Workforce Development Plan
Phase 2 Working Groups Progress Report
Qualifications and Training for School Age Childcare Working Group

July 2021
Introduction

The Workforce Development Plan is being developed in close collaboration by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The development of the Plan is being 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 of School Age Childcare

Purpose

The purpose of the Qualifications and Training for School-Age Childcare Working Group is to develop proposals for consideration by the Workforce Development Plan (WDP) Steering Group – including rationale, approach to implementation (given the current workforce context), timelines for reform, initial actions and (where relevant) financial implications and trade-offs – on a career framework for school age childcare including identification of roles, role profiles and titles, pre-requirements for different roles, career pathways, and the application of the career framework to different types of setting.

This document provides progress and recommendations of the School-Age Childcare (SAC) Working Group from 17th February 2021 to 22nd July 2021.

Qualifications and Training for School Age Childcare Working Group Membership

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<td>Rapporteur</td>
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<td>Admin</td>
<td>Tobin, Barry / Anthony Garbari</td>
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<td>Clince, Karen</td>
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<td>Kilbane, Louise</td>
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<td>McCartney, Peter</td>
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<td>Quinn, Marian</td>
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Context, Challenges and Opportunities

Context

The members of the group took part in a guided discussion facilitated by the chair, to share their views/perspectives on SAC so that they could move forward with the ToRs. Members of the WG pulled together the common themes emerging and a vision statement was created and disseminated to the group.

Topics that have been discussed in other Working Groups have impacted on the work of the SAC. This has been the impetus for the organisation of discussion groups that required input from the CPD, Career Pathways and Framework and the SAC working groups.

The questions of an induction process (see below), and features of leadership programmes to follow national quality guidelines (see below) and an aligned ELC and SAC award programme have been raised in these groups.

From the meetings held, discussion notes were disseminated and observations were made by the members of each WG.

Eight meetings of the Qualification and Training for School-Age Childcare Working Group have been held to date. All items within the Terms of Reference have been considered with in-depth discussions held regarding role profiles of SAC practitioners and working titles for these roles; professional award type descriptors for a Level 5 award in school age childcare; range of qualifications for recognition within comprehensive SAC regulations; add-on/transition training programme; leadership training programme and Continuing Professional Development supports.

At the second working group meeting, it was agreed that three sub groups should be formed (as outlined below) and members of the working put themselves forward for each group.

- Role Profiles Subgroup – five meetings held
- CPD and Training Subgroup – two meetings held
- Mapping Subgroup - one meeting held

Subgroup on Role Profiles

The purpose of this subgroup was to develop role profiles for people working in the SAC sector. This informed the work of the Qualifications and CPD subgroup.

Subgroup on Qualifications and CPD

The purpose of this subgroup is to develop proposals under the terms of reference of the SAC Working Group.

Subgroup on Mapping

The purpose of this subgroup is to map existing qualifications and courses in SAC that are currently being delivered across Ireland.

Challenges

The Sector

The School-Age Childcare sector is in a transition phase in which it requires a strategic overview to ensure that the upskilling of the workforce is a cohesive and progressive one that does not leave experienced practitioners behind but supports the sector to achieve new skills, knowledge and competencies. It requires strategic supports to professionalise the sector and to eventually progress to a graduate lead sector.
It should be acknowledged that the School Aged Childcare (SAC) sector is at a different stage in its lifecycle compared to Early Learning and Care (ELC) and therefore requires focus on and funding to develop as a professional sector to provide and deliver quality to children, parents and families

No SAC Vision

Another challenge facing the SAC sector is that there is no common vision for it. Members of the WG were brought together to work on the ToRs without having a shared vision of SAC. It was agreed that an overarching vision of SAC and a full review of the Action Plan (2017) would be important in ensuring a cohesive, professional and strong SAC sector.

SAC seen as an ‘add-on’ to ELC

One of the main challenges facing the sector is that it has often been seen as additional or supplemental to ELC as a profession. It is important that SAC is central to the frameworks and structures put in place as part of the Workforce Development Plan. Consideration must be made to ensure that SAC is acknowledged as a profession in its own right and not considered as an “add-on” for those who have already engaged in an ELC award.

Opportunities

National Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services (2020)

It was agreed by members of the Working Group that, as the National Guidelines for School Age Childcare Services (2020) outline quality practice for SAC in Ireland, it is imperative that these are clearly reflected in the vision of SAC, the role profiles and the PATDs. At the last meeting of the WG on 1st July, this was also agreed by the attendees. The Guidelines have been used to inform the role profiles and were used to compile the 2nd draft of PATDs.

Development of a vision for SAC

The work currently being undertaken by the WDP Steering Group and SAC Working Group offers a timely opportunity to create a strong vision to drive the review of the Action Plan (2017). The WG have provided an example of this vision statement.

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are network groups with a common goal/expertise that support practitioners to create and access a pool of learning, and share learning and information to deepen understanding on this common interest or expertise.

It is proposed that communities of practice be formed for SAC nationwide to further develop professionalisation of the SAC sector.

Creation of an induction programme

At the second Working Group meeting, it was suggested that an induction process be developed that would support the new SAC professional to develop skills when they were in situ. Recommendations were made in the progress report on 1st April 2021 that the SAC, Careers Framework/pathways and CPD working groups work together to progress a professional induction process for SAC similar, for example, to Droichead for newly qualified teachers in Ireland.

As part of Phase 2 of the Workforce Development Plan (WDP), four working groups (Career Framework / Pathways, CPD, Promotion & Regulation of the Profession, School Age Childcare) are examining issues to do with induction. Recognising the need to work through the areas of overlap, but also recognising
the key questions being raised on the topic of induction in the course of the working group discussions, a workshop dedicated to the topic was held on 28th May, drawing together members from across these four working groups.

An induction process will be supported by training that provides learners with a thorough understanding of their role as a SAC professional.

It has also been argued that it should not be the employer’s responsibility to fund or to drive this process. It is proposed that DCEDiY take responsibility for this as a national process and also fund its implementation and progression.

An induction process will take time to progress and may not be introduced on a mandatory basis by 2028. However, the proposal for carrying out important groundwork over the coming years, including developing external supports and piloting a provisional induction process, is welcome. The proposed research into effective induction processes in ELC contexts is needed to ensure an evidence informed approach. The Droichead induction process for newly qualified teachers may be a suitable approach to further explore in terms of suitability to a SAC context.

The responsibility for establishing an induction process should not be on the employer. The proposal for DCEDiY to take responsibility to progress this process in the short to middle term is appropriate, as it supports the mentoring and development of the new professional in the SAC sector.

Progression of features of Leadership

Recommendations were made in the progress report on 1st April 2021 that the SAC, Careers Framework/Pathways and CPD working groups work together to progress features of Leadership. The Leadership workshops held on 21st May 2021 delivered some proposals to be made to the Steering Group. Discussion notes were disseminated to the working groups of SAC, Careers Framework/Pathways and CPD to respond to those proposals.

- A manager of both an ELC and SAC service should have a qualification in either ELC or SAC. They should be supported through accredited CPD to gain knowledge, skills and competence in the other discipline.
- Members of the Working Group debated that leaders/managers require a foundation in SAC to understand the roles and responsibilities that practitioners in a setting have and, therefore, an administrative-only leadership programme is not sufficient.
- Working Group members also discussed how managers who do not have pedagogical knowledge may make decisions that override those of practitioners who do have this expertise, and this may not always be in the best interests of the school-age child.

Online awareness raising programme

In the short-term, while PATDs are being developed and a programme designed, a CPD online awareness raising programme will benefit those working in the SAC sector and will provide a nationwide standardised CPD opportunity for all SAC professionals. The content for this online learning can be designed using the National Quality Guidelines.

All CPD that is undertaken requires accreditation so that those who participate should be able to add credit value to their ‘toolbox’ of competencies to carry with them into their practice and as part of their professional development.

Graduate led workforce in the future

As the WDP sets out the pathway for qualification requirement to 2028, it is also an opportunity in the time up to 2028 to also start working towards a graduate led i.e. major award of level 7+, workforce within SAC to ensure the roles in SAC will eventually be similar to the roles in ELC.
Terms of Reference (TOR) Key Outputs

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

1) Role profiles of SAC practitioners, including
   a) a practitioner role(s)
   b) a leader role and
   c) working titles for these roles

2) Professional award type descriptors (PATD) for a Level 5 award in school age childcare, based on the proposed role profile.

3) Recommendations on the range of qualifications that should be accepted as appropriate for recognition in comprehensive SAC regulations (or that might be accepted in combination with supplementary training specific to SAC) in addition to a specific Level 5 award in school-age childcare

4) Features of an “add-on” training programme on school age childcare aimed at practitioners who already have a qualification in early learning and care.

5) Features of a leadership training programme for SAC, in line with the proposed role profile for a SAC leader.

6) Priorities and a timeline for further development of Continuing Professional Development supports for SAC services and staff, including initial actions during 2022-2024.

The group has carried out research to inform their work as outlined below:

- National Guidelines were used to inform draft of role profiles
- Playwork qualifications, levels and progression path were presented
- Job descriptions in Ireland and other jurisdictions were reviewed
- ECEC Working Group Report DEC 2020 was reviewed
- QQI Professional Descriptors and Annotations (ELC) were considered and QQI and DES were consulted on the development of Professional Award-Type Descriptors (PATDs) and annotations in SAC
- Reports and modules were disseminated to inform the WG on the piloting of the SACCI award and also the SACCI mandatory modules that were decommitted in 2012/13.

ToR 1, Role profiles
Create role profiles of SAC practitioners, including, a practitioner role(s), a leader role and working titles for these roles

Working Group Recommendations and Rationale
The draft for Early Years Role Profiles (DCEDIY) was used as a template to compile the tasks and responsibilities, and knowledge and skills, required by School Age Care Professionals. The National Guidelines for SAC were also used as a guide for informing SAC role profiles for this jurisdiction.

The Role profiles have been broadly agreed along with the PATDs and will both be submitted for feedback to the Steering Group. The Chair of the SAC Working Group disseminated questions to the group on the requirement of a coordinating/mentoring role in SAC and to consider whether two or three roles are appropriate in the SAC sector.

The broad agreement is that the working titles for the roles in the SAC sector be SAC Practitioner and SAC Manager in the short term. Both role titles will be reviewed in the medium/long term.
The WG believe that in the short term, the two roles of Manager and Practitioner best reflect the practice in the SAC sector.

The naming of roles will be finalised through the work of a professional association, including public consultation, to be completed in the medium/long term (timeline to correspond with Career Pathways/Career Framework WG).

**ToR 2, Professional award type descriptors (PATD).**
Create a PATD for a Level 5 award in school age childcare, based on the proposed role profile.

**Working Group Recommendations and Rationale**

In the course of drafting PATDs a proposal was put forward, that there is an opportunity to develop a dual track ELC/SAC programme to take account of transferability of knowledge and skills between one area of expertise or the other, but also to take account that ELC and SAC also have different features within knowledge, skills and competences.

The programme would provide a foundation for learners as there are similar knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired, but would then be able to specialise in their field of interest. This supports transferability of their skills so that they are able to work in both ELC and SAC.

An orientation type of programme, such as happens in engineering, nursing etc., whereby learners sample a variety of roles within the sector at initial training before specialising in their preferred area, will support the new professional in choosing the area of their career they wish to pursue and may reduce high turnover of staff as they understand the role more deeply.

There are many similar features of skills, knowledge and competencies required of practitioners working in ELC and SAC. There are also differences and these could be addressed through the provision of choices within the programme when an individual identifies what area of expertise they wish to specialise in.

Therefore it is proposed that, in the longer term, instead of a separate SAC and ELC programme, a combined ELC/SAC programme be developed that will encompass the award type descriptors required in both ELC and SAC.

In the short- and medium-term, the newly designed ELC programme that is being rolled out in September 2021 might continue alongside a yet to be developed SAC award based on the drafted PATD in this report, until programmes are due for revalidation when the provision of a combined award will be taken into account.

The development of this combined programme would require a review of the PATDs of ELC and SAC to develop a PATD to combine similar descriptors and identify differences between the two areas.

**Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)**

Drafting PATDs for the SAC (SAC/ELC) Award offers an opportunity to take account of the prior learning of those in the SAC sector who have years of experience. Exemptions or legacy clauses from any ‘add-on’ course to bridge knowledge and skills will be available for experienced practitioners who can show evidence of prior experiential learning. The PATDs must be flexible enough to take account of RPEL of experienced practitioners.

This experiential learning will require a minimum and maximum length of time recognised as appropriate, which will need to be further explored.
QQI provided information about the work ETBs have developed with regard to RPEL provision across cohorts of learners allowing for knowledge and skills acquired through experiential learning.

It was also agreed by the group that the centrality of play and social learning is a unique identifier in SAC. Therefore there is a need for a clear definition of play, to address this different focus from ELCs. A proposal was subsequently made that a research paper be drafted on the meaning of play, the differing views of play and why we play. This theoretical paper might support a common understanding of the intrinsic value play has for children that might inform subsequent programme development of PATDs. It was also suggested that this definition of play be incorporated into the updated National Action Plan for SAC.

In the interim a PATD was compiled for a SAC level 5 programme (and also a level 6).

**ToR 3, range of qualifications that should be accepted for recognition in SAC**

Recommendations on the range of qualifications that should be accepted as appropriate for recognition in comprehensive SAC regulations (or that might be accepted in combination with supplementary training specific to SAC) in addition to a specific Level 5 award in school-age childcare.

**Working Group Recommendations and Rationale**

The working group believes that after a transition period, it will become a requirement that all staff working directly with children in centre-based SAC settings have one of the following:

- A Level 5 qualification in school-age childcare, OR
- A Level 5 qualification in early learning and care with SAC “add on”, OR
- An equivalent Level 5 qualification in an approved discipline with SAC “add on”.

The Working Group have proposed that the following qualifications are all appropriate disciplines to allow for working in the SAC sector:

- Youth Work
- Playwork
- ELC
- Social care
- Primary education
- Forest School

These programmes will all require an ‘add on’ so that the gaps in knowledge and skills are bridged to ensure that practitioners are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to proficiently carry out the role of SAC practitioner. Although the above list outlines courses that are closely aligned to the ethos of SAC they should not be seen as an exhausted list and further research is required to see if there are other programmes such as outdoor education courses that could be added.

**ToR 4, “Add-on” training programme for SAC**

Features of an “add-on” training programme on school age childcare aimed at practitioners who already have a qualification in early learning and care.

**Working Group Recommendations and Rationale**

A requirement will be put in place that, two years following the commencement of the regulatory requirement for minimum qualification, those with ELC or approved disciplines will complete a SAC
transition training programme. There is a framework for an ‘add-on’ for those who require bridging of knowledge and skills. The ‘add on’ may be similar to the Level 3 Transition to Playwork and will need to take account of the context of SAC as delivered in Ireland. The ‘add-on’ must also have fidelity with the seven guidelines within the National Guidelines for School-Age Childcare Services.

- Leadership, Governance and Service Management
- Staff and Professional Practice
- The Environment
- Health, well-being and Safety
- Nurturing Relationships and Supportive Interactions
- Programme of Activities
- Collaborative Partnerships with Parents, Families and Communities

In the short/medium term, the transition award will be a voluntary requirement of practitioners. In the long term, after 2028, the transition award will be made mandatory for those working within SAC sector.

It is proposed that after the commencement of the regulatory requirement for a minimum qualification in SAC, those with qualifications in ELC or other approved disciplines will be required to complete the SAC transition training programme if they do not meet RPEL criteria.

The ELC/SAC sector will benefit from the transferability of qualifications across the sector so that practitioners can move easily from ELC and SAC. This reflects the sector with many practitioners working in ELC in the morning and SAC in the afternoon.

The working group also discussed the further exploration of the School Age Childcare Initiative (SACCI) award archived in 2012, to identify whether it would be appropriate to reinstate or inform the qualification that will be developed. The WG accessed information on the mandatory SACCI award modules which was disseminated on 28 June.

The PATDs will require immediate review by a working group then submitted to QQI for the consultation process to take place.

**ToR 5, features of a leadership training programme for SAC**

Features of a leadership training programme for SAC, in line with the proposed role profile for a SAC leader.

**Working Group Recommendations and Rationale**

It is proposed that a Leadership training programme would be developed that might encompass both administrative/business and leadership of practice.

A proposal was made that the features of a Leadership programme is informed by the National Quality Guidelines. For example, Guideline 1: Leadership, Governance and Service Management and Guideline 2: Staff and Professional Practice, the first two guidelines, will inform some of the features of this leadership programme.

(It could include features such as leadership concepts and practices, implementing collaborative practices, understanding theory and practice of play to coordinate its implementation in settings, knowledge, skills and competencies around Government funding schemes and report writing.)
In the short term, an open access online awareness training in relation to School-Age Childcare can be developed and awareness raising training made available as soon as is practicable. (see proposed timelines p12)

An online awareness raising programme has been put forward as a proposal to provide the first step to developing specific CPD opportunities for the SAC sector. It is proposed that the topics will be informed by the National Quality Guidelines.

The National CPD framework will incorporate SAC with the following topics identified for initial roll out during in the short term.

Suggested features of awareness raising level training are:

- SAC function, purpose
- Policies & Procedures
- Supporting children and young people’s play
- SAC environment
- resilience & well-being
- positive strategies for social and emotional development
- Child Safeguarding (link out)
- communication and partnership with parents
- collaboration with children and young people
- Inclusion, relevant to child development 4-14 years

Other CPD supports will require the inclusion of a Train the Trainer programme to deliver quality training of SAC in the sector.

Mentoring supports, a Train the Trainer programme and support resources such as publications and developed networks such as communities of practice will all contribute to professionalisation within the SAC sector. This requires a timeline that will align with the implementation of a SAC award. This requires timelines proposed by Working Group

Proposed Timelines to 2028
Short Term – 2020-2023

- The review and update of SAC action plan (2017) requires immediate attention to include the vision and provide the purpose and roadmap for the sector.
- Finalisation of an SAC PATDs by a working group to complete the development and consultation process of a new award for roll out in the short term. Possible submission of PATD to QQI by September/October.
- Further analysis on recognised courses for SAC qualification alignment
- The WG believe that in the short term, the two roles of Manager and Practitioner best reflect the practice in the SAC sector. Also noted that there are specialist responsibilities that current lie with these roles. This should remain under review especially with future ambitions to have a graduate led workforce is SAC
- An open access online awareness training in relation to School-Age Childcare should be developed and awareness raising training made available as soon as is practicable.
Medium Term – 2023-2025

- Introduction of a minimum requirement for a Level 5 SAC qualification for all practitioners and Managers.
- The final naming of roles will be finalised through the work of a professional association, including public consultation, to be completed in the medium/long term (timeline to correspond with Career Pathways/Career Framework WG.
- Leadership training programme should be developed encompassing both administrative/business and leadership of practice.
- Features of a Leadership programme should also be informed by the National Quality Guidelines and include Leadership, Governance and Service Management and Staff and Professional Practice.

Long Term – 2025-2028

- Proposed review of ELC and SAC programs with a view to the establishment of a combined Level 5 qualification in ELC and SAC.
- Transition award will be made mandatory for those working within SAC sector.
- Research how to implement a graduate led (major award level 7 + ) for SAC similar to that in ELC.

Financial implications

Training for specialist roles will require CPD funding for training the trainer.

The learner fund will fully fund all CPD (including training) for practitioners to build on their skills.

The development of an aligned ELC and SAC programme will create savings in the further development of programmes.

The DECDIY will be responsible for driving an induction framework and therefore will fully fund all suitable induction process that supports the development of the novice professional into a setting.