



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, 2022- 2028

Annual Monitoring Report on the
Implementation of Nurturing Skills, 2023

April 2024

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1. Acronyms

CCC	City / County Childcare Committee
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DE	Department of Education
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DTCAGSM	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ELC	Early Learning and Care
JLC	Joint Labour Committee
NAPC	National Action Plan for Childminding
NCS	National Childcare Scheme
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACG	Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines
PATD	Professional Award-Type Descriptors
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAC	School-Age Childcare
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
EPM	Equal Participation Model

2. Introduction

Nurturing Skills, the Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, 2022 – 2028, sets out a vision of:

'A well-qualified, skilled, diverse and valued professional workforce that is centred on children's rights, needs and potential and that provides quality experiences for children in partnership with families, and which continues to advance its professional development within a coherent and competent system.'

The plan aims to raise qualification levels, to create professional development pathways, and to promote careers in the sector. Nurturing Skills aims to achieve these objectives through five Pillars of support for the workforce, each Pillar containing a series of actions to meet these objectives over the lifetime of the plan, and also details an implementation plan for the initial three years (2022-2024).

The Nurturing Skills Implementation Plan 2022-2024 identifies more than 57 initial actions across Government Departments and State Agencies. This annual report focuses on key achievements in 2023 and describes progress across the five pillars of support with a progress update on each action presented in tabular form.

The vision and actions in Nurturing Skills are in line with the EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, which calls on EU Member States to achieve both well-qualified staff with training that enables them to fulfil their professional role and supportive working conditions, and with the commitment in First 5 to develop an effective early childhood system that will help all babies and young children to have positive early experiences.

The vision and actions in Nurturing Skills are also in line with the National Quality Guidelines for SAC, which stress the importance of staff qualifications and training in ensuring quality services for school-age children, and with the National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028, which commits to extending regulation, training, and supports to childminders over the years ahead.

In November 2023, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) launched the latest implementation plan for First 5, First 5 Implementation Plan (2023-2025), marking the beginning of the second implementation phase of this ten-year, whole-of-government Strategy. Building on the very significant developments in Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) over recent years, this next phase of First 5 implementation seeks to further improve affordability, accessibility and quality. Measures include: further development of Together for Better (the new funding model for ELC and SAC), as well as implementation of Nurturing Skills, the Workforce Plan for ELC and SAC (2022-2028).

3. Monitoring Committee

Nurturing Skills committed to establishment of a Monitoring Committee to oversee implementation. Relevant state bodies were invited to nominate a representative. In addition, a representative was appointed from among members of the Stakeholder Group which supported the development of Nurturing Skills, on the basis of the nominations received.

Implementation through to 2028 will be overseen by the Nurturing Skills Monitoring Committee. The Monitoring Committee will carry out a mid-point review by 2025 that will consider possible amendments to the Plan in light of progress made and will inform development of a second implementation plan for 2025-2028.

The Monitoring Committee met once during 2023 with an agreement to hold the second meeting for 2023 in early January 2024.

During 2023, the Monitoring Committee began to prepare for the 2025 mid-point review of Nurturing Skills. It was agreed to invite members of the stakeholder group previously established for the development of Nurturing Skills to join an advisory group to assist with the mid-point review. The Monitoring Committee agreed draft terms of reference for the advisory group. It was noted by the Committee that the advisory group for the mid-point review would give an opportunity to wider stakeholders to input into the monitoring of Nurturing Skills at a key point in time. The advisory group will be formed in 2024.

4. Implementation of actions in 2023

Summary of Nurturing Skills action status for 2023*

Nurturing Skills Pillars	Complete	In Progress	Not Started	Grand Total
Raising qualification levels: ELC	1	6		7
Raising qualification levels: SAC		4	2	6
Raising qualification levels: Childminding		3	2	5
Developing a national CPD system	1	10		11
Establishing a career framework		2		2
Moving towards regulation of the profession		1	2	3
Supporting recruitment, retention and diversity		3	3	6
Key enablers	2	4	1	7
Total actions for 2023*	4	33	10	47

*Note: Count of actions above are for the period 2022 and 2023 only and does not include actions due to commence in 2024

4.1 Pillar 1: Establishing a career framework

Nurturing Skills committed to identification and development of professional roles in early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) over the period to 2028, providing a career framework and career development pathway. Nurturing Skills identified initial roles as:

- Early years educator / School-age childcare practitioner;
- Lead Educator, which is intended to become a graduate role over time;
- Manager (both ELC and SAC), which is intended to become a graduate role in ELC over time.

During 2022 these roles were given legal meaning through forming the basis of the historic first Employment Regulations Orders (ERO) for the sector

DCEDIY continues to promote these defined roles, and the terminology associated with them, in all its communications. In their interactions with the Early Years Hive Portal (hosted by Pobal), service providers are required to use the roles set out in Nurturing Skills when recording staff members and claiming specific payments such as the graduate premium in the Core Funding Scheme.

Nurturing Skills set a number of targets for raising the qualifications of the workforce. DCEDIY continues to monitor the qualification level targets set out in Nurturing Skills. The proportion of Early Years Educators with a relevant degree qualification having risen from 12% in 2012 to 37% in 2022. There was also a significant increase in the number of Lead Educators reported as having a Level 7 or above qualification increasing from 42.6% in 2021 to 48% in 2022.

Further key indicators for monitoring progress in relation to qualification targets in Nurturing Skills can be found in section 5, Key Indicators, below.

4.2 Pillar 2: Raising qualification levels

Pillar 2 supports aim to enable Early Years Educators and SAC Practitioners, particularly those who are already working in the sector, to achieve the professional qualifications that will, over time, become

requirements for the roles they are in. While the achievement of the qualifications required for different roles will, for new entrants into the sector, be a matter for initial professional education, there is a strong focus for the lifetime of Nurturing Skills on supporting existing Early Years Educators and SAC Practitioners to achieve higher qualifications while continuing to work in the sector.

On 7 December 2023, the Minister announced the introduction of a new Nurturing Skills Learner Fund on a pilot basis, co-funded by the European Union through the EIST programme 2021 to 2027.

The new Nurturing Skills Learner Fund will support early years educators to undertake approved degree-level qualifications while continuing to work in the early learning and care (ELC) sector. It aims to help achieve the Government objective of achieving a graduate-led workforce in ELC services by 2028.

The expansion of funding opportunities for early years educators to upskill was a key commitment in Nurturing Skills, the Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, 2022-2028. Nurturing Skills aims to build on the significant progress already made in raising skill levels across the workforce.

The pilot Nurturing Skill Learner Fund will make a contribution of up to 90% of course fees for early years educators seeking to upskill by studying for a recognised ELC qualification at level 7 or 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications. It is designed to complement and add to other Government financial supports, such as the Free Fees Initiative and SUSI grants. Funding will be provided directly to approved higher education institutions to reduce the upfront costs of studying for early years educators.

The new Fund aims to enhance the quality of ELC services, while supporting the professional development of early years educators, developing career pathways, and supporting recruitment and retention of staff in the sector.

The Nurturing Skills Learner Fund will be co-funded by the European Union through the ESF+ Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training programme (EIST) 2021-27. It is included under the Skills and Lifelong Learning strand with the aim of promoting lifelong learning, in particular flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all.

The current Learner Fund has since 2017 given financial support to 3,720 early years educators who have completed ELC qualifications at levels 7 and 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications. The current Learner Fund will continue to be available, with a higher level of post-award bursary contribution from 2024. The bursary will increase from €750 to €1,000 to assist those who are undertaking degrees but are not part of the new pilot Nurturing Skills Learner Fund.

In 2023, DCEDIY and QQI commenced initial planning for the development of a new Level 5 award in SAC based on work carried out by the SAC working group during Phase 2 of development of Nurturing Skills. It is expected that more detailed work on planning for the new qualification will commence in early 2024. This project will include the development of a special purpose award for SAC for those who already hold a recognised ELC qualification.

A SAC training and qualifications advisory group was established to support the development of training and qualifications in SAC and the incremental introduction of minimum Level 5 in SAC Regulations. The group had its first meeting on the 13th November 2023.

Commitments in Nurturing Skills on training and qualifications for childminders reflect the distinctive features of childminding and differences in its stage of development, and are reflected also in the National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028.

In line with the National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028, and under the oversight of its Steering Group and the Training and Supports Advisory Group, work continued on the development of a mandatory training programme, which will service as a pre-registration requirement for childminders. Further development of the pre-registration training course will take place in early 2024, with a view to rolling out the training once the regulations have been finalised.

Nurturing Skills commits to support the development of initial professional education programmes or modules (at Levels 5 through to 8) that are conducted through the medium of Irish.

Through supports provided by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the University of Galway are currently in the process of planning for the development of Irish-language modules for degree programmes for Early Years Educators.

The Grandfathering declaration for staff employed in ELC services came to an end in September 2023. The minimum qualification requirement for working in early learning and care came into effect on 31 December 2016. The grandfathering declaration was introduced in 2016 as a means to accommodate staff without a qualification who intended to retire by September 2021. In recognition of the exceptional circumstances and disruption caused by the pandemic, in 2021 Minister O’Gorman authorised a temporary extension to September 2023 for those who signed the original Grandfathering Declaration.

4.3 Pillar 3: Developing a national Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system

Continuing professional development (CPD) for Early Years Educators, SAC Practitioners and childminders who are already qualified and working in the sector is a key factor in ensuring the quality of ELC and SAC provision.

To date delivery of CPD opportunities has been fragmented, with some coordination being achieved through the National Síolta Aistear Initiative since 2016 and through Better Start’s Learning and Development (L&D) Unit, which was established in 2018/19. Over recent years, Better Start has developed the capacity of its learner management system (LMS) which, in line with the commitment in Nurturing Skills, was intended to provide a central, online hub for quality-assured CPD activities and resources, as the basis for a single national “gateway” for CPD for the sector. Work is currently underway within DCEDIY, to further strengthen the goal of a national gateway for CPD for the sector. Work is continuing with Pobal to help build the ICT infrastructure, through a rebranding to the Nurturing Skills Learning Hub and further development of the Better Start LMS. The Better Start LMS is currently being restructured to provide wider CPD supports to the ELC and SAC sector.

A CPD Oversight Group will be established in Q1 2024 which will further guide this work and will support implementation of a number of commitments in Pillar 3 of Nurturing Skills.

An online introduction to Síolta and Aistear is due to be released in Q1 2024 as part of the National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI), in line with the commitment in Nurturing Skills to redevelop NSAI resources into a new blended format, combining online and face-to-face delivery.

In 2022, the Department has worked closely with Gaeloideachas to develop a 12 week CPD course through Irish for those in the sector who work through Irish, expected for roll-out in 2024.

Through collaboration between Léargas, DCEDIY and Better Start, a new professional development opportunity for the workforce arose from the decision made in 2022 to open exchange opportunities funded through the EU Erasmus+ programme to early years educators who are working in ELC services that are Core Funding Partner Services. The application process for Erasmus+ exchanges opened to ELC settings in early 2023.

4.4 Pillar 4. Supporting recruitment, retention and diversity

The primary factor affecting recruitment and retention for ELC and SAC services is the level of pay and working conditions. As the State is not the employer in ELC or SAC and so does not determine wages or working conditions, Nurturing Skills describes improvement in pay and conditions as a “key enabler” rather than a direct action under the plan.

The Minister announced the formation of a sub-group of the ELC Stakeholder Forum to address workforce recruitment and retention challenges faced by the sector, at the November ELCSF meeting. The sub group held their first meeting on the 13 December 2023, with plans to meet bi – monthly going forward.

Under Pillar 4 of Nurturing Skills, actions are included to examine the development of a range of entry routes into the sector, including apprenticeships or other work-based learning, and access programmes in further education and higher education, with a particular focus on the scope for targeting early years educators and SAC practitioners from groups that are less well represented in the workforce. Planning for research on alternative entry routes commenced during 2023 and the research is expected to begin in early 2024.

4.5 Pillar 5. Moving towards regulation of the profession

First 5 commits to moving incrementally over time towards regulation of the ELC and SAC profession, building on the establishment in 2020 of the Qualifications Advisory Board and future creation of a register of the workforce. Nurturing Skills restates this commitment to an incremental move to regulation of the profession over the lifetime of Nurturing Skills. No date is set for completion of this process, given the importance of ensuring that all elements of regulation are robust, ensuring that the sector is ready, and avoiding additional administrative burden on Early Years Educators / SAC practitioners at this time.

As part of the process of moving towards regulation of the profession, the processes currently under way through QQI and the Qualifications Advisory Board to assess adherence of qualifications to the new professional award criteria at Levels 5-8 on the NFQ will continue, and a new professional award in SAC will be developed. Developments continued in 2023 in the work of QQI and QAB on ELC qualifications are summarised under Pillar 2 above.

While recognising the benefits that second-language speakers can bring to an ELC or SAC setting, Pillar 5 of Nurturing Skills committed to strengthen the quality of practice in ELC and SAC through the introduction of an English language-proficiency requirement to work with children in English-medium ELC and SAC settings. Research on English Language Requirements is expected to begin in 2024, with a view to using that research to inform next steps.

4.6 Key Enablers

Successful delivery of the commitments in Nurturing Skills relies on key enablers that lie outside the scope of the Plan but will be shaped by parallel reform processes currently under way, in particular improvement in levels of pay and conditions of employment, which relies on the progress of the Joint Labour Committee (JLC) for Early Years Services which was established in 2021.

The EROs are being supported by Core Funding. €303m has been allocated for Core Funding in 2024, a 14% increase on the 2023 investment in the scheme. This substantial increase on the 2023 allocation will support continued implementation of the scheme for the second programme year, September 2023 to August 2024 and into the third programme year from September 2024.

The JLC for Early Years Services is continuing to meet in relation to possible changes to the EROs. The Minister met with the JLC members in May 2023 to provide an update on the Government position with regard to funding for the sector, and the Department has responded to a number of data requests from the JLC.

For Budget 2023, the Minister committed to amending the rules for Core Funding Graduate Premiums by ending the requirement that a lead educator / manager must have 3 years' experience in addition to a relevant degree, which had been a rule for the ECCE Higher Capitation since 2010. The change has been proposed to strengthen the incentive for graduates to enter and remain working in the ELC sector and is on the condition of a similar change being negotiated by employers and employee representatives to amend current EROs to remove the same condition. As of the end of 2023, the JLC had not yet drafted new ERO proposals that included the removal of the 3 year requirement for graduate rates, and so Core Funding graduate premiums have not yet been adjusted.

Communications planning for Nurturing Skills has begun with the commissioning of Drury PR Agency to develop a communication strategy and implementation for Nurturing Skills actions and deliverables.

5. Progress in relation to the 2022 to 2024 Implementation Plan

There are 57 actions set out in the 2022-2024 Implementation Plan. The table below reports on progress in relation to those actions that were to be progressed during 2023.

Action	Description	Key Responsibility	Supporting Organisations	Key Milestone	Action update Status	Action progress comment
1	Link future funding to awards that are in line with the Professional Award Type Descriptors (PATD) and Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG). Holders of prior awards will continue to be recognised for the purpose of funding.	DCEDIY	QAB, QQI	Commencing 2022	In Progress	Graduate premiums in Core Funding aligned with timeline for introduction of PATD and PACG aligned awards. NSLF pilot launched in December 2023. Funding available for students participating in QAB approved level 7 and 8 courses will be provided for recognised awards only.
2	Continue to monitor progress towards achieving the target of a graduate-led ELC workforce by 2028, and consider alternative measures that may be needed to help ensure the target is met.	DCEDIY	DFHERIS	2022-24	In Progress	Qualification level of workforce continues to be monitored through Sector Profile and Core Funding administrative data.
3	Strengthen training and supports for managers and staff with leadership responsibilities that may be distributed across a setting, such as leadership in pedagogy,	DCEDIY, DE		2023-24	Not Started	Delayed due for commencement in 2024

	diversity and inclusion, family and community partnership, and student placement and induction.					
4	Carry out research on leadership structures, approaches and supports, and identify needs for additional support. Based on this research, commission the development of training in management skills specific to ELC and SAC for managers of ELC and SAC services, and begin roll-out.	DCEDIY		2023-24	Not Started	Delayed due for commencement in 2024
5	Commission research into good practice in effective induction processes, including in ELC and SAC contexts internationally.	DCEDIY, DE		2023	Not Started	
7	Develop and introduce a mechanism for the funding of Early Years Educators with a Level 5 award to undertake a Level 6 award in line with the PATD.	DCEDIY	DE, FE & HE sector, Pobal	2022	In Progress	New funding under development with a view to introducing funding for those in the workforce to upskill/gain further qualifications. Currently many Level 6 ELC programmes are subsidised by the government through European Social Funds via

						regional Education Training Boards.
8	Develop and introduce a mechanism for the funding of Early Years Educators to undertake Level 7/8 programmes in ELC that are in line with the PACG.	DCEDIY	DE, FE & HE sector, Pobal	2022	In Progress	Nurturing Skills Learner Fund pilot launched in December 2023. Funding will be made available from 2024 for students participating in QAB approved level 7 and 8 courses
9	Develop and introduce a mechanism for providing financial support to ELC and SAC services to help meet the costs of releasing staff to go on student practice placements and study leave.	DCEDIY	DE, FE & HE sector, Pobal	2022	In Progress	New funding under development with a view to including payment to services for student placements. Extension of funding to services will be considered following the introduction of the pilot Nurturing Skills Learner Fund in 2024.
10	Reform service funding to remove the exclusive link between higher capitation payments and the ECCE programme. As part of Core Funding, the Higher Capitation payments will be replaced by new financial supports for	DCEDIY	Pobal	2022	Complete	Complete

	service providers to employ graduates as Lead Educators and managers with all ages of children in ELC. In order to support upskilling and the achievement of the graduate qualification target, these supports will focus on the employment of graduates with relevant degrees.					
11	Continue the work of Qualifications Advisory Board to assess design and monitor implementation of ELC degree programmes in line with the PACG.	DE, DCEDIY		2022-24	In Progress	The QAB has currently approved 64 courses in 30 locations in 18 HEIs as meeting the requirement of the PACG. The second phase of this process, which will review the implementation of these courses in practice, commenced in 2023, with the first of the 3 pilot reviews undertaken.
12	Amend the qualifications recognition process to bring it in line with the PATD and PACG.	DCEDIY, DE		2022	In Progress	DCEDIY reviewing process for recognition of qualifications with a view to bringing it in line with PATD and PACG standards. Research on approaches in other jurisdictions and other sectors was undertaken in 2023, to inform

						further review in 2024.
13	Support the development of initial professional education programmes or modules that are conducted through the medium of Irish for Early Years Educators working in naíonraí within and outside the Gaeltacht.	DTCAGSM, DE, DCEDIY		2021-24	In Progress	This is an action that has been identified and comes in under the 5 year Irish Language Action Plan 2018-2022. Planning under way for development of Irish-language modules in University of Galway degree programme.
14	Develop and roll out an open-access, online introductory training programme on SAC, focused on raising awareness of the content of the National Quality Guidelines for SAC that were published in 2020.	DCEDIY	DCEDIY	2022	In Progress	Advisory Group on SAC Qualifications and Training was established and held first meeting in September 2023. Development of the training programme will commence in early 2024.
15	Finalise the development of Professional Award-Type Descriptors for a Level 5 qualification in SAC.	DCEDIY	QQI	2022	In Progress	Advisory Group on SAC Qualifications and Training reviewed Tender for a specialist to draft Professional Award Type Descriptors for SAC.
16	Develop a short special purpose SAC award to meet the minimum Level 5 requirement to practise in SAC for Practitioners	DCEDIY	QQI	2022	In Progress	To be addressed as part of development of Level 5 SAC programme

	with qualifications in related disciplines, including ELC.					
17	Seek to adjust initial professional education programmes at Level 5 and higher to encompass both ELC and SAC.	DE, DCEDIY, QQI		2023-24	Not Started	Delayed pending development of PATD for a new Level 5 SAC award
18	Extend the remit and membership of the Qualifications Advisory Board to examine combined ELC and SAC awards.	DE, DCEDIY		2023-24	In Progress	Initial scoping of expanded QAB function under way.
19	Incorporate the incremental introduction of a Level 5 minimum qualification requirement into comprehensive Regulations to be introduced for SAC.	DCEDIY		2022	Not Started	The development of comprehensive SAC regulations has been delayed.
20	Develop and introduce a mechanism for the funding of SAC Practitioners to undertake a Level 5 SAC award and a special purpose course that meet the Level 5 requirement.	DCEDIY	DE, FE & HE sector, Pobal	2022	Not Started	Funding for Level 5 SAC can be included in new funding when programme is developed
21	Support the development of initial professional education programmes or modules for SAC that are conducted through the medium of Irish.	DCEDIY, DTCAGSM		2022-24	Not Started	Pending the development of an SAC award.

22	Within the framework of the National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028 (NAPC), develop and commence roll-out of a funded childminder-specific Foundation Training Programme as a pre-requirement for registration with Tusla.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	Focus of training programme on regulation and registration process. Decision taken to have the majority of the programme as self-paced, eLearning. Outline of programme developed, work on content continuing with Tusla and Training and Supports Advisory Group ongoing. Training to begin rollout in 2024.
23	Within the framework of the NAPC, develop a Quality Development Programme for registered childminders.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	Training and Supports Advisory Group examined best options for course development. Research partner to be appointed in 2024 to develop quality guidelines and training objectives.
24	Develop and implement new childminder-specific Regulations that include training requirements in line with the NAPC.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	Work on drafting the Regulations continued throughout 2023. Public consultation to take place in early 2024.
25	Within the framework of the NAPC, research and pilot the introduction of staffed local childminding networks, to inform the	DCEDIY		2022-24	In Progress	Initial action research undertaken in 2023 by CCCs. Irish-context model developed to be trialled across Ireland by CCCs in 2024, with research to

	development of a new role of local childminding network leader.					be undertaken in its effectiveness.
26	Develop a robust process for recognition of prior qualifications and learning for the Foundation Training and Quality Development Programme.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	Given decisions taken on the decision of the pre-registration programme, RPL deemed inappropriate for the pre-registration training programme as there is no prior learning that would be applicable. The setting of quality guidelines and learning objectives for the Quality Development Programme will allow for the mapping of RPL.
27	Building on the outcome of the Review of the Operating Model, ensure that the further development of the operating model to support the ELC and SAC sector provides a firm basis for development of a single national structure to oversee the development of CPD resources and supports.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	Initial scoping of new agency underway. Mapping of functions include functions related to the development of CPD resources and supports.

28	Progress the development of a learner management system to provide a central hub to access quality-assured ELC and SAC CPD activities and resources.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	A learner management system (LMS) is being managed by Better Start, which will serve as a hub/gateway for CPD. Further development of the LMS is under way.
29	Commission the development of an online system to enable the recording, tracking and viewing of CPD engagement at ELC and SAC service level and at individual professional level.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	Updates to the Better Start LMS are in development stage. This will facilitate the ability of educators and practitioners to track their own CPD progress, as an initial step prior to development of a dedicated online portal.
30	Develop a single, modular, blended training programme to support the roll-out of Síolta and Aistear, with roll-out accelerated to achieve full national coverage, and structured linkages between the training programme and mentoring supports provided by Better Start QDS.	DE, DCEDIY, Better Start		2022	In Progress	The first course identified to be developed into an eLearning programme, An Introduction to Síolta and Aistear, is nearing completion. Once this programme is finalised and available online, work will begin on developing further online NSAI training programmes. These will be in line with the current updating of Aistear as appropriate.

31	Establish a working group to oversee the updating of Síolta and the development of a single, national self-evaluation framework, building on the self-assessment tools already developed through the Aistear-Síolta Practice Guide and other resources, and integrated with other established national frameworks e.g. Aistear, the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines, and the National Quality Guidelines for SAC Services.	DCEDIY, DE		2022	Not Started	The first meeting of this working group is due to take place in late January/early February 2024.
32	Develop a national policy on the Key Person approach across ELC and SAC settings, and develop training and resources for its initial roll-out.	DCEDIY		2023-24	Not Started	
33	Develop structures and processes for the <i>quality assurance</i> of CPD resources, activities and supports (including in relation to online and blended CPD, and including in	DCEDIY		2023-24	In Progress	A quality assurance group for CPD for Irish-medium provision of ELC working group was established in Q3 2023. A CPD Oversight Group which will have overall quality assurance responsibility will

	relation to Irish-language CPD resources), overseen by a central agency at a national level, to guide the development of formal, non-formal and informal CPD, building on existing European and national guidance and on expertise within the sector.					be established in Q1 2024. The CPD Oversight Group will further develop QA processes and provide national governance for CPD processes.
34	Examine the scope to use micro-credentials in CPD opportunities in ELC and SAC.	DCEDIY, DE		2023-24	Not Started	
36	Introduce Core Funding from September 2022 to provide financial support for non-contact time, including participation in a diverse range of CPD activities, replacing the more limited CPD payment pilot.	DCEDIY	Pobal	2022	Complete	Core Funding commenced 15 September 2022.
37	Develop national guidance and resources to support student professional practice placement, at all qualification levels.	DE, DCEDIY	FE & HE sector, QQI, QAB	2022	Not Started	Work expected to commence in 2024.
38	As a next step, in relation to e-learning, make CPD materials, resources and supports	DCEDIY, DE, Better Start		2022-24	In Progress	Work is nearing completion on two pieces of CPD that will be available simultaneously in both Irish and

	available in both Irish and English.					English. This requirement will be built into all future contracts for CPD development.
39	Conduct a mapping of existing CPD supports as an initial step to inform further actions, along with a survey of ELC and SAC professionals' and services' engagement in CPD.	DCEDIY	Better Start, CCCs	2022	Not Started	This mapping exercise will begin in conjunction with the establishment of the CPD Oversight Group which will be established in Q1 2024.
40	Develop a central hub or a one-stop-shop approach on careers and training opportunities in ELC and SAC, building on existing resources, with information made available for a variety of stakeholders including careers/guidance counsellors.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	Initial work on a centralised jobs board for temporary jobs was created and is located on the My CCC web page. Work continues on how to develop this initiative more broadly to support all recruitment in the sector.
41	Undertake a campaign to promote careers in ELC and SAC, focusing initially on the value and importance to children and society of high quality ELC and SAC provision. Promotional materials should give visibility to the diversity of people who work in the	DCEDIY		2022-24	Not Started	

	sector and what they do.					
43	Review and further roll out Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training across the ELC and SAC sector, facilitated by developing an online format for the training.	DCEDIY, CCCs		2022	In Progress	EDI continues to be rolled out through the AIM. The training will be reviewed and aligned to the rollout of the Equal Participation Model (EPM).
44	Examine development of a range of entry routes into the sector, including apprenticeships or other work-based learning, and access programmes in FE and HE.	DCEDIY, DFHERIS	FE & HE sector, QQI, QAB	2022-23	In Progress	Draft specifications for research in to alternate entry routes has been compiled and shared with the Early Learning and Care Stakeholder Forum Sub group on Recruitment and Retention for consultation. Request for tender expected to be published in Q1 2024.
45	In considering different entry routes into the sector, examine the scope for targeting potential Early Years Educators and SAC Practitioners from groups that are less well represented in the workforce.	DCEDIY		2022-24	In Progress	See Action 44

46	Ensure the approach to careers information has a particular focus on information and supports for potential entrants to the workforce from minority groups and men, as well as Irish-language opportunities (including for those for whom Irish is not their first language).	DCEDIY		2022-23	Not Started	
47	Commence regular data-gathering on levels of proficiency in the English and Irish languages among Early Years Educators and SAC Practitioners.	DCEDIY		2023-24	Not Started	
48	Continue the processes currently under way through QQI and the Qualifications Advisory Board to oversee, assess and monitor adherence of qualifications to the new professional award criteria at Levels 5-8 on the NFQ.	DE, DCEDIY, QQI		2022-24	In Progress	The QAB has currently approved 64 courses in 30 locations in 18 HEIs as meeting the requirement of the PACG. The second phase of this process, which will review the implementation of these courses in practice, commenced in 2023 with the first of three educational institutions having been assessed. QQI assesses adherence of level 5 and 6 awards to PATD.

49	Establish a language competency working group to advise on a regulatory requirement for language-proficiency.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	The intention is to begin research on English Language Requirements in 2024, with a view to using that research to inform next steps. The tender documents are being prepared and will be published in early 2024.
50	Carry out research on language proficiency across the ELC and SAC sector to help determine the timeframe for introduction of a language-proficiency requirement.	DCEDIY		2022-23	In Progress	Questions have been included on language proficiency (English and Irish) in the TALIS Starting Strong survey, which was piloted in spring 2023, with the main study planned for 2024.
51	Establishment and on-going operation of a Joint Labour Committee for the ELC and SAC sector.	Labour Court	DETE	2021-22	Complete	JLC established and has agreed two EROs. The JLC continue to negotiate pay and conditions.
52	Develop appropriate funding mechanisms to support ELC and SAC services to meet additional costs arising from an Employment Regulation Order that may come into force as well as to introduce or improve other factors that contribute to high-quality practice, such as non-contact	DCEDIY		2022-24	In Progress	Core Funding and supporting ERO commenced on 15 September 2022. As Core Funding will continue to develop, the action remains 'in progress'

	time, planning, training, and curriculum implementation.					
53	Strengthen the capacity of the infrastructure for delivery of quality supports, including the development of a national infrastructure for CPD supports.	DCEDIY		2022-24	In Progress	Work is continuing with Pobal to build the ICT infrastructure, through a rebranding and further development of the Better Start LMS. The Better Start LMS is currently being restructured to provide wider CPD supports such as the two eLearning projects nearing completion. CPD Oversight Group will be established in Q1 2024.
54	Develop a stakeholder engagement and communications plan to ensure the contents of the Workforce Plan are widely understood across the sector (including development of a website dedicated to the Workforce Plan) and to support ongoing direct engagement with the ELC and SAC workforce.	DCEDIY	CCCs	2022	In Progress	Initial steps in scoping communication strategy for Nurturing Skills in progress. Communication consultancy firm in place and planning to begin in Q1 2024

55	Should a professional association for Early Years Educators and SAC Practitioners be established with sufficient organisational scale to carry out the core functions expected of a professional association, seek appropriate opportunities for engagement and consultation with it.	DCEDIY		2022-24	Not Started	No association yet in place that meets the criteria.
56	Develop a core indicator set for monitoring progress of implementation.	Monitoring Committee	DCEDIY	2022	Complete	Initial indicator set agreed and to be kept under review.
57	Participate in the pilot and 2024 round of the OECD TALIS Starting Strong survey.	DCEDIY	Pobal, CCCs	2022-24	In Progress	Ireland is participating in 2024 round of the TALIS survey. Pilot took place in Spring 2023

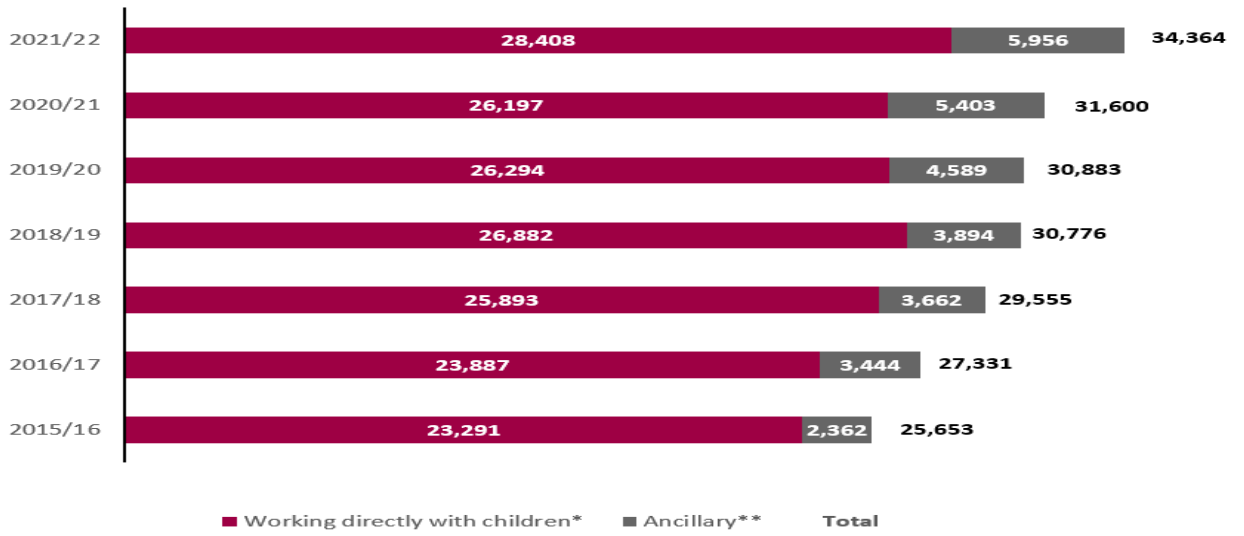
6. Key indicators

Nurturing Skills Key Indicators - 2023							
Nurturing Skills Key indicators	Pillar	Indicator No.	2028 Target	2019	2020	2021	2022
Staff with Level 6 and above	Pillar 1	1.1	85%	66.8%	68.8%	70.1%	70.2%
Lead Educators with Level 7 and above	Pillar 1	1.2	100%	38.5%	39.3%	42.6%	48.3%
Managers with Level 6 and above	Pillar 1	1.3	100%	91.0%	92.0%	96.6%	95.4%
SAC practitioners with a Level 5 in SAC	Pillar 1	1.4	50%	N/A ¹	N/A	N/A	N/A
Childminders with foundation level Training	Pillar 1	1.5		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of staff availing of new funding for upskilling	Pillar 2	2.1		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of Staff availing of current Learner Fund	Pillar 2	2.2		420	400	336	426
Number of Staff completing CPD through the national CPD gateway	Pillar 3	3.1		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Measurement of NSAI roll out	Pillar 3	3.2		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Service staff turnover	Pillar 4	4.1		23%	18%	19%	25%
Staff exiting the sector	Pillar 4	4.2				13%	14%
Services reporting recruitment challenges	Pillar 4	4.3		53%	44%	49%	60%
Gender balance in the sector (%F:%M)	Pillar 4	4.4		N/A	N/A	98:2	98:2
Equality Diversity and Inclusion training (services)	Pillar 4	4.5		3,373	3,394	3,394	3,419
English and Irish language proficiency in services	Pillar 5	5.1		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

¹ Data which currently is not collected or is not available to the Department has been recorded as N/A in the table above.

Other Contextual indicators

Total number of staff working in ELC/SAC services



Number of staff in ELC/SAC services	6.1	30,776	30,883	31,600	34,364
Number of registered childminders	6.2	N/A	84	84	79
Managers with a Level 7 and above, qualification	6.3	43%	45%	73%	71%
Proportion of ELC staff with Level 7 and above	6.4	25%	27%	34%	37%