Workforce Development Plan
Phase 2 Working Groups Progress Report
Promotion and Regulation of the Profession Working Group

July 2021

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 3
Promotion and Regulation of the Profession .......................................................................................... 3
Purpose .................................................................................................................................................. 3
Working group membership .................................................................................................................. 4
Context, Challenges and Opportunities ............................................................................................... 6
Term Of Reference: Key outputs ........................................................................................................ 8
  Term of Reference 1 & 3: Promoting the Profession and Careers ...................................................... 8
    Working Group Recommendations and Rationale ........................................................................... 8
    Proposed timelines to 2028 ........................................................................................................... 11
    Financial Implications .................................................................................................................... 11
  Term of Reference 2: Ways to enhance diversity in the workforce .................................................... 11
    Working Group Recommendations and Rationale ........................................................................ 11
    Proposed timelines to 2028 ........................................................................................................... 16
    Financial Implications .................................................................................................................... 17
  Term of Reference 4 Consideration of the appropriate role for the State in facilitating the development of a professional association .............................................................................. 17
    Working Group Recommendations and Rationale ........................................................................ 17
    Proposed timelines to 2028 ........................................................................................................... 18
    Financial Implications .................................................................................................................... 19
  Term of Reference 5: Next steps in the process of movement towards establishment of a statutory professional standards body / professional regulator .............................................................. 19
    Working Group Recommendations and Rationale ........................................................................ 19
    Proposed timelines to 2028 ........................................................................................................... 19
    Financial implications ..................................................................................................................... 20
  Term of Reference 6: Regulatory requirements for working in the sector ........................................ 20
    Working Group Recommendations and Rationale ........................................................................ 20
    Proposed timelines to 2028 ........................................................................................................... 23
    Financial Implications .................................................................................................................... 24
Introduction
The Workforce Development Plan is being developed in close collaboration between the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Education, and its development is overseen by a Steering Group and supported by a Stakeholder Group.

The 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.

Promotion and Regulation of the Profession

Purpose
The role of the working group on Promotion and Regulation of the Profession in phase two of the Workforce Development Plan (WDP) was to build on, explore and consider the recommendations as outlined in the WDP phase one interim report, the findings of the public consultations and the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the group and extend on the discussion from the interim report April 2021. Ultimately the role of this working group was to develop proposals for consideration by the WDP Steering Group on measures to promote the early childhood education and care profession, enhance diversity in the workforce and regulatory requirements to work in the sector. The group were also asked to consider the role for the State in facilitating the development of a professional association and offer recommendations in relation to proposed next steps in the development of a statutory professional standards body / professional regulator. From a policy perspective; First 5, A Whole-of-
Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 (DCYA2018) makes a commitment to moving incrementally over time towards regulation of the profession and development of a professional standards body to promote and regulate the ELC (and school-age childcare) profession.

The working group in their discussions have been guided by national and international research, such as the Early Years Sector Profile reports (Pobal), The OECD Start Strong series, the OECD Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Reviews, The Seepro-r Project 30 country reports work profiles (Oberhuemer and Schreyer, 2018), the Good Practice for Good Jobs in Early Childhood Education and Care (OECD, 2019) and the European Commission report; Early Childhood Education and Care; How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff (European Commission 2020).

Working group membership

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>O’Riordan, Kathryn / Gleeson, Paul</th>
<th>DCEDIY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rapporteur</td>
<td>Melia, Rita</td>
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<td>Secretariat</td>
<td>Tobin, Barry</td>
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<th>Group Member</th>
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<td>Boles, Sharon</td>
<td>Childcare Committees Ireland</td>
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<td>Carpenter, Annette</td>
<td>SIPTU</td>
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<td>Corcoran, Mike</td>
<td>Tusla</td>
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<td>Downey, Clare</td>
<td>National Parents Council</td>
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<td>Garrity, Sheila</td>
<td>PLÉ</td>
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<td>Healy, Catherine</td>
<td>Better Start</td>
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<td>Heeney, Teresa / Corbett, Maire</td>
<td>Early Childhood Ireland</td>
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<td>Kelly, Barbara</td>
<td>QQI</td>
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<td>Kenny, Mick</td>
<td>Men in Childcare</td>
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<td>Murray, Colette</td>
<td>EDeN Project</td>
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<td>Ní Chualleanáin, Caroline</td>
<td>Comhar Naionrai na Gaeltachta</td>
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<td>Professor Urban, Mathias</td>
<td>Independent Early Years Expert; DCU</td>
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<td>Quinn, Marian</td>
<td>Association of Childhood Professionals</td>
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Subgroups

Four subgroups were formed at the initial stages. Members of the working group self-appointed, to groups which interested or had relevance to them. The following were the four initial sub groups.

- Promotion and Regulation Working Group - Retention
- Promotion and Regulation Working Group - PR Campaign
- Promotion and Regulation Working Group - Diversity
- Promotion and Regulation Working Group - Professional Association

The work of the subgroups since the submission of the interim report focused on the Diversity subgroup and the Professional Association subgroup.

An additional subgroup was formed to discuss the ToR particularly in relation to language competency requirements as applied to naíonraí. Clare Spáinneach was invited to represent Gaeloideachas, Clare worked with Caroline Ní Chualáin, Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta (CNNG) and Rita Melia to develop specific recommendations which are relevant to naíonraí. All of the remaining Terms of Reference were discussed by the full group.
Context, Challenges and Opportunities

The group were asked by the steering to provide clear recommendations in the final report in the following two specific areas.

In the Progress Report it states that ‘The group recommends that steps are not introduced to establish a statutory regulator at this time’. The Steering Group felt that, although it may not be the time to establish a statutory regulator right now that this Working Group needs to consider when that time will be and what the next steps in the process should be.

The Steering Group also confirmed that they share the opinion that the state should have a limited role in a potential professional body, however it was recommended that the role of this working group is to ‘spell out’ what that ‘limited role’ should be.

A significant amount of discussion took place during the six meetings and the numerous sub group meetings in relation to the ToR questions. The challenges and opportunities were certainly embedded in the context of the work loads and work environments of all of the members of the group. Each group member committed their time and expertise to this working group in the spirit of true collaboration. The discussion of the working group which has resulted in this final report was lively, challenging and engaging as each individual contributed from their own context. This final report represents the shared understandings and agreed decisions of the Promotion and Regulation of the Profession Working Group.

This report was written taking into consideration both early years and school age childcare provision representing all of the sector. The working group are conscious that individually ECEC and SAC are at different stages of regulatory and professional development, however the areas of consideration in this report which may seem more pertinent to ECEC at present will in due course be applicable to SAC also. An example of this is the proposed language requirement which will also need to be introduced if or when a school age childcare qualification becomes a requirement. The importance of ensuring that when planning for the regulation and professionalisation of the sector that ECEC and SAC are considered in unison was regularly articulated by the group.

Following the interim report the working group raised concerns in relation to transparency and ensuring that the collective voice of the group would be heard in relation to recommendations. The subgroups subsequently took increased ownership of the areas of discussion, organising subgroup meetings and developing papers to share and invite discussion feedback from the larger group. A further challenge considered by the group was the identified overlaps with other working groups, to
meet this challenge the progress reports from the other working groups were subsequently shared with the subgroup. Cross overs have been identified by this group in relation to all of the other working groups such as Leadership, Induction and what was seen as the most significant challenge for all groups was trying to make strategic workforce development decisions for the ECEC sector in a context where the issue of pay and conditions was being analysed in a separate consultation process of the new Funding Model.

In relation to the career framework and career pathways subgroup, the considerations of this working group in ToR 1 a plan for promotion and career in the sector will need to be aligned. Continuing professional development, training and supports for school age childcare and childminders also interlinks with the proposal for the establishment of a Professional Association. A further challenge which is also recognised as an opportunity is the critical importance of looking at diversity in its fullest sense across all of the working groups. The work of this subgroup provided a rich opportunity to hear and give voice to the achievements and the challenges of ECEC providers who work in bilingual or immersive education settings.

The context of the ECEC sector in Ireland has been well documented and identified by this group throughout the process. It is hoped that the expertise, knowledge and commitment of this group in engaging in this process will contribute to the professionalisation of the sector with better outcomes and brighter futures for all children accessing ECEC and School Age Childcare.
**Term Of Reference: Key outputs**

The key outputs of the group were defined by the 6 main questions in the ToR for the working group were are outlined below as:

1. A plan for promoting the profession and careers in the sector, including measures to support recruitment from a range of different age groups; school leavers, students, those who have left the sector and might return and adults considering returning to the labour force.

2. Ways to enhance diversity in the workforce, including ethnic diversity, gender balance, and potential alternative entry routes suited to individuals from a range of backgrounds.

3. Features of a public information campaign aimed at raising the profile of careers in the sector and public awareness of the value and appeal of the work carried out by ELC/SAC professionals.

4. Consideration of the appropriate role for the State in facilitating the development of a professional association.

5. Next steps in the process of movement towards establishment of a statutory professional standards body / professional regulator, drawing on comparisons with other jurisdictions and other professions.

6. Regulatory requirements for working in the sector (other than qualification requirements), including language proficiency requirements.

A timeline for actions to support the promotion and regulation of the profession, including initial actions during 2022-2024.

Each ToR outputs are looked at individually and the group’s recommendations and rationale are outlined below.

**Term of Reference 1 & 3: Promoting the Profession and Careers**

A plan for promoting the profession and careers in the sector, including measures to support recruitment from a range of different age groups; school leavers, students, those who have left the sector and might return and adults considering returning to the labour force.

**Working Group Recommendations and Rationale**

The working group agreed, following considered discussion that it would be disingenuous or unfair to promote the profession at this particular time until the issue of pay and conditions are addressed. To progress this discussion it was suggested that a two phased approach to any potential PR campaign be undertaken. Phase one of the campaign should address ToR 3; a campaign to raise the profile of the sector. The initial campaign conducted by a professional marketing company should focus on giving visibility to the value and importance of quality of ECEC provision and school age child care for
children’s holistic development and wellbeing, for children, families and society. Phase two which is pertinent to this ToR should involve the engagement of a professional marketing/media company who would undertake promotion of the profession, careers in the sector and recruitment from a diverse population. Both terms of reference will be examined together.

In order to progress an efficient targeted campaign to promote the profession, careers in the sector and recruitment from a diverse population it was agreed by the working group that updated research data would be required. Having reviewed approaches in Malaysia and Scotland it was suggested that there should be a central hub or a one stop shop with information available to meet a variety of stakeholders, similar to Childcare Careers Scotland, the Scottish government recruitment campaign, www.childcarecareersscotland.scot

It was noted that there is currently nothing like this for careers/guidance councillors in schools or for the sector. An example of the type of content available on the Scottish government campaign site is available below in figure 1.

For ToR 3, the working group agree that an initial first step would be to engage a marketing company to develop marketing materials which would highlight the importance of quality early childhood education and care provision for children. The campaign should give visibility to the diversity and the complexities of the role of the early childhood education and care and school age childcare professional and the importance and value of play. Such a campaign as a first step should be aimed
primarily at parents / guardians, it should give visibility to the diversity of people who work in the sector and what they do. The media campaign should clearly identify what quality early years and school age provision looks like in practice and the crucial role of the early childhood and school age childcare professional.

The ambitious vision for the ECEC workforce and the provision of quality ECEC services for children as outlined in First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028 (DCYA2018) should be actioned through the promotion of the value of ECEC provision for children, families and society as a first step. This will involve

- Establishment of a working group to drive this agenda.
- Engaging a professional media company to undertake strategic targeted marketing over two phases.

Phase 1: to promote the value of quality early childhood education and care experiences (TOR 3) as above.
Phase 2: to promote careers in the sector, ideally when pay and conditions have improved for the sector.

This promotion should also include a targeted promotion of careers for early-years professionals working through Irish in the overall promotion plan for the sector. A significant consideration must be given to working with diversity experts across all ToR. Supporting a diverse workforce and promotion of careers to a diverse work force must be prioritised. Further detail on how this can be achieved is described in ToR 2.

Proposed:

- Establish a working group or extend the life of the working group from phase 1.
- Develop a Strategy (inter-departmental) to enhance diversity in the workforce (further outlined under ToR 2.
- Engage a media company to coordinate a national campaign to market careers in ECEC to a diverse audience, school leavers, hard to reach populations, people returning to work.
- Use a designated hub or website to give visibility to what a career in ECEC entails with stories and testimonials from people working in the sector.
- A coordinated approach to working with career guidance teachers in second level education.
Proposed timelines to 2028

Immediate

- Establish a working group to coordinate a national approach to promotion the value of quality ECEC provision and raise parents / guardians awareness of the importance of quality provision and play for young children’s holistic development and wellbeing.
- Engage a professional marketing / media company.

Medium Term

- Develop a one stop shop or hub taking inspiration from other jurisdictions to give visibility to what a professional career in ECEC looks like in practice, to include career pathways, progression opportunities, Continual professional Development and training opportunities.
- Establish a national approach to working with career guidance counsellors in second level colleges

Medium - long Term: 2024 -2028

- Promotion of careers in the sector.

Financial Implications

Promotion of the value of quality ECEC provision for children, families and society will require significant resources to engage a professional marketing/ media company and support a coordinated approach. Phase 1, may need to be a Government initiative. Phase two promotion of careers in the sector may potentially be the responsibility of the Professional Association; this will also need significant resourcing.

Term of Reference 2: Ways to enhance diversity in the workforce

Ways to enhance diversity in the workforce, including ethnic diversity, gender balance, and potential alternative entry routes suited to individuals from a range of backgrounds.

Working Group Recommendations and Rationale

The Diversity subgroup addressed this ToR question in consultation with the main group, the full document developed by the group is detailed here.

Diversity is about the kaleidoscope of individuals and communities living in Ireland. Diversity is also about our multiple identities as individuals within our communities. While the workforce ToR name ethnic and gender diversity it is important to acknowledge that there are many who experience inequality and exclusion in Irish society including, for example, LGBTQ and disability. Hence the
importance of, highlighting intersectionality which can include migration background, ethnicity, gender, disability, cultural and religious background, social class and sexual orientation. Hence the focus on alternative entry routes to enhance diversity in the workforce needs to address all areas of diversity and its intersectionality. It is also important to target hard-to-reach groups for example Travellers and Roma. Diversity in the workforce is also important for all children, both majority and minority children.

Addressing diversity within ECEC also requires acknowledgment of inequality and the discrimination that affects many in our society negatively.

Having a diverse workforce also means ensuring that our services have robust policies in place that ensure non-discrimination for children, families, communities and for the staff.

Diversity, Equality and Inclusion are systemic issues and hence need to be address in ECEC at all levels. It requires a holistic approach to meet the diverse needs of children, families, staff and society. The DEI Charter and Guidelines (DCYA, 2016) are an excellent starting point because they address diversity from an Anti-bias perspective which includes recognition and respect for diversity, addressing inequality and how to reflect on our attitudes and values. The guidelines also support engagement with individual and societal issues such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia. This approach is particularly relevant in early childhood settings including school aged childcare and childminding as children begin to form both positive and negative attitudes to difference in the early years. The current training on implementing the DEI guidelines is 15 hours this needs to be extended and accredited to provide more robust Anti-bias training. This is important for addressing DEI in the sector and challenging ECEC and SAC educators’ conscious and unconscious bias around all isms.

Data Collection
Currently there is no validated data available in relation to the number of people from minority groups or with a background of migration, working in early childhood, SAC or childminding settings in Ireland. There is also no data on distribution of role profiles of those working in ECEC. There is a need for disaggregated data for all educators working in ECEC.

Gender
The gendered nature of the ECEC sector leads to a particular form of discrimination for men in ECEC. This is based largely on the risk-adverse climate regarding child-abuse in society today. It also has to do with conditions of service and stereotypes associated with male engagement with children which comes from both parents and staff working in ECEC. Research has demonstrated the need to
‘overcome essentialist conceptions of differences between body and mind, women and men’ (Peeters, Rohrmann & Emilsen, 2015). Approximately 1% of the ECEC workforce are male in Ireland. This is a shocking reflection on the lack of action on addressing the role of the male in ECEC nationally and internationally despite EU measures. The EU set a target in 1996 to achieve a 20% male workforce by 2006. The evidence shows that 97% of the workforce is female in Europe (EU, 2019). There is an urgent need to increase the gender diversity of the workforce through a variety of affirmative actions and new targets need to be set. It’s believe that the inclusion of trained male educators could have a significant impact on the levels of negative stereotyping about men and their abilities to nurture and care for children. Male role models are for children but also for parents and society. A vision of men working with children is one that should be aspire to.

**Hard to Reach Groups: One Example**

Traveller and Roma representative groups generally do not have funding to address early childhood issues and education issues. Many Travellers and Roma do not attend or use all the provisions available to them for their children. There are multiple reasons for this but trust is a major one. There is a need for outreach work to be undertaken through Traveller representative organisations with county childcare committees or other groups to inform and engage Travellers on early childhood services. Technological issues in registering can also be problematic especially for Travellers who are experiencing issues with accommodation. Information is about the value of ECEC as much as it is about how to access services. It’s known that many young Traveller and Roma children who have not attended ECEC run into challenges when they enter the primary system, so it is vital to begin this work promptly. Outreach work is also required to support Travellers and Roma into ECEC training and into the sector. There are issues around resourcing and progression which need to be explored.

Recommended actions to enhance diversity in the workforce, including early childhood services, school age childcare and childminding to increase diversity in the workforce requires a clear political aim and commitment.

**Key recommendation for immediate action: Address across departments as necessary.**

**Develop a Strategy**

Create an inter-departmental group to develop a strategy that includes;

- the data deficit,
- conditions for workers,
- review of international research,
- routes and pro-active targeted actions for hard to reach groups into ECEC.
The strategy should include targets, an implementation plan, monitoring, timeframe and action review, evaluation and resourcing.

Diversity experts

Diversity experts should be present in various internal and external committees when new initiatives are being developed. To look at (new) policy initiatives from a diversity perspective and ensure that attention is paid to diversity within these developments.

Policy, Conditions and Resourcing.

Address the conditions for all staff working in early childhood and SAC. Incentivise employment ensure promotion opportunities.

Set Targets

- Targets need to be set for increasing diversity in early childhood and SAC for both gender and broader diversity. Example: minimum of 10% of men working in the early years sector by 2028.
- Similar to Scotland, a programme needs to be put in place to support and encourage more men to work in childcare this may include a funding stream similar to the Men in Early Years Challenge Fund: Encouraging more men into childcare - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

Policy

- Develop an implementation plan for the strategy.
- National register of early childhood educators to include an ethnic identifier. The group was cognisant that a national register would require a legislative footing if it were to be a mandatory register for all.
- Policy guidelines/regulations on level of English language proficiency required to work in ECEC. Guidelines to also include how 2nd language speakers enhance ECEC.
- Develop a messaging programme working with the sector: Making diversity visible in ECEC for parents and society.
- Engage with DES, the HEA and the ETB.
- Provide funding strands to support access and inclusion.

Service Level Practical Initiatives

- Support for services with appropriate recruitment policies and procedures.
• Leadership training is key in recruitment, induction and ongoing CPD in attracting and retaining staff from a diverse range of backgrounds.

• Recruitment with intent which is specifically targeted to include, alternative entry routes, better access programmes, targeted at different groups to include incentives.

Pre-service and Continuous Professional Development: HEA and ETB Levels

• Engagement with HEA and ETB’s on the development of clear access routes into colleges.

• Develop supportive in house mentoring and networking opportunities to create a sense of belonging and promote active participation in college. Support University and colleges to develop ECEC promotional material and outreach initiatives for hard to reach groups.

• Need for HEA, ETB’s policy and ECEC programme action to ensure the ECEC curriculum is not focused solely on “western culture” and ensure that all ECEC programmes address DEI comprehensively in course materials with the DEI guidelines as a core resource. All teaching staff should have attended anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-classist anti-ablest, anti-homophobic training that addresses all isms. It is important for staff to acquire diversity skills and knowledge of the mechanisms of (unconscious) prejudices and direct and indirect discrimination.

• The need for a more diverse training/lecturing cohort; across all roles/levels/ contexts of the wider ECEC/SAC field. This is important for creating an inclusive climate and sense of belonging for students.

Promotion at Societal and Secondary Levels

• Promote working in early childhood education and care for men through career guidance in secondary schools, supporting engagement with the workforce through transition year. Provide financial resources for mature male students and recruit with intent.

• Collaboration with secondary education and external partners (Traveller and Roma or other representative groups) is crucial for the success of promotional initiatives.

Local Initiatives (national policy implications)

• Identify clear pathways for mature learners to come in and stay in the workforce, look at alternative entry routes.

• Incentivise PD training including the current DEI training being rolled out by the CCC’s. The training should be mandatory, certified and include a capitation. The DEI training addresses issues for both the child and the adult. It is experiential training which addressed attitudes and values and our role as ECEC educators. To embed an anti-bias approach (DEI Charter and Guideline, 2016) all staff need to be trained to ensure consistent practice across the service.
Therefore PD training on DEI should be mandatory and hence certified. This training also needs to be extended beyond 15 hours to enable in-depth engagement with the content to meet criteria for accreditation.

- Provide training supports for peer learning on diversity issues and networking in local areas.
- Provide learner funding and targeted funding programmes to meet the needs of different groups.

**Review and Research Increased Diversity**

- Review international research on how diversity in the workforce is enhanced in areas such as indigenous groups, minority groups and gender.
- There is a need for disaggregated data for all educators working in ECEC. (see questions under data collection)
- Data collection on language proficiencies.
- Gather data on the career progression route of men who qualified with an early childhood education and care degree and/or ETB training qualification.
- Research the supports, and challenges for diverse groups including gender on accessing the ECEC workforce.

**Outreach Work for Immediate Action**

- Develop alliances immediately with representative groups with a view to agreeing steps to progress outreach work and clear pathways to developing a diverse workforce (Roma, Traveller, men in childcare, disability groups, immigrant and migrant groups).
- Target students through a diversity-aware recruitment initiative. If recruited they need to be well informed about their choice and are well prepared when starting their study programme.
- Resource representative organisations to work in partnership with county and city childcare committees.
- Develop promotional, outreach and training programmes targeted in areas where there is known to be diverse populations. Access CSO data.
- Establish regional communities of practice, supported by community representatives.

**Proposed timelines to 2028**

**Immediate**

- Develop a strategy (inter-departmental)
- Identify Targets for a diverse workforce: (example)
  - 10% Gender by 2018
  - 10% diverse workforce 2028
• Data Collection and Research
• Develop alliances with and resource representative organisations and diversity networks through CCC’s to work in partnership with local groups and with HEA, ETB’s as necessary
• DEI Training enhanced and incentivised
• Initiated initial conversations with DES, HEA and the ETB
• Address English language proficiency

Medium Term
• Promotional initiatives for a diverse workforce
• National Register of ECEC educators including ethnic identifier
• Development of clear pathway to ETB’s and HEA colleges and universities
• Address decolonisation in ECEC pre and in-service education and training
• Targeted resourcing and training for diverse groups
• Support local services to support recruitment, training and mentoring,

Medium - long Term: 2024 -2028
• Review the implementation plan. Continuous data, monitoring and evaluation against set targets.
• Evaluate the initiative.

Financial Implications
Development and implementation of a strategy

Term of Reference 4 Consideration of the appropriate role for the State in facilitating the development of a professional association
Consideration of the appropriate role for the State in facilitating the development of a professional association, drawing on comparisons with other jurisdictions and other professions.

Working Group Recommendations and Rationale
The working group agreed that the establishment of a professional association would support the further professionalization of the Sector. A sub-group, which did not include Department officials, looked at item 4 in the ToR – consideration of the appropriate role for the State in facilitating the development of a professional association. The sub-group’s full proposal considered not just the role of the State but suggested next steps that might be undertaken in the formation of a professional association. A further document proposes a pathway to the establishment of a professional association for the early childhood education and care and school age childcare workforce. Beginning with an introduction, followed by an outline of the potential areas of responsibilities of a professional
association, suggestions re a staged process for achieving the goals, resourcing and areas for further discussion are included in the proposal document.

The working group agree that the presence of a Professional Association (PA) is an element of an effective Early Childhood System and one that needs further development in the Irish context. Issues related to the profession are impeding the provision of a high quality system and impacting the experiences of children and families. While it is acknowledged that many areas related to high quality provision are currently being examined at various fora, matters related to a PA also need attention. *First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019- 2028 (DCYA2018)* articulates a professionalisation agenda, and the development of professional association would support of this agenda.

In order to achieve the goals of professionalising the workforce, the working group suggest that the State should play a specific role in supporting the establishment of a professional association. However the role of the state should be limited to facilitating the conditions for and providing resourcing supports to establish this professional association.

It is envisaged that the professional association would be a self-sufficient, autonomous association, managed by and for the profession.

In order to establish the professional association, the sub-group proposed that state resourcing would be critical to ensure initial and on-going costs are met over a phased basis. The following are proposed timelines to 2028.

**Proposed timelines to 2028**

**Immediate**

- Proposal that State provides resourcing to support the establishment and work of a Steering group to establish a Professional Association which will overtime become self-sufficient, autonomous and managed by the profession for the profession.

**Medium- Long Term 2024-2028**

- Phased reduction of resources over a five year period, following this initial setup phase.
- Membership Fees; Initial membership will not be charged or there will be a nominal charge only, in order to build the membership base. It is proposed that this initial cost will be covered by initial state resource support. On-going sustainability of the PA will be based on membership fees and in the provision of possible (as yet unidentified) services to the early childhood field.
• Review and evaluate progress against key performance indicators, quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

Financial Implications
Initial resourcing to support the establishment and work of a Steering group to establish a Professional Association which will over time become self-sufficient, autonomous and managed by the profession for the profession.

Term of Reference 5: Next steps in the process of movement towards establishment of a statutory professional standards body / professional regulator
Next steps in the process of movement towards; establishment of a statutory professional standards body / professional regulator, drawing on comparisons with other jurisdictions and other professions.

Working Group Recommendations and Rationale
The working group has given this question thorough informed consideration and significant discussion. This discussion has been informed by knowledge of professional regulators in other sectors and a presentation by Dr. Michelle O’Sullivan Kemmy Business School University of Limerick in March 2021 on regulation.

As identified by the group that the establishment of a professional association would support the further professionalization of the Sector and while a professional regulator may develop in time it is considered by the working group that the imposing of a professional regulator in an already highly regulated environment may cause increased burden at present.

Proposed timelines to 2028
Immediate - medium term

• It was proposed that certain elements that the establishment of a Professional Regulator would provide could be advanced through alternative mechanism in the shorter term such as completion of;
  o QQI Process
  o QAB Process
  o CPD Oversight process

• The working group are in agreement that the State should be responsible for determining when a Professional Regulator should be established.

In advance and in preparation:
• An audit needs to be conducted on current processes, the findings of which should clarify and identify the proposed roles and responsibilities of a Professional Association and the specific statutory requirements for the sector, which would be the responsibility of a Professional Regulator. It will be the decision of the state to decide if or when a Professional Regulator is required.

• It was also agreed that any processes should be positive and inclusive, supporting members of the profession along the journey towards regulation.

Medium – Long term

• The working group agree that the decision for a regulator is the responsibility of the state. Following an audit of the regulatory requirements of the sector, when issues of pay and conditions have been addressed, a decision needs to be taken by the state to determine if a professional regulator is required and the roles and responsibilities of the Professional Regulator.

Financial implications
Costs associated with the establishment of a Professional Regulator.

Term of Reference 6: Regulatory requirements for working in the sector
Regulatory requirements for working in the sector (other than qualification requirements), including language proficiency requirements.

Working Group Recommendations and Rationale
Language Proficiency

The issue of language proficiency of staff in early childhood settings, school age childcare and childminder settings was identified by the working group as a significant concern which needs to be addressed.

Currently there is no data available in relation to the language proficiency of ECEC professionals working in early years settings in Ireland. Concerns voiced by the working group are based on anecdotal evidence from a variety of sources and therefore may require additional research. This workforce development plan offers an opportunity to ensure that all children and families have access to early years professionals who can communicate effectively supporting one of the most critical elements of quality early years provision, positive interactions and relationships.

Therefore consideration to English language proficiency of staff in settings including the number of staff on temporary work/living visas with English as second language requires investigation. This is of
particular concern for those working with very young children. The working group suggest that there is a need to put systems or regulations in place to address English language proficiency levels.

The working group acknowledge the importance of having a diverse workforce and value and recognise that ECEC professionals who have English as a second language are proficient in their home language. Therefore mechanisms to embrace and avail of this opportunity for children, needs to be recognised and developed in early childhood education and care settings. Members of the working group confirmed during discussion that they are aware that staff have been asked not to speak their home language with other staff or children in services. This is something that needs to be addressed at policy level.

In order to consider possible language proficiency requirements a review of the language proficiency requirement in other jurisdictions was undertaken. This review was based primarily based on the Seepro-r report; *Early Childhood Workforce Profiles in 30 countries with Key Contextual Data* (Oberhuemer and Schreyer 2018). Other data was taken into consideration based on the expertise within the group, conversations with international colleagues and reported evidence from practice. This data guided the group discussion.

It was decided to consider language competency requirements based on four different cohorts. These include; ECEC professionals who undertake their initial ECEC qualification training in Ireland, ECEC professionals who come to work in Ireland who have qualified in ECEC in another jurisdiction, ECEC professionals who have qualified in another jurisdiction who are currently working in Ireland and staff who work in ECEC settings which are immersive or bilingual settings.

**Requirements for students undertaking Early Learning and Care Programmes; level 5-8 NFQ in Ireland**

Based on the requirements of students undertaking ECEC programmes in Ireland to have an English language competency to undertake the programmes from level 5-8NFQ, the requirement for English language competency is addressed at this stage. The Professional Award-type Descriptors at NFQ levels 5 to 8: Annotated for QQI Early Learning and Care (ELC) Awards identify a minimum English language and literacy competency for learners who are going to undertake NFQ level 5 and 6 Early Learning and Care programmes. The competency level for speakers of English as a second language when these programmes are implemented in 2022 will be B2 in writing, reading, listening and speaking. This competency level is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

**ECEC professionals who come to work in Ireland who have qualified in ECEC in another jurisdiction**
As there is a language competency level required by ECEC educators who undertake their training and graduate from Irish educational institutions, it was considered by the group that ECEC educators from other jurisdictions should also have this minimum language competency requirement to work directly with children in early childhood education and care settings in Ireland. The working group suggests that when applications for recognition of foreign qualifications were being assessed, that language proficiency should also be an assessment requirement.

**ECEC professionals who have qualified in another jurisdiction who are currently working in Ireland**

This seems to be the cohort which is currently the cause of concern who are working with children in ECEC services in Ireland. The working group agreed that the current cohort must firstly be identified and resources put in place to support these ECEC professionals during a transition phase to attain the same language proficiency which is required from ECEC professionals who undertake their education and training in Ireland. The working group accept that they are not the appropriate group to provide detailed recommendations in relation to pedagogical input or time scales for the transition period. The working group suggests that a language proficiency working group should be set up to explore this area further, guided by language development/linguistic experts.

**Immersive and Bilingual settings**

The working group agree that specific strategic leadership is required for immersive and bilingual settings in Ireland. It is evident that there are gaps in terms of national linguistic strategy, national campaigns and defects in the practical support given to Irish-language services. Therefore a language planning powerhouse in the government is required. The need for a separate body that would solely focus on this area should be researched. An independent body could be objective and analytical and undertake work such as preparation of legislation, strategic language planning, etc.

The immersion education model is considered suitable for children regardless of their home language or of any special educational needs the child might have. It is recognised in both national and international research as benefitting children in a number of ways:

- Greater cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking
- Increased intentional control and enhanced executive control
- Supports children’s language acquisition through total absorption and involvement
- Children gain a better understanding of the foundations of language – grammar, word formation, sentence order
- Transferable concepts and skills means ability in other languages (including English) increases
• Fosters higher levels of tolerance, a greater sense of identity and increased self-esteem
• Bilingual education for children with SEN ‘does no harm and clearly does contribute to social, emotional and interpersonal growth’ (NCSE, 2011)

The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 do not specify any required language qualifications and there is no requirement to register the language of a service. Equally there is no copyright on the use of the term ‘naíonra’. Gaeloideachas defines a naíonra as an early-years service that practices Irish-medium immersion education. Naíonraí are not inspected against any language requirements. The Department of Education’s focused inspections take account of the language of the service, but do not directly inspect against the staff’s competency in Irish.

**Irish Language competency**

Gaeloideachas recommends that the lead early-years teacher in a naíonra should have a level B2 TEG (Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge) qualification in Irish (or equivalent) and that assistant early-years teachers should have a level B1 TEG qualification (or equivalent). This refers solely to the oral component of the qualification. This recommendation is made on the basis that TEG levels B2 and B1 demonstrate the oral competency required for good practice in immersion education. It does not however think that this should be a regulatory requirement at the moment.

**Proposed timelines to 2028**

**Immediate**

• Proposed Language proficiency of B2 in writing, reading, listening and speaking for all practitioners working with children. This competency level is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.
• Research to be conducted on language proficiency and the number of ECEC professionals working in early years settings on temporary work/living visas with English as a second language.

**Medium – Long term**

• Regulation to include a language competency requirement for individuals working in ECEC settings in Ireland needs to be developed and introduced.
• Establishment of a language competency working group guided by language development and linguistic experts.

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1 Note that the DCEDIY uses the term ‘naíonra’ in Irish as a translation for ‘early years service’, and as such it does not necessarily denote the working language of the service.
• Associated supports need to be put in place to support ECEC professionals already working in the sector to meet impending regulatory requirements.

• Applications received from ECEC professionals to have their foreign ECEC qualifications recognised, should be required to have evidence of language competency requirements.

For an immersive language experience, a high level of language competency is required of the ECEC professional. The following are the high level requirements.

• Promote proficiency in Irish as a core competency for ECEC professionals.

• Increase numbers of staff with higher Irish language proficiency.

• Commission research on best practice in immersion education in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht naíonra services.

• Develop a quality assurance programme which focuses on the Irish language component.

• Support the development of ECEC initial teacher education through the medium of Irish.

The following provide examples of how the above may be addressed in practice.

• Incentivise ECEC professionals to attain TEG B2 qualifications in Irish through the provision of higher capitation, bursaries, grants for naíonraí particularly those outside of the Gaeltacht areas.

• Conduct research with early-years services that operate through Irish, to ascertain the profile of those working in the sector, audit mentoring and training supports and identify requirements.

• Conduct research on best practice in immersion education in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht naíonra services.

• Based on the findings of the research establish online and blended training programmes including accredited and continual professional development programmes.

• Develop a bridging programme similar to that in Marino for primary school teachers, teaching through Irish for the early-years sector.

**Financial Implications**

Establishment of a language competency working group associated costs to support research, training, transition periods, Irish language sector and associated costs.