides a central place where individuals' data, interactions, and engagement can be stored and shared.

- The planning for and evaluation of professional development, at regional, local, service and individual level over time.
- The inspection and evaluation system.

It is proposed that a learner management system (LMS)⁴³ is developed which provides a central hub to access most or all quality assured ELC and SAC CPD activities.

The LMS will host:

- Generic components to be completed at specific stages of career development. For example, while on student professional practice placement, on induction into first position, on induction into a new role or post of responsibility.
- Generic components to support regulatory compliance and development of national policy and curriculum implementation.
- Components pitched at varying levels of practice – novice, competent and expert.
- Components on a wide variety of topics, of varying length and delivery modes to provide choice and to support autonomous professional and lifelong learning.
- Bespoke CPD components for School-aged Childcare.
- Bespoke CPD components for Childminders.

The working group note that Better Start has developed an LMS system, which has been used to deliver Hanen, Lámh and SPEL CPD and the Quality Development Service over the past year. A CRM system, as part of the Early Years Platform (replacing PIP), is beginning design requirements in August. Use of this system could potentially be a timely, cost effective and efficient option in the medium term.

⁴³ A learning management system (LMS) is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, automation and delivery of educational courses, training programs, or learning and development programs.

Quality Assurance of CPD

The OECD Starting Strong VI report states that to enhance process quality, “trainings must be of high quality and adapted to the needs and interests of staff, which vary based on their initial preparation, experience and role”. It also found that very few countries monitor the quality of professional development.⁴⁴ Broadly speaking there are three approaches to quality assurance in education: a regulatory approach, which imposes minimum regulatory requirements that providers must meet, an advisory approach which uses guidelines and example of good practice to inspire providers, and an organic approach which leaves it to providers to identify their own quality needs.⁴⁵

It is proposed that an advisory approach is adopted and that structures and processes for the quality assurance of CPD resources, activities and supports, are established and administered by a central agency at a national level.

The working group recommend that the following should be address in terms of quality assurance guidelines:

- Quality of CPD content
- Quality of trainers’/mentors’/coaches’ and other staff’s skills
- Quality of training delivery, including online delivery and facilitation
- Evaluative research on the impact of CPD on practice
- Evaluative research on the outcomes for children
- Support organisations

⁴⁴ OECD (2021) Starting Strong VI, (June 2021) Supporting Meaningful Interactions in Early Childhood Education and Care. (OECD, Paris) <https://doi.org/10.1787/25216031>

⁴⁵ https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/improving-the-quality-of-non-formal-adult-learning_f1b450e1-en

The quality assurance guidelines will provide a framework within which training, mentoring and support providers can increase their understanding and awareness of effective CPD design and delivery and undertake self-evaluation against the quality assurance criteria. Quality assurance guidance, such as the QQI policies on quality assurance⁴⁶, have already been developed and many providers of formal CPD adhere to this guidance and have developed their own individual quality assurance policies. EQAVET⁴⁷, a community of practice that promotes European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance in vocational educational training, also provides a wide range of quality assurance resources.

Currently, the Resource Development Group, a structure of the National Síolta Aistear Initiative⁴⁸, quality assures all NSAI CPD related to Síolta and Aistear, the AIM Training Working Group quality assures training in relation to inclusion,⁴⁹ and Better Start quality assures their quality development mentoring service.⁵⁰ The range of existing expertise in quality assurance of CPD already developed in the sector should be harnessed and consolidated into one quality assurance guidance for the design and delivery of CPD.

It is proposed that quality assurance guidance on the development of formal, non-formal and informal CPD is developed building on existing European and National guidance and the expertise within the sector.

Increasing availability and uptake of online and blended learning CPD requires specific guidance in relation to quality assurance for this delivery mode. ELC and SAC are practical professions and there are limits to what CPD can be effectively delivered online. The mode of delivery of CPD should be matched to suit the content and format of the CPD and to meet the needs of the service and professional. Some guidance has already been developed by QQI⁵¹ which could form a basis of quality assurance for online CPD for ELC and SAC.

It is proposed that quality assurance guidance in relation to online and blended CPD resources, activities and training is developed.

A key factor in assuring the quality of CPD is that the trainers, mentors and coaches have the skills, competencies and qualifications necessary to deliver CPD proficiently. Clarity is needed on what those essential competences, skills and qualifications are and the Career Framework and Career Pathways working group is providing some guidance for this work. It should be noted that trainers, mentors and coaches will require CPD specific to their roles in order to maintain, expand and deepen their professional skills and expertise.

The development of CPD content and processes should, at all times, be evidence-based, relevant and fully aligned to national policy and frameworks. It should utilise and build on content and processes already developed and proven to be effective in improving practice, programme quality and outcomes for children and families. CPD content and processes should be firmly embedded in the following principles:

- Life-long learning enhances personal and professional development
- Professional development is ongoing throughout a career
- CPD is most effective when based on and integrated into practice, particularly when it includes feedback on change in practice.

⁴⁶ <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/QA-Guidelines.aspx>

⁴⁷ <https://www.eqavet.eu/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/c09af4-national-siolta-aistear-initiative/>

⁴⁹ For example the LINC programme, <https://lincprogramme.ie/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.betterstart.ie/for-elic/the-quality-development-service/>

⁵¹ <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Blended-Learning-Guidelines.aspx>

- An individual’s active engagement in their own learning fosters a culture of professional engagement, autonomy and responsibility.
- Self-evaluation of professional development and learning needs is a crucial aspect of being and becoming professional
- Self-reflection, both individual and collaborative, underpins and supports change in professional practice, quality development and improved outcomes for children.

Quality assurance guidance should also indicate where and when CPD resources, supports and training should be made available in both Irish and English, and specifically tailored for naíonraí.

Professional Learning Communities

A professional learning community (PLC) is defined as, “a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way”.⁵² The goal is not to be a professional learning community, but to improve well-being and learning for children and families.

An EU report on professional learning communities in ECEC services and primary schools states that the purpose of PLCs is to support staff, both emotionally and professionally, by allowing them to critically reflect on their own teaching and to share concrete ideas on how to improve the wellbeing and the learning experience of children and families.⁵³

The study suggests that the following five key criteria be used to define a PLC. The five criteria are relevant to both ELC and SAC, though the context (e.g. the references to “school”, “teachers”, “classroom” and “educational matters”) is different. While written in relation to learning communities within a setting/school, the criteria are also relevant to the development of learning communities across settings, both ELC and SAC:

1. Teachers frequently engage in ‘reflective and in-depth dialogues’ with colleagues about educational matters based on their daily practice.
2. Teachers move from the classroom doors in a ‘deprivatisation of practices’, by observing each other’s practices, giving feedback, planning jointly, building relationships with the neighbourhood, and engaging in dialogue with parents.

⁵² Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: a review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*. 7(4), 221-258.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226457350_Professional_Learning_Communities_A_Review_of_the_Literature

⁵³ Sharmahd N., Peeters J., Van Laere K., Vonta T., De Kimpe C., Brajković S., Contini L., Giovannini D.; Transforming European ECEC services and primary schools into professional learning communities: drivers, barriers and ways forward, NESET II report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017. [AR2_2017.pdf \(nesetweb.eu\)](#)

3. There is investment in ‘collective responsibility’, as school improvement is no longer considered to be the sole responsibility of a principal or a single teacher, but rather a collective one
4. There is a focus on reaching a shared vision and set of values, based on children’s rights and respect for diversity. This forms the basis for shared, collective, and ethical decision-making.
5. These four characteristics need a fifth condition to be realized: the presence of ‘leadership’ is a powerful factor in transforming a school’s culture. Leadership is a crucial, yet complex, element to be taken into account in PLCs.

The working group endorses these criteria as a basis for establishing and supporting PLCs. It acknowledges that many ELC and SAC services already have, as outlined in criteria 2, established a focus on practice-based learning, taking place in constant dialogue with colleagues, parents and local communities.

Research suggest that effective PLCs develop capacity for professional learning on three levels:

1. A personal level (an individual’s ability to actively reflect).
2. An interpersonal level (the ability of professionals to work together from shared conceptions of learning and education).
3. An organizational level (the structural and cultural conditions that facilitate and support the development of personal and interpersonal capacities).⁵⁴

The active participation of every member of the team is crucial to the effectiveness of a PLC, and distributed/democratic leadership or facilitation is necessary to achieve this as this type of leadership implies collaboration, team work, and participation.

The EU report on training, recruiting and retaining staff highlights that PLCs provide valuable opportunities for professionals to share and discuss examples of practice, and encourage team-based reflection of how to organise and manage children’s activities.⁵⁵

The working group has determined that there is a specific need for a national approach to supporting the further development of professional learning communities, including pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership. As previously stated, the majority of CPD engagement is, and will continue to be, non-formal and informal. Hence the establishment of effective and adequately funded PLCs will be crucial in achieving a national CPD strategy.

It is proposed that a national system of establishing, supporting and funding professional learning communities is developed.

Creating and maintaining PLCs requires specific competences, structural conditions and time. It is envisaged that existing PLC systems, such as Better Start Early Years Specialists and Síolta Mentors, will be utilised to establish and support the development of PLCs, at both in-service and between-service levels. As capacity to facilitate and lead is built through training and experience, ELC and SAC services will increasingly take responsibility for their own PLCs seeking external support when needed.

The working group recommends the following:

- Research to define PLCs, establish principles and values to underpin PLCs and to develop guidance for facilitating PLCs, in an Irish context.

⁵⁴ Slegers, P., den Brok, P., Verbiest, E., Moolenaar, N. M., Daly, A. J. (2013). Towards conceptual clarity: A multidimensional, multilevel model of professional learning communities in Dutch elementary schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 114(1), 118- 137. <https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/191703873/Slegers2013toward.pdf>

⁵⁵ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/47ba3c3a-6789-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1>

- Development of accredited CPD training for PLC facilitators. This could be a micro-credential and form part of a special purpose award or qualification in leadership.
- Funding to establish a national network of PLC facilitators to begin the work of raising awareness of, and establishing PLCs.
- Establishing PLCs within ELC and SAC services and also at local, regional, national and international level. Consideration needs to be given to the use of on-line PLCs.
- Funding for non-contact time for all team members to attend and engage in a PLC.

The working group suggests that local childminding networks, as outlined in the National Action Plan for Childminding⁵⁶, are established as professional learning communities to similar standards of evidence and quality assurance as outlined above.

Structuring, Planning and Recording Time Allocated to CPD

Movement towards regulatory requirements for CPD

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 the ELC and SAC CPD strategy will expect 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 service, based on the needs of their particular service. To date, regulatory requirements, outlined in Tusla's Quality and Regulatory Framework, in relation to CPD in ELC have focused on the service. Presently, ELC services are required to have a staff training policy which identifies and addresses the training needs of employees and a staff supervision policy to outline how employees are supervised and supported in relation to their work practices.⁵⁷

It is proposed that regulatory requirements for CPD should remain at service level in the short-to-medium term.

As the movement towards regulation of the profession progresses it is proposed that CPD expectations and requirements for individual ELC and SAC professionals may be incrementally introduced, possibly in the first instance through the conditions of membership of a professional body and later through legal requirements set by a professional regulator.

Planning for types of CPD engagement

An essential first step, before developing guidance on CPD engagement, is establishing clear and agreed definitions of different forms of CPD. Formal learning is always structured and organised, and has clear learning objectives. Informal learning is never organised, has no set objectives in terms

⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/132300/5d403d61-a868-488c-9766-5b1e42f1e408.pdf#page=null>

⁵⁷ <https://www.tusla.ie/services/preschool-services/early-years-quality-and-regulatory-framework/>

of learning outcomes and is never intentional. Non-formal learning is mid-way between formal and informal. It is organised and can have learning objectives but learning is typically the by-product of these organised activities⁵⁸.

The table on the following page outlines an initial endeavour by the working group to define activities that relate to informal, non-formal and formal CPD.⁵⁹

Formal	Non-Formal	Informal
Intentional, structured activities leading to formal recognition	Intentional, structured, organised activities without formal certification	Everyday activities that enhance professional experience
Professional or academic qualifications	Short course, workshops, webinars, coaching, mentoring, attending conferences and events, communities of practice, induction	Job shadowing, learning by experience, job rotation, reading, team meetings, self-evaluation, informal mentoring, sharing information with others, online discussion groups, professional networks

It is proposed that clear definitions and exemplars of each form of CDP, formal, non-formal and informal, are developed.

The agreed national definitions and descriptors of informal, non-formal and formal CPD will underpin the development of CPD plans at individual and at service level. In relation to offering guidance on how much of each type of CPD should be engaged in, direction can be drawn from current research on engagement of workers in different forms of CPD. An OECD survey shows that on average about 70% of workers engage in informal learning activities over a 12 month period, compared with 41% who engage in non-formal learning and just 8% who train towards a formal qualification.⁶⁰ This research lends support to the 70/20/10 model for learning and development. The model is used by professional bodies, such as Engineers Ireland⁶¹, as a formula to describe the

⁵⁸ <https://www.oecd.org/fr/education/apprendre-au-dela-de-l-ecole/recognitionofnon-formalandinformallearning-home.htm>

⁵⁹ European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning; Routes from learning to certification. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4054_en.pdf

⁶⁰ Fialho, P., G. Quintini and M. Vandeweyer (2019), "Returns to different forms of job related training: Factoring in informal learning", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 231, OECD Publishing, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/b21807e9-en>

⁶¹ Engineers Ireland (2018) 'What Counts as CPD', <https://www.engineersireland.ie/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=6Lzi9iyRFEI%3d&portalid=0&resourceView=1>

optimal sources of CPD learning. It suggests that employees obtain 70% of knowledge on the job (informal), 20% peer-to-peer (non-formal) and 10% traditional training programmes (formal).⁶²

It is proposed that guidance on the proportion of time allocated to CPD engagement, based on the definitions of CPD is developed.

These guidelines can support the development of both service and individual CPD plans where, in line with the 70/20/10 model, the primary focus is on learning and developing through experiences in work, some focus on learning and developing through engagement and interaction with others and less focus on learning and development through structured courses. This approach to planning and engaging in CPD will recognise and highlight the powerful learning opportunities available in the ELC and SAC services through co-professional engagement.

It is proposed that ELC and SAC services are funded to complete a minimum of two days (12 hours) formal and non-formal CPD, for all staff, annually.

A flexible approach, to meet the diverse needs of different services, should be taken as to how the two days/12 hours formal CPD is arranged and how it is funded. Consideration should be given to the option of closure of ELC and SAC services, to facilitate full staff attendance, for two days/four half days annually. These closures should be planned as part of a service's annual calendar to give families adequate notice and could coincide with local school closures.

It is proposed that ELC and SAC services are funded to engage in non-formal and informal CPD.

As most non-formal and informal CPD takes place in the ELC or SAC service, funding to facilitate the following activities is needed if CPD is to be facilitated for all staff in all settings:

- Funding of non-contact time for staff in leadership positions to mentor students on placement, mentor new staff on induction and/or probation, facilitate PLCs, and support self-evaluation for quality improvement.
- Funding for non-contact time for all staff to engage in team reflection, evaluation and planning for children's care and education experiences and quality improvement.⁶³
- Funding for non-contact time for all staff to attend team meetings and PLCs.
- Funding for additional staff time, above the minimum ratios, to allow mentors to work with staff in session without impacting the quality of the children's experiences.

The working group note that due consideration must be given to staff well-being in relation to completing CPD outside of normal working hours.

Recognition and recording of CPD engagement

A formal system of recording ELC and SAC professionals' engagement in CPD activities and continuing learning is vital in valuing, rewarding and motivating their efforts. In developing its CPD system, the Teaching Council found that more than half of the responses from the consultation workshops with teachers reflected a belief that a lack of recognition or accreditation contributed to a negative experience of CPD.⁶⁴

It is proposed that a system, and guidance, is developed to support ELC and SAC services and professionals to record their formal, non-formal and informal CPD engagements.

⁶² Hughes, R. L., Ginnett, R. C., & Curphy, G. J. (2014) *Leadership: Enhancing the lessons of experience* (8th ed.) McGraw-Hill Professional

⁶³ This time is distinct from time needed for integral core operations e.g. supervision, team meetings, communication with parents and other professionals (mentors, health professionals etc.)

⁶⁴ Teaching Council (2016b) *Cosán, Framework for Teachers' Learning*, Maynooth: The Teaching Council, p.8.

It is envisaged that the formal recording of all CPD engagements will raise awareness around the vital role service-embedded learning experiences play in professional development. This raised awareness and valuing of informal and non-formal learning experiences will in turn foster a more deliberate and purposeful planning and engagement in these activities.

Special considerations

As we have seen, informal learning typically relies the most on the interaction among colleagues and, as such, is the most likely to be disrupted by social distancing measures and the use of 'pod systems'⁶⁵ in ELC and SAC services. Results from recent research show that across OECD countries, workers' learning opportunities could have decreased by an average of 18% in case of non-formal learning, and 25% in the case of the informal learning during widespread Covid-19 regimes.⁶⁶ Research conducted in 2020 by the Skills and Labour Market Unit in SOLAS on behalf of the National Skills Council, measuring Irish workers participation in lifelong learning, reports a 30% fall in the number of workers participating in non-formal learning compared to the previous year.⁶⁷ In light of these findings particular consideration may need to be given as to how best informal and non-formal CPD experiences can be provided and supported with safety in mind during the immediate period while public health restrictions remain in place.

⁶⁵ [https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Guidance Document for Early Years Services COVID-19 \(Version 3 19.04.21\) .pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Guidance_Document_for_Early_Years_Services_COVID-19_(Version_3_19.04.21).pdf)

⁶⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/adult-learning-and-covid-19-how-much-informal-and-non-formal-learning-are-workers-missing-56a96569/>

⁶⁷ https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/d5d3866d35/lifelong-learning-among-adults_q42020_final.pdf

Professional Practice Placements and Induction

Student professional practice placements in ELC and SAC services are an essential component of training and education programmes. The OECD's Starting Strong VI found that work-based learning during initial education for ECEC professionals is associated with quality in ECEC⁶⁸ and the international literature has long highlighted the important role played by work-based training for sustaining situated and contextual-based learning.⁶⁹ The Professional Award-type Descriptors for level 5 and 6⁷⁰ and the Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for level 7 and 8 qualifications⁷¹ state clearly that professional practice placements are an integral element of the programme and that learners must pass this placement before an award can be made. The working group recognises that to date, facilitating student professional practice placements has imposed high demands on ELC and SAC services with minimal support and acknowledgement in return.

It is proposed that national, universal supports and resources for student professional practice placement, at all qualification levels, are developed.

Principles underpinning provision of quality professional practice placements

- All placements must be underpinned by a child-centred, rights-based approach with a primary focus on what is in the best interests of the children.
- The placement experience must be designed as a collaborative partnership between the education provider, the ELC/SAC service staff, the student, the children and their families.

⁶⁸ <https://www.oecd.org/education/starting-strong-vi-f47a06ae-en.htm>

⁶⁹ Balduzzi, L. and A. Lazzari (2015), "Mentoring practices in workplace-based professional preparation: a critical analysis of policy developments in the Italian context", *Early Years*, pp. 35:2, 124-138.

⁷⁰ <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/ELC%20Awards%20Consultation%20Draft%20NFQ%20Levels%205%20to%208.pdf>

⁷¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Early-Childhood/professional-award-criteria-and-guidelines-for-initial-professional-education-l7-8-degree-programmes-elc-ireland.pdf>

- ELC and SAC services' expertise and the crucial role they play in the professional development of students is fully acknowledged and the supports needed to fulfil this role to the highest standard should be provided.
- Professional practice is relational; based on trust, equality and partnership. Skilled mentoring is the linchpin in providing quality professional practice placements for students.

A national, universal approach to student professional practice placement

First 5 states that the availability of quality settings for student placement represents a challenge for the ELC and SAC workforce. The working group recognises that high quality student placement experiences are most likely to be provided by high quality ELC and SAC services.

It is proposed that guidance and a system of support in evidencing an ELC or SAC service's capacity to provide quality professional practice placements is developed.

The following are some of the conditions the working group feel are necessary to provide high quality professional practice placements for ELC and SAC student:

- ELC and SAC services offering to host student placements are shown to be providing a quality service to children and families. This could be evidenced through the service's self-evaluation of its capacity to host student placements together with external inspection and evaluation.
- A dedicated student mentor in each service that proposes to host student practice placements, with an ELC or SAC qualification equal to, or higher than, the level of the student's course of study.
- A clear and documented memorandum of understanding/formal written agreement between the service, educational provider and student, clearly outlining the learning objectives, assessment processes and the learning experiences opportunities to be provided.

Supports needed to establish a national, universal approach to quality professional practice placements

- Funding for ELC and SAC services to establish structures to support quality placements, such as non-contact time for student mentor meetings, reporting and assessment procedures.
- The development of materials, such as a national student placement handbook, tools to self-evaluate your service's capacity to host student placements, a code of practice for placements, national guidance on student mentoring, etc.
- The development of accredited CPD training for student placement mentors. This could be a micro-credential and could form part of a special purpose award/qualification in leadership.
- The development of local/regional communities of practice facilitated by an experienced mentor. These communities of practice would support the gradual introduction of the national approach to student professional practice placement in ELC and SAC services.

Special considerations

The working group identified issues which warrant special consideration in the development of a national system of student placement, they are as follows:

- Consideration must be given to the potential impact, both positive and negative, of student placement on children. Children should be afforded opportunities for participation and decision making, at a developmentally appropriate level, in student placements. The working group highlight that there is a need for research on the impact of student placements on children.

- Consideration must be given to part-time students who are also in employment in ELC and SAC. Clear guidance from QQI and QAB for completion of placement in their place of work is needed.
- Consideration must be given to the cost to employers associated with releasing employees, who are undertaking studies, to complete placements in another ELC or SAC service.

Induction

It is common practice for new employees and current employees taking up a new role in a centre-based ELC/SAC service to have a probation period, and there is a regulatory requirement that all employees are provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, on a service's policies and procedures and the regulations. However, up to this point, there has been no requirement for an induction process into the profession, and no national approach to supporting induction.

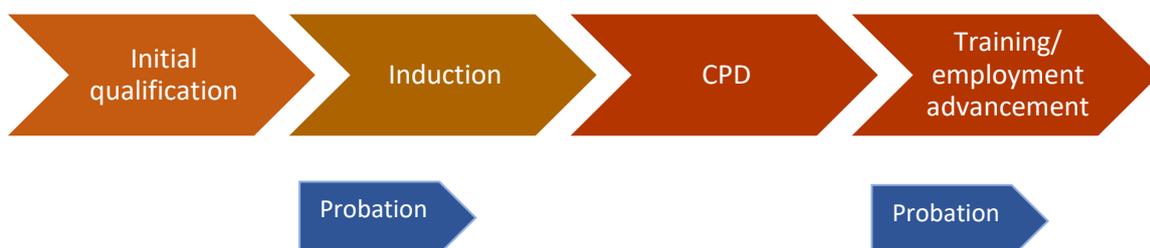
Induction is different from probation. Probation focuses on confirming someone is suitable for the job to which they have been appointed. European Commission 2020 report on workforce development states,

“Typically entry into a new role is accompanied by a period of probation where an individual's skills and competences are reviewed to ensure they are appropriate to their role. In addition, many employers and ECEC systems operate an induction period for those members of staff starting their first role in an ECEC setting.”⁷²

Induction is 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.

While an individual would only go through the induction process once (following completion of initial pre-service qualification), that individual might undergo a probation process a number of times during her/his career, depending on when she/he changes jobs and/or takes on new roles.

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 on-going CPD and does not of itself complete the professional development process. The model below illustrate how this journey sits with career progression.



⁷² EC (2020) *Early Childhood Education and Care – How to Recruit, Train and Motivate Well-Qualified Staff*, p.98 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/47ba3c3a-6789-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1>.

The European Commission Report, 2018, *Monitoring the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care* proposed four indicators that might help monitoring of the quality statement - "Well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enable them to fulfil their professional role"⁷³, one of which is induction.⁷⁴

Whereas probation is the responsibility of the employer, responsibility for induction – as a process to support entry into the profession – lies with bodies that have responsibility for the profession.

It is proposed that an induction process is developed and incrementally introduced for all new entrants to the profession (other than childminders⁷⁵) at all qualification levels.

The preparatory steps needed include:

- Research existing models of induction, including within the ELC / SAC sector internationally and nationally in other professions, such as the Droichead⁷⁶ induction process for newly qualified teachers.
- Consultation with stakeholders to ensure that the induction process responds to the needs of ELC and SAC services and of professionals.
- Development, piloting and review of a national structured induction process.
- Development of accredited CPD to train skilled and experienced staff as induction mentors. This could be a micro-credential and could form part of a special purpose award/qualification in leadership.
- Development of systems to monitor and record the induction.
- Development of quality assured resources and external mentoring to support embedding the induction process in services.
- Funding to ensure sufficient non-contact and out of ratio time for induction.

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"⁷⁷ is used as an indicator of quality in an early years system.

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.)

⁷³ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/825252b4-3ec6-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1>

⁷⁴ The other three indicators for this quality statement relate to: initial pre-service training; leadership training; and work experience as part of initial pre-service training.

⁷⁵ 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

⁷⁶ <https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/teacher-education/droichead/>

⁷⁷ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/825252b4-3ec6-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1>

- Those professionals who have just moved to work in Ireland even if they previously completed an induction process in another country.

Mapping of Existing CPD Supports

As stated previously, Ireland lacks a unified national CPD infrastructure for ELC and SAC. Existing CPD resources and support structures are varied and fragmented. Progressing the development of a comprehensive national CPD system for ELC and SAC should begin with a rigorous mapping of the resources and structures already in place.

It is proposed that a mapping of existing CPD supports is conducted as an initial action to inform further actions.

The mapping will seek to gather information on:

- What ELC and SAC CPD resources and supports (informal, non-formal and formal) are currently available?
- Who provides/delivers each CPD activity?
- How these CPD resources and supports are created, quality assured, financed and governed?
- How do these CPD resources and supports relate to national regulations, frameworks, and guidance?
- What accreditation/recognition, if any, does each CPD activity carry?
- Is engagement in particular CPD activity linked to career progression?

It is proposed that a survey of ELC and SAC professionals' and services' engagement in CPD activity is conducted.

The survey will be conducted at both ELC and SAC individual professional level and at service level, and will gather information on:

- The CPD activities engaged in (informal, non-formal and formal), including on-line.
- How relevant is the CPD to practice.
- The amount of time spent on CPD activities.
- The cost of CPD activities.
- The enablers and barriers to engagement in CPD activity.

Priority Focus for CPD

Particular focuses for CPD to be developed and rolled out through the Workforce Development Plan will include:

- Accredited CPD which will build incrementally to degree level, so supporting the achievement the First 5 target of 50% graduate led ELC workforce.
- Accredited CPD for the specific/specialist leadership responsibilities or roles such as; management/administration, pedagogy, inclusion, self-evaluation for quality improvement, student placement, induction, family and community liaison.
- Accredited training in SAC to support ELC award holders to work in SAC.
- National roll-out of NSAI CPD to support implementation of the updated Sfolta national quality framework and Aistear national curriculum framework.
- Expansion of the CPD resources available through AIM to support inclusive practices within services and training to support implementation of the Universal Design Guidelines for ELC Settings.
- CPD to help professionals to support children's transitions into and within ELC services and from ELC services to primary schools.
- CPD to support professionals working in the context of disadvantage.
- Bespoke CPD on school-age childcare.
- Bespoke CPD for childminders.
- CPD to support effective working relationships with parents, families and communities, and piloting of the delivery of parenting programmes through ELC settings.
- CPD to support professionals and services to engage in self-evaluation and action planning for quality improvement.
- CPD to support all professionals working with young children around key issues of relevance across disciplines.

Consideration should be given to roll-out of CPD resources in both Irish and English, where appropriate.

Proposed Timelines to 2028

Initial and short-term actions for completion between 2022 and 2024:

- Mapping
- Development of LMS and CRM
- Introduction of some funding for non-contact time
- Working group on development of self-evaluation framework
- Development of quality assurance guidelines
- Research on induction, and consultation and development process for induction process
- Research on PLCs and development of guidance on means to support them